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Press Release

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IMMEDIATE

MTA Opens 50th Street Commons

New Public Space an 'Oasis' in Midtown Manhattan

Elected officials and community leaders from Midtown Manhattan today joined officials from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to formally open a new public space constructed as part of the East Side Access project. East Side Access will bring Long Island Rail Road trains into a new eight-track station beneath Grand Central Terminal, saving Long Island and Queens commuters to Manhattan's East Side up to 40 minutes off their daily commutes.

"This 'pocket park' is truly an oasis in the midst of Manhattan's concrete jungle," said Dr. Michael Horodniceanu, president of MTA Capital Construction, the agency of the MTA that is building East Side Access. "50th Street Commons is our way of giving back to the Midtown Manhattan community, which has endured the inconveniences of construction for a number of years. While most of the construction for East Side Access is underground, this is an aspect of the project that will be a visible improvement for everyone in Manhattan."

Representative Carolyn Maloney said: "The 50th Street facility is the embodiment of what can happen when government listens to community concerns. The MTA responded to area stakeholders and developed a building that exceeded everyone's best hopes. The building that's being completed today includes public space, good ventilation and the ability for trucks to enter and leave without backing up. I am pleased to congratulate the MTA on its beautiful new facility."

City Council Member Daniel Garodnick said: "This district is starved for open space, and we appreciate expanding it wherever we can. Thank you to the MTA for including this in its plan."

Manhattan Chamber of Commerce President Nancy Ploeger said: "This new pocket park on East 50th Street will provide a much needed break in the urban landscape. It's a great place for everyone from tourists to office workers to stop and enjoy some peace and some lunch!"

This new 2,400-square-foot urban space, located at 48 East 50th Street between Park and Madison Avenues, was built as part of the East Side Access 50th Street ventilation facility contract. The pocket park features a rich palette of stone, glass, stainless steel and North American granite blocks designed to draw people into the space. Tables, chairs and benches can seat more than 40 people, with room for many additional visitors.

An overhead trellis and beds of 22 species of ornamental plants provide a sense of separation for people seeking refuge from the hustle and bustle of Manhattan streets. The centerpiece of 50th Street Commons – a large illuminated glass waterfall with changing colors and water effects – creates a unique environment and relaxing atmosphere. The park will be open to the public daily from 8 a.m. to sunset.

Once operational, the 50th Street ventilation facility will serve multiple purposes crucial to the operations of the new LIRR concourse. In addition to climate control and ventilation functions for the concourse and tracks, the facility will be capable of supplying emergency ventilation as well. It also will serve as an access and delivery point for materials to support the retail operations and passenger spaces in the new concourse. Noise mitigation was among the primary focuses in designing the building, with dampers and sound absorbing materials making the inner workings of the facility nearly silent to the public at street level.

East Side Access is one of the largest transportation infrastructure projects in the United States, encompassing work at multiple locations in Manhattan, Queens and the Bronx and including more than 11 miles of tunnels. When completed in 2022, ESA will serve more than 160,000 customers each day, providing a faster and easier commute from Long Island and Queens to the east side of Manhattan in a new eight-track terminal and concourse below Grand Central Terminal. Trains from Grand Central also will provide quick and easy access to John F. Kennedy International Airport by connecting with the AirTrain in Jamaica.