

# THE INTER- BOROUGH EXPRESS



## Interborough Express (IBX) FAQs

### IBX BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW

#### **What is the Interborough Express (IBX)?**

The IBX would create new public transit between Brooklyn and Queens, providing better transit connections among communities from Bay Ridge to Jackson Heights. It would improve access to up to 17 subway lines, dozens of bus routes, and the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR).

#### **What is the potential ridership for this service?**

Initial studies predict up to 115,000 daily weekday ridership with annual ridership of approximately 40 million.

#### **Who will benefit from this project? What growth is expected? Does this growth take into account growth resulting from the IBX project?**

The corridor is home to 900,000 residents and 260,000 workers within ½-mile of the line. The New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) socioeconomic forecast data projects growth of at least 41,000 residents and 15,000 jobs by 2045. These residents and workers will benefit from improved access to jobs and other destinations in Brooklyn, Queens and elsewhere in the region.

The project is especially beneficial for those who need to travel within the corridor. Over 55% of Brooklyn residents living within the corridor work in Brooklyn, and 40% of Queens residents living within the corridor work within Queens. The project also advances equity within our transportation network. Almost three-quarters of the corridor's residents are people of color, 19% are below the poverty line, and 50% of the households do not own a car. On top of these direct benefits, the increase in transit access will potentially reduce congestion on roads within the communities.

#### **Who owns the existing lines?**

The southern portion of the line (11 miles) is owned by MTA Long Island Rail Road. The northern portion (3 miles) is owned by CSX. The dividing line between the two is at Fresh Pond Yard in Queens.

#### **What is the project status? How will it be decided if this project advances?**

In January 2024, Governor Hochul announced \$45 million for engineering on the IBX, which you can learn more about at <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-announces-highlights-fy-2025-budget>. This Governor's leadership on this project allows this crucial planning step to move forward.

As part of the MTA's Twenty-Year Needs Assessment, a comparative evaluation of potential system expansion projects was conducted to understand which initiatives would have the greatest regional impact. This effort weighed the costs and benefits of potential system expansion projects to help us make smarter, better-informed decisions regarding the future of transit in the region. This analysis demonstrated that IBX has the potential to support MTA's strategic vision. Along with other planning-level projects, IBX has been advanced to the environmental review stage to further understand its relative costs, benefits and risks.

**What kind of approvals will be required to construct the project?**

Federal, State and local approvals are expected to be required.

**IBX ROUTE AND STATIONS**

**What is the proposed IBX route?**

The proposed IBX (as pictured) would run along an existing freight line in a semi-circle between southern and eastern Brooklyn and Central Queens, connecting the ethnically and economically diverse neighborhoods of Sunset Park, Borough Park, Kensington, Midwood, Flatbush, Flatlands, New Lots, Brownsville, East New York, Bushwick, Ridgewood, Middle Village, Maspeth, Elmhurst and Jackson Heights with several new stations in communities not currently served by rail.

**Could the IBX continue farther than Jackson Heights, including the Bronx?**

Continuation north of the proposed Jackson Heights terminus would involve the same right-of-way that will be used for Metro-North Penn Station Access, a top-priority project for the MTA and for the Bronx. Penn Station Access will create four new accessible Metro-North stations in the East Bronx with service to Manhattan and Westchester and Connecticut using the existing Amtrak Hell Gate Line in the Bronx and Queens. Penn Station Access' construction contract was awarded in late 2021 and service is anticipated to begin in 2027. As a result, the route planning for the IBX is focused on the segment of the line that can be upgraded without interfering with the Metro-North Penn Station Access Project.



With the opening of Penn Station Access, the existing Hell Gate Line that connects to the Bronx will be at capacity, as Amtrak intercity trains and CSX freight trains also use the line. It would not be possible to add another frequent service like the IBX within the existing infrastructure. As such, extending the IBX to the Bronx would require construction of an entirely new parallel bridge and line at enormous expense (given property impacts, engineering and construction costs.)

**Can a stop for LaGuardia Airport be added?**

The IBX project's goals include improving transit service for residents and workers taking trips throughout Brooklyn and Queens, while making use of an existing major rail corridor. As we understand that the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey is currently evaluating options for transit access to LaGuardia Airport, the IBX project will not preclude the ability to provide some manner of airport connection in the future.

**Could the IBX connect to Staten Island?**

There is no existing pathway between the IBX alignment and the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge and the bridge itself was not constructed to accommodate rail options.

**How many stations will the IBX have?**

There are currently 19 stations proposed along the 14-mile corridor between the Brooklyn Army Terminal and Roosevelt Avenue in Queens.

**Are the station locations finalized?**

The Planning and Environmental Linkages report that was released in 2023 identified 19 station locations that were chosen based on projected ridership, constructability, and spacing. The engineering work to design these stations will not begin until late 2024. The stations will be finalized in the engineering phase, and we encourage continued feedback.

**IBX OPERATIONS, TRANSFERS, AND FARES****How frequent will the proposed service be?**

Operational planning has not yet begun, but proposed service could operate at 5-minute frequencies during peak periods, with anticipated longer headways during off-peak times, similar to other transit.

**How many other MTA transit lines will this connect to?**

- **Subway:** Up to 17 subway lines (N/R/D/B/Q/2/5/L/3/J/Z/A/C/M/7/E/F)
- **Bus:** 51 current bus routes
- **Long Island Rail Road:** Connection at Atlantic Ave/East New York station

**What would the IBX fare be?**

Fares will be determined by the MTA Board at time of implementation. However, we expect that the fare will be equivalent to standard bus and subway fares and that fare payment would be consistent with the MTA's standard bus and subway fare payment system at that time, such as OMNY or other future payment systems.

**Will the IBX stations physically connect to the transit? How will transfers work?**

We are planning for the IBX to allow free and seamless transfers as you would currently between subway and bus lines. The exact location of station platforms and available transfers to other services is still to be determined. IBX stations will consist of a platform located within the existing right-of-way. Given this, IBX stations are unlikely to be physically connected to other transit stations. You will be able to tap into the IBX using OMNY and transfer to connecting bus and subway lines by tapping again with OMNY. Special attention will be paid to station design and ease of transfers during the design phase.

**IBX MODE AND RAIL TYPE****Which mode is the MTA advancing, and why?**

The IBX project is advancing with the selection of Light Rail Transit (LRT) as its mode. During the Planning & Environmental Linkages study, it was determined that LRT outperforms Conventional Rail and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). The following factors were evaluated to reach this conclusion:

- **Service:** LRT is the fastest option and can fully meet passenger demand, unlike BRT. BRT also has operational challenges as it would need to turn around on Jackson Heights streets.
- **Cost-effectiveness:** LRT is a versatile transit mode that would allow operation in the most constrained portions of the corridor, including East New York tunnel, and comply with all fire and life safety requirements. Light Rail vehicles can be procured "off-the-shelf" with minimal modification and can draw from a different pool of potential suppliers than traditional MTA rolling stock.

- **Value:** Conventional Rail has a much higher construction cost, and BRT cannot move as many riders, leading to higher cost-per-rider figures for both compared to LRT.
- **Public Feedback:** Over 1,000 comments were received on the MTA’s project website. Themes of this feedback suggest an overwhelming preference for a rail option within the corridor.

**Why will the IBX use light rail instead of subway cars?**

Light rail is more cost effective, has faster end to end run-times, can be procured “off-the-shelf” with minimal modification, and can draw from a different pool of potential suppliers than traditional MTA rolling stock. Light rail is also more flexible as it can operate in multiple environments. Finally, by pursuing this mode, the MTA will be utilizing the latest technology and car equipment to deliver a modern experience for our customers.

**Are you considering street running at Metropolitan Avenue? How can you ensure reliable service with the potential of street running segments?**

One of the primary benefits of LRT is its ability to operate in multiple environments, including on a dedicated rail corridor and within the local street network. MTA does not believe that a properly engineered street running alignment would reduce speed and reliability.

Examples of on-street light rail operations can be found around the world, as far away as Melbourne, Australia and as near as Jersey City. In these locations and many others, trains operate safely and efficiently in street environments with appropriate signaling and roadway treatment. Ensuring that street-running is done successfully is a major engineering area of focus in this next phase of design. All options are still open in terms of project design. Speed and reliability are essential to the project, and the MTA is committed to exploring any reasonable design options.

**IBX CONSTRUCTION, TIMELINE, AND FUNDING****How will the project be constructed, and will there be construction impacts?**

At this early planning phase of the project, construction methods, details and potential impacts have not been determined. As we proceed with project planning, we will work to minimize construction impacts to communities to the extent possible, and any such plans will be shared at future public meetings.

The IBX will be built largely within the existing rail right-of-way, which has active freight rail service. Creating passenger service will require the reconstruction of bridges and embankments in areas throughout the corridor. The project team will meet with elected officials and community groups to devise construction plans that strive to minimize any potential concerns while balancing cost and schedule considerations. The project team will remain engaged with the community throughout the entire process. There will be numerous public meetings in Brooklyn and Queens and virtually during the planning process and future construction phases of this project to communicate details and impacts.

**Will there be any property acquisition required?**

The project is primarily within the existing MTA and CSX right-of-way, and initial studies indicate that the amount of property acquisition is expected to be minimal, but some amount of acquisition is likely. Further engineering studies will be conducted to learn about potential property acquisition.

**What is the project schedule? When will construction begin and what is the duration?**

We will begin the environmental review process in winter 2023-2024, which generally takes two years. We will seek to begin design work concurrent with the environmental review process. If the project is funded in a future capital program, a construction contract could be awarded after the design process.

**Will eventual construction (if funded) include local hiring and MWBE targets?**

MTA projects can now consider local hiring, which is currently being piloted on other projects. Additionally, MTA projects set MWBE goals.

**How much does this project cost?**

The cost to construct the IBX is projected to be \$5.5B (in 2027 dollars). Thanks to its high ridership (115,000 projected weekday riders) and relatively low construction cost, Light Rail offers the best value, with a cost of \$48,000 per daily rider.

**How will you fund this project?**

In January 2024, Governor Hochul announced \$45 million for engineering on the Interborough Express, which you can learn more about at <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-announces-highlights-fy-2025-budget>. This funding is an important next step to advance the project. For full project funding, we are not precluding any funding sources at this point, and we will be following federal procedures to ensure we remain eligible for federal funds, including programs for multimodal (freight/passenger) projects.

Additionally, the IBX was included in the MTA's comparative evaluation process for potential inclusion in the MTA's 2025-2029 Capital Program. This process evaluated the project within a range of metrics such as ridership, cost, travel time, capacity, and network benefits. This process informed the Twenty-Year Needs Assessment (<https://future.mta.info>), a final evaluation which analyzes the benefits and costs of potential investments for advancement into the next Capital Program. If funding is identified and the MTA decides to proceed with this project, it will be included in subsequent Capital Programs.

**IBX SAFETY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE IMPROVEMENTS****Will stations and vehicles on the line be ADA accessible?**

Yes, all stations and vehicles will be fully accessible to all riders.

**What bicycle and pedestrian improvements are you proposing as part of this project?**

In January 2023, the MTA released a strategic action plan to improve bicycle, pedestrian, and micromobility access across our network, including at subway and commuter rail stations, bus stops, and bridges, which can be accessed at <https://new.mta.info/bike-micromobility-strategic-action-plan>.

The MTA is excited about the multi-modal opportunities associated with this project, and we are committed to making it easier for our customers to access the system by walking or biking. At this stage of the planning process, specific bicycle and pedestrian improvements related to the IBX have not been determined. However, we expect to provide pedestrian connections as well as bicycle access and parking at stations to the extent possible.

## **PRESERVATION & COORDINATION WITH EXISTING FREIGHT RAIL**

### **What is the existing line currently used for, and how would it be affected by the IBX project?**

The line is currently in use as a freight rail corridor, which sees up to three trains per day on the MTA-owned portion. Freight service on this segment is handled by the New York & Atlantic Railway (NYAR), which interchanges with CSX, the Providence and Worcester (P&W), and the New York New Jersey Railroad (NYNJR) railcar float, which serves multiple rail freight customers off the line. IBX passenger service will be designed to seamlessly share this corridor with freight rail in the future.

We understand there are quality of life concerns about the existing freight service on the tracks owned by the MTA, and we are committed to addressing these issues. There is funding available and an active procurement underway for new freight locomotives that generate fewer emissions and lower noise levels. Additionally, as part of the Interborough Express project, we are envisioning upgrades to the corridor that would result in less disruptive freight operations.

### **How would the project relate to the CSX-owned right-of-way (the Fremont Secondary)?**

The northern three miles of the IBX alignment (from roughly Fresh Pond Yard to Jackson Heights, Queens), is located in a portion of the corridor known as the Fremont Secondary, which is owned by CSX railroad. The MTA is committed to working with CSX to reach an agreement that allows us to operate within their corridor in a manner complementary with their current and future freight operations.

### **How does the IBX affect the future of the Cross Harbor Freight Program Study?**

The Port Authority of New York & New Jersey (PANYNJ) is pursuing its own project known as the Cross Harbor Freight Program (CHFP) to improve the movement of freight across New York Harbor between the east-of-Hudson and west-of-Hudson regions. Under this separate PANYNJ project, additional freight trains would operate on separate tracks located adjacent to the MTA's IBX project. IBX is being developed to not preclude the CHFP project, and the MTA and PANYNJ are committed to working together to ensure coordination of design and operations for their respective projects. Further information on the CHFP project can be found at <https://www.panynj.gov/port/en/our-port/port-development/cross-harbor-freight-program.html>.

### **How many tracks will there be, and will the IBX need to add new tracks?**

Two new passenger tracks will be constructed for IBX light rail service, with freight traffic operating on dedicated freight tracks within the corridor.

## **IBX PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND NEXT STEPS**

### **What are the next steps for the project, including timeline?**

We anticipate beginning the formal environmental review process in 2024. The purpose of the environmental review is to conduct a thorough evaluation of the IBX project and document these results. Throughout this process, we will elicit and consider your comments through public outreach and hearings.

We also expect to begin the formal project design process in late 2024 or early 2025, which takes another year or two. If IBX is determined to be suitable for construction, the MTA will need to identify construction funds. Throughout the project, the MTA will engage with the community, elected officials, and stakeholders to ensure all comments are heard.

**Where can I find more information on past and future meetings?**

The MTA held three in-person Town Hall Events on May 19, September 22, and August 16, 2023, and a series of in-person Open Houses between November 2023 and January 2024. Visit <https://new.mta.info/ibx> for information from past meetings and updates on future meetings. You can also submit questions and comments at any time by emailing [IBXOutreach@mtacd.org](mailto:IBXOutreach@mtacd.org).