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Press Release

November 23, 2020

[Bridges & Tunnels](#)

IMMEDIATE

ICYMI: Governor Cuomo Announces Opening of Robert F. Kennedy Bridge Connection to Harlem River Drive

Project Being Completed One Month Ahead of Original Schedule Amidst Ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic

New Route Projected to Avert 2,500 Tons of Greenhouse Gas Emissions While Saving Daily Commuters Nine Hours a Year in Driving Time

[Photos of the Completed Bridge Connection Here](#)

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced the opening of a new ramp connecting the Robert F. Kennedy Bridge to the Harlem River Drive, ending a detour through East Harlem streets that has persisted for more than 62 years since the Harlem River Drive's initial segment was opened in 1958.

The design build project, led by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, was originally expected to take 15 months to build and as a result of aggressive project management, contractors are completing the project one month ahead of schedule, compressing to just 14 months. The MTA projects the ramp will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in East Harlem by more than 2,500 tons of CO₂-equivalent emissions per year, helping to ease pressure on community childhood asthma rates.

"It is almost unbelievable that a bridge of this magnitude, one of the busiest crossings in the country, wasn't already connected to a major highway like Harlem River Drive," **Governor Cuomo said**. "Despite the barriers of COVID-19, New York State is building back better for our future. Not only was this project completed ahead of time, but this new bridge connection will improve safety and traffic flow for travelers, as well as provide a higher quality of life in the surrounding community by reducing noise, traffic and air pollution."

Before the ramp's opening, drivers on the RFK looking to travel North onto the Harlem River Drive - which leads to the George Washington Bridge - had to exit the bridge between 125th and 126th Streets, travel northbound on Second Avenue, then merge onto an on-ramp next to the community playground. The parallel direct southbound connection from the Harlem River Drive onto the RFK Bridge has been in place since the Harlem River Drive's southern segment opened in February 1958.

The new route is encompassed by a gently graded 1,400-foot-long ramp supported by 17 vertical concrete piers that carry motorists over 50 feet of height above ground. The new ramp conforms with all modern design standards. Motorists will find a new right-hand exit branching off from the Manhattan-bound span of the bridge. The route rises slightly to clear the Willis Avenue Bridge before gently trending downward until touching down in the left lane of the Harlem River Drive, geographically just north of the northern end of Second Avenue.

President of MTA Construction and Development Janno Lieber said, "This project shows how - as Governor Cuomo has advocated for some time -- aggressive project management and design-build contracting can allow us to complete major construction projects months ahead of schedule. MTA C & D has gotten a huge amount of work done in the past six months -always with COVID-safe work practices. But the pandemic has wreaked havoc with MTA finances and slowed our rollout of the historic 2020-24 Capital Program. We need the Federal government to finally step up and provide \$12 billion in emergency relief to get the MTA through 2020 and 2021 and allow us to continue the improvements we're delivering for the entire MTA system."

The new ramp, takes motorists high above First Avenue, the Harlem River Drive and Willis Avenue Bridge and is projected to save 17,000 motorists a day an average of over 3 minutes during peak travel times daily, adding up to 150,000 hours per year of total travel time savings, or nine hours a year for a daily commuter pre-pandemic. It was made possible by close coordination between the MTA and the New York City Department of Transportation, which recently realigned the Harlem River Drive to improve traffic flow at the exit to Second Avenue

President of MTA Bridges and Tunnels Daniel DeCrescenzo said, "Much like the work we are doing to improve connections between the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge and the Gowanus Expressway - this ramp exemplifies how we are continually working in close coordination with regional highway authorities to better integrate the MTA's bridge and tunnel network with the regional highway network. This underscores our commitment to investing in our facilities so we can better serve customers now and for many years to come."

Director of the Division of Environmental Pediatrics at NYU Langone Leonardo Trasande, MD, MPP Health said, "Studies have shown that traffic-related air pollution contributes to the development of asthma in children. We know there are serious disparities in exposure in New York City that disproportionately affect low-income and minority children. That's why steps like these to reduce air pollution are so important."

The project was being overseen by MTA Construction & Development in tandem with MTA Bridges and Tunnels, which owns, operates and maintains the RFK Bridge. The MTA coordinated the work and engineering closely with the New York State Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration. Within days of the COVID global pandemic hitting the New York region, MTA construction sites - which were allowed to stay operational

as essential services - implemented a broad range of safety measures that kept the sites active and safe. MTA C&D mobilized quickly to identify the necessary precautions, and collaborated with contractors to implement them consistently.

The MTA partnered with the New York City Department of Transportation to expedite and cost effectively deliver this project. The two agencies have coordinated to ensure the alignment of the DOT's original design for the Harlem River Drive reconstruction project would be able to accommodate the construction of the new connector ramp. For example, the RFK ramp is built on some of the support piers that were part of the DOT's recent reconstruction of the Harlem River Drive.

The work was performed under a \$48 million design-build contract by Judlau Contracting and was funded through MTA Bridges and Tunnel's 2015-2019 Capital Plan. Heavy construction work began in February.