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Press Release

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[Bridges & Tunnels](#)

IMMEDIATE

MTA's Flagship Robert F. Kennedy/Triborough Bridge Celebrates 75th Anniversary July 11th

Photography Exhibit, Oral History Project and Fall Walking Tour Planned

MTA Bridges and Tunnels, in cooperation with the Greater Astoria Historical Society, will commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Robert F. Kennedy (originally known as Triborough) Bridge on Monday, July 11th with the opening of a special photography exhibit, featuring images rarely seen by the public.

Curated by archivists from MTA Bridges and Tunnels and the Greater Astoria Historical Society (GAHS), the exhibit, titled: "A Planner's Dream, an Engineer's Triumph, a Legacy to our City," will be on display at the Historical Society's Quinn Gallery located at 35-20 Broadway in Long Island City, Queens through October.

The anniversary day will begin with a preview of the photo exhibit for the media and elected and community officials from the three boroughs, beginning at **2 p.m.** This will be followed by an evening history roundtable hosted by the Historical Society in its main lecture hall at **7 p.m.**

"This is a perfect way to bring the three communities that the RFK Bridge serves together to celebrate the 75th anniversary of our oldest bridge, which played such a vital role in the development of modern New York City history," said MTA Bridges and Tunnels President James Ferrara.

Roundtable panelists will include a MTA Bridges and Tunnels senior bridge engineer, representatives from the Regional Plan Association, and historians from Manhattan, Queens, and the Bronx. The public is invited to attend and participate in the question and answer period. The discussion will focus on the building the bridge, which helped unify the boroughs and contributed to the development of Long Island.

Although the bridge was officially opened to traffic on July 11, 1936, the final touches were not completed until September of the following year. To commemorate this event, the Greater Astoria Historical Society, in cooperation with MTA Bridges and Tunnels, the Bronx Historical Society, and Forgotten New York, will host a walking tour on **Saturday, Sept. 17th** with separate groups starting in Bronx and Manhattan that will meet at the bridge's nexus on Randall's Island. The two groups will then continue to Astoria Park in Queens, site of the original groundbreaking, for a brief program.

And to pay tribute to the enduring legacy of the bridge, an oral history project is underway. Anyone interested in participating in the oral history project is invited to send an email with a brief description of their memory to bridgememories@mtabt.org. They can also call 646 252-7420. A copy of the oral histories that are collected will be available to the public at the Greater Astoria Historical Society and will be shared with organizations in the Bronx and Manhattan.

History

When it opened in 1936, the Triborough Bridge was among the most significant public works projects built during the Great Depression, and as it neared completion provided jobs for some 2,800 workers daily. Groundbreaking for the bridge occurred Oct. 25, 1929, four days before the stock market crash that ushered in the Great Depression. A municipal project originally designed to resemble the Manhattan Bridge, economic conditions halted construction in 1932, with only some piers and parts of the anchorages having been built.

The Triborough Bridge Authority (TBA) was created in 1933 after the state chose the project to receive federal Reconstruction Finance Corporation loan. The following year, newly elected Mayor Fiorello La Guardia appointed Robert Moses to the TBA. Moses promptly borrowed Othmar H. Ammann, designer of the George Washington Bridge, to redesign the bridge in the Art Deco style of the day from the piers up.

The revised project cost a total of \$60.3 million to construct, which included a \$35 million loan from the Public Works Administration (backed by the RFC), a PWA grant of \$9.2 million and \$16.1 million paid by New York City. Opening day included a motorcade and celebration at what was then called Triborough Stadium on Randall's Island, attended by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Mayor Fiorello La Guardia and a 10-year-old boy from Astoria, Anthony Benedetto, who sang the National Anthem and grew up to become famed singer Tony Bennett.

The Triborough Bridge quickly became a link to the emerging parkway system in Long Island and was a factor in the development of the island's suburban communities. The TBA became the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority in 1946. The agency became part of the MTA in 1968 and is now called MTA Bridges and Tunnels.

The RFK Bridge is technically three bridges, a viaduct and 14 miles of approach roads connecting Manhattan, Queens and the Bronx. It's spans include the eight-lane, suspension span over the East River at Hell's Gate connecting Manhattan and Queens; the six-lane Harlem River Lift span in Manhattan, and the eight-lane fixed truss bridge over the Bronx Kills to the Bronx.

A huge traffic junction on Randall's Island, where the three branches of the bridge intersect, links to the Grand Central Parkway in Queens, the FDR Drive in Manhattan and the Bruckner and Major Deegan Expressways in the Bronx.

In its first full-year of operations, 11 million vehicles crossed the bridge. The cost of the toll was 25-cents. In 2010 more than 60 million vehicles traveled across the RFK's spans where the crossing charge is now \$6.50 cash or \$4.80 with E-ZPass.

The bridge was renamed in honor of the late Robert F. Kennedy in August 2008 by Gov. David Paterson. The bridge was the first major public work dedicated to Robert Kennedy in New York State, where he served as a U.S. Senator from 1965-1968.

The 75-year-old bridge will undergo nearly \$1 billion in capital improvement projects over the next 15 years. The largest portion, an estimated \$700 million, is for the reconstruction of bridge structures supporting the Manhattan and Bronx toll plazas. Actual roadway work on the Bronx plaza is expected to begin in 2014, while the Manhattan plaza will be rehabilitated starting in 2019.

MTA Bridges and Tunnels' Capital improvement projects are fully funded by Bridges and Tunnels through the collection of tolls and TBTA bonds, and are not dependent on state or federal funding.

The Greater Astoria Historical Society, chartered in 1985, is a non-profit organization supported by the Long Island City community. The GAHS is located at 35-20 Broadway, 4th Floor, Long Island City, N.Y. GAHS website: www.astorialic.org

In addition to the RFK Bridge, MTA Bridges and Tunnels operates the Throgs Neck, Bronx-Whitestone, Henry Hudson, Verrazano-Narrows, Cross Bay Veterans Memorial and Marine Parkway-Gil Hodges Bridges, and the Queens Midtown and Brooklyn-Battery Tunnels. Nearly 800,000 vehicles and more than a million people use MTA crossings daily.

Photos Courtesy of MTA Bridges and Tunnels Special Archive:



Triborough Bridge_Astoria Park: Inside Astoria Park, at start of digging Main Tower Pier 27. Gentlemen in photo not identified. January 26, 1932. Photographer unknown.



Triborough Bridge_Harlem River Lift@125th Street: View of on and off ramps at Triborough Bridge's Harlem River Lift Span, looking east along 125th Street. October 1, 1936. Photographer unknown.



Triborough Bridge_Suspended Span: Getting ready to put in the roadbed at the Triborough Bridge's suspended span. 1935. Photographer unknown.