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Press Release

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[Bridges & Tunnels](#)

IMMEDIATE

Brooklyn–Battery Tunnel Milestone: Vital NYC Link for 60 Years

The Brooklyn–Battery Tunnel, a vital link between Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn for some 44,000 vehicles daily, has reached a milestone birthday, turning 60 years old on May 25th.

Designed by renowned engineer Ole Singstad, the Brooklyn–Battery Tunnel is the longest continuous underwater vehicular tunnel in North America, measuring 1.7 miles long between portals. The tunnels' two tubes running under the East River connect Lower Manhattan to the Red Hook section of Brooklyn.

"Since opening day in 1950 the Brooklyn–Battery Tunnel has helped join the city together," said Bridges and Tunnels President Jim Ferrara. "Every day thousands of New Yorkers rely on the tunnel to commute to Manhattan via express buses and cars, and for the delivery of goods."

The idea to build a tunnel from south Brooklyn to Lower Manhattan first surfaced in the late 1920s, but if Robert Moses had his way there wouldn't have been a tunnel at all. Moses originally wanted to build a bridge in the area but the idea was dismissed after First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt objected, saying a bridge would ruin views and destroy parkland.

The New York City Tunnel Authority finally began construction on the tunnel in October 1940 but the federal government ordered the project halted in October 1942 because of the need for steel, iron and other construction materials during World War II. Work resumed in 1945, when the Triborough Bridge Authority, pre-cursor to the TBTA and now known as MTA Bridges and Tunnels, took over the project under Robert Moses, who dismissed designer Ole Singstad and put engineer Ralph Smillie in charge for the duration of the job.

It took more than 13 million hours of labor by teams of surveyors, engineers, draftsmen, laborers, sandhogs, ironworkers, carpenters and electricians to complete the tunnel. The last rock separating the tunnel between Brooklyn and Manhattan was "holed through" on Sept. 16, 1948 (*see photo*).

After road surfacing, wiring, tiling and painting were completed, the tunnel opened for business on May 25, 1950. A parade of dignitaries led by Mayor William O'Dwyer and Moses, head of the newly created Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, traveled by motorcade through the tunnel where they were welcomed by a cheering crowd on the Manhattan side.

In 2009, a total of nearly 16 million trips were taken at the Brooklyn–Battery Tunnel. General Manager Renée Shepherd, who has been in charge of the tunnel since 2006, takes pride in the employees who keep the tunnel safe, clean and clear for traffic on a daily basis. "Our employees are dedicated to ensuring safe and efficient travel for our customers, and are aware of its importance as an extremely vital transportation corridor in New York City."

Shepherd manages some 200 employees, including a team of 143 Bridge and Tunnel Officers, Sergeants and Lieutenants, and is assisted by Operations Superintendent Edwin King and Maintenance Superintendent Marc Mende. Duties at the tunnel include aiding motorists, collecting tolls, monitoring truck check points, security and maintaining the physical condition of the tunnel and plaza area. The tunnel has a professional engineering contingent led by Facility Engineer Robert Kushmock, whose work includes planning, executing and overseeing construction projects.

The Brooklyn–Battery Tunnel was a critical route for emergency vehicles during the 9/11 terrorist attack, and afterward as construction vehicles bound for Ground Zero made frequent daily crossings. The facility is also the starting point for the annual "Tunnel-to-Towers Run," commemorating the heroism of firefighter Stephen Siller, who died on 9/11 after running through the tunnel on foot in an effort to reach the towers.

Brooklyn–Battery Tunnel by the Numbers:

1. Original toll: **35 cents**
2. **Two** tubes; **four** traffic lanes; **13** toll lanes
3. **16 million** annual crossings (2009 figure)
4. **Three** ventilation buildings, located in Governors Island, Brooklyn and Manhattan
5. Air is exchanged inside the tunnel every **90** seconds.
6. **1997**: the year the façade of the Manhattan vent building was featured in the "Men in Black" film, as the fictional headquarters of a secret government agency.

MTA Bridges and Tunnels' facilities, which link the five boroughs of New York City, are the Robert F. Kennedy (formerly Triborough), Throgs Neck, Bronx–Whitestone, Henry Hudson, Verrazano–Narrows, Cross Bay Veterans Memorial and Marine Parkway–Gil Hodges Memorial Bridges, and the Queens Midtown and Brooklyn–Battery Tunnels.



Brooklyn toll plaza looking toward Manhattan, circa 1950.



Brooklyn–Battery Tunnel workers from Brooklyn and Manhattan meet after "holing through" during excavation on Sept. 16, 1948.

(Photo credit: MTA Bridges and Tunnels Special Archive Collection).