



June 7, 2018

Via U.S. Mail and Published at www.riverkeeper.org

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
New York State State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

**Re: Open Letter Calling for an Immediate and Full Review of Community
and Environmental Impacts from LaGuardia Airport AirTrain**

Dear Governor Cuomo:

Riverkeeper, Inc., and Guardians of Flushing Bay respectfully request that the state work with federal partners to complete an environmental impact statement on the proposed AirTrain from the Willets Point subway station to LaGuardia Airport before making any determination to construct the train, alienate parkland, or grant eminent domain authority to condemn properties. We understand that legislation is being drafted that would provide eminent domain authority to route the AirTrain above the Flushing Bay Promenade and over Flushing Bay, the heart of historic World's Fair Marina Park. This route would impose significant hardship on local communities and the bay, which are already shouldering the burden of LaGuardia Airport. The proposal could upend recent investments to improve neighborhoods and prevent implementation of the vision plan for Flushing Bay developed by Riverkeeper and Guardians of Flushing Bay with abundant input from community partners.¹ To give credence to the integrity of an environmental and community impact review, it must be completed with full public involvement before legislation specifically authorizes any particular route.

Flushing Bay has borne the impacts of LaGuardia for decades. Part of the bay had been filled in to construct the airport and now receives polluted stormwater runoff from runways and local highways. The bay is also heavily polluted by 2.3 billion gallons of raw sewage discharging yearly from New York City's sewer system. Despite these hazards, thousands of intrepid kayakers and dragon boaters take to the bay each year. Even more New Yorkers utilize the Flushing Bay Promenade and historic World's Fair Marina for recreation and boat launching. In addition to people, the waters are home to many wetland species, such as oysters, blue crabs, flounder, striped bass, and great blue heron.

¹ The full vision plan is available at www.riverkeeper.org/flushingwaterways.

Plans are now underway to bring the bay back to life. Under an agreement with the state, New York City is investing \$670 million to capture and treat roughly one third of the 2.3 billion gallons of yearly sewage discharges. At the same time, Riverkeeper and Guardians of Flushing Bay, along with community partners, have developed a vision plan to reinvigorate the bay and improve the park. The plan contains more than 50 flexible community-driven projects, such as oyster reef creation throughout the LaGuardia waterfront, Grand Central Parkway pedestrian bridge upgrades, walkway and landscape refurbishments, and the development of a Queens Water Exploration Center to bring essential amenities to the bay. We also propose bioremediation practices, including marsh installation and green stormwater capture infrastructure, that would help mitigate pollution and reduce the odors currently emanating from the water.

A path of the AirTrain along the promenade or over the bay would prohibit these projects from becoming a reality. In an area already starved for park space, the AirTrain would obstruct connectivity and recreational opportunities at the park and also destroy local ecological habitats, disrupt quiet enjoyment of the waterfront and interfere with one of the few public marinas for human powered boaters in the city. It is crucial that these impacts be avoided.

As described in a recent letter² from Ditmars Boulevard Block Association, Inc., there is no doubt that East Elmhurst residents also suffer the consequences of hosting LaGuardia Airport, including heavy traffic, air and noise pollution and the disruption from redevelopment of the airport. A separate and alternatively proposed AirTrain route over Grand Central Parkway has the potential to intensify air and noise pollution, aggravate traffic congestion during construction, and obstruct the viewshed of the homes facing the parkway. Any claims by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey about potential overall reduction in local traffic due to the AirTrain cannot be sustained without first undertaking a full review. We strongly believe these potential impacts, too, warrant consideration before a plan is formulated to construct the AirTrain.

Given these concerns, and in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and State Environmental Quality Review Act,³ the environmental impact statement must detail the potential significant environmental and community impacts from construction and use of the AirTrain, identify mitigation measures to minimize any impacts that are unavoidable, and evaluate a range of reasonable alternatives. Such analysis must review the adverse impacts described above, and it must consider all reasonable alternatives, including especially a no action alternative, an underground rail line, continuation of the N train from Astoria, and/or dedicated bus lanes from nearby subway stations. To fulfill state and city goals of sustainable planning, and to mitigate impacts on local communities and Flushing Bay to the maximum extent practicable, the environmental review must be completed with full community involvement before a route is identified through legislation and begins to gain momentum.

It is yet to be demonstrated whether a train link from Willets Point to LaGuardia is necessary or prudent. If any project does move forward, it must serve the interests of local residents and avoid significant impacts to Flushing Bay and the promenade. We are calling on you to direct state

² Letter from Ditmars Boulevard Block Assn., Inc., to Hon. Jose Peralta, N.Y. State Senator (Apr. 16, 2018).

³ Under New York State regulations, where a federal agency prepares an environmental impact statement compliant with the National Environmental Policy Act, an involved state agency must make additional findings pursuant to the State Environmental Quality Review Act, if necessary. 6 NYCRR § 617.15.

officials to work with federal and local stakeholders to complete a full review now and avoid embarking headlong on a flawed plan that could harm New Yorkers for generations.

Respectfully submitted,



Paul Gallay
President and Hudson Riverkeeper
Riverkeeper, Inc.



Akila Simon
Board Member
Guardians of Flushing Bay

Cc (via email):

Hon. Kirsten Gillibrand, U.S. Senator for New York
Hon. Charles E. Schumer, Minority Leader, U.S. Senate
Hon. Joseph Crowley, Member of Congress, 14th District of New York
Hon. Tony Avella, New York State Senator, 11th District
Hon. Jose Peralta, New York State Senator, 13th District
Hon. Toby Ann Stavisky, New York State Senator, 16th District
Hon. Jeffrion Aubry, New York State Assembly Member, 35th District
Hon. Aridia Espinal, New York State Assembly Member, 39th District
Hon. Ron Kim, New York State Assembly Member, 40th District
Hon. Daniel Rosenthal, New York State Assembly Member, 27th District
Hon. Bill de Blasio, New York City Mayor
Hon. Melinda Katz, Queens Borough President
Hon. Costa Constantinides, New York City Council Member, 22nd District
Hon. Peter Koo, New York City Council Member, 20th District
Hon. Francisco Moya, New York City Council Member, 21st District
Hon. Paul Vellone, New York State Assembly Member, 19th District
Hon. Philip Papas, Chair, Queens Community Board 3
Hon. Joseph Risi, Chair, Queens Community Board 1
Dan Elwell, Acting Administrator, Federal Aviation Administration
Basil Seggos, Commissioner, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
Mitchell J. Silver, Commissioner, New York City Department of Parks and Recreation
Vincent Sapienza, Commissioner, New York City Department of Environmental Protection
Rick Cotton, Executive Director, Port Authority of New York & New Jersey
Frank Taylor et al., Board of Directors, Ditmars Boulevard Block Association, Inc.