

Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney's Opening Remarks
March 19, 2008

I am delighted to be joined by the incomparable Helen Marshall, our extraordinary Borough President. Helen Marshall works tirelessly to make Queens a better place to live and she truly deserves our recognition and thanks.

I am thrilled that we will be hearing from the new Deputy Mayor for Economic Development – Robert Lieber. He's incredibly important for this community. Many of the projects we care about depend on his leadership and attention.

Western Queens is one of the most rapidly changing areas of the City:

There's the renewal of Long Island City – with manufacturing leaving, it's becoming New York's 4th central business district; there's Queens West/Hunter's Point south; there's East Side Access creating a new LIRR station in Sunnyside; there are proposals to make major transit improvements such as the Queens Plaza Roadway Redevelopment Project, Long Island City Links and the Jackson Avenue Improvements project.

The city and state are taking the lead on all these projects, and private investment is spurring the explosion of new developments – But many of these projects are relying on require federal investment. It's hard to really be able to plan and complete large scale infrastructure projects without the federal government. The federal government currently contributes approximately 40% of the amount invested in the nation's public transportation infrastructure. In recent years that share has been as high as 51%. But we're not even close to keeping up with the competition.

China spends 9 percent of its gross domestic product on infrastructure; the United States spends less than 1%. And that's something that should concern us as a nation. Mass transit avoids crippling congestion and saves our nation 1.4 billion gallons of gasoline every year.

Fortunately, New York recognizes the importance of investing in infrastructure – and the projects we'll be talking about today demonstrate that commitment to making sure that New York remains a world-class city. While the rest of the nation hasn't done a great job of promoting mass transit, New York City has done a spectacular job. One out of every three users of mass transit and 2/3rd of the nation's rail passengers, use the MTA. That's a success story that keeps our city's economic engine running.

Fortune magazine ranks New York near the top among the nation's best cities for business because New York has "what every city desires, a workable mass transit system." But keeping it workable requires investment. We're the victims of our own success – There's no room for more subways or more trains on the existing tracks. We need to expand our infrastructure.

The MTA and the Federal Transit Administration recently signed a full funding grant agreement for East Side Access – a proposal to bring the Long Island Railroad into Grand Central Station by using the 63rd Street Tunnel Connector. East Side Access will provide LIRR commuters a one seat ride to Grand Central Terminal and shave 30-40 minutes off their commutes. It will create a new stop in Sunnyside to bring commuters to the growing business district in Long Island City, and take some of the traffic off of Queens streets by giving LIRR passengers a quicker and easier way to get to work.

For many commuters, Penn Station is inconvenient. They work on the East Side. They want to commute into the East Side. East Side Access will make that happen.

The 63rd Street tunnel was built in the 1970s and was once described as the tunnel to nowhere. For decades this amazing tunnel sat there, empty. In 1992, while Bill Clinton was running for President, and I was running for Congress, Tom Manton, our late great county leader and Congressman, got a commitment from candidate Clinton to build tracks to connect the F line into the tunnel. Clinton kept his word to the people of Queens, and I joined the Queens delegation, in working to get another \$309 million, roughly half the project's cost, and the MTA completed the connection.

The Tunnel Connector relieves congestion on subway lines to Queens, enabling NYC Transit to add 20% more trains during rush hour– about 17 an hour.

But the original tunnel had two stories, one of which had been built to accommodate East Side Access – and that's a \$6.3 billion project. The federal government signed a full funding grant agreement committing to pay about a third. In my district there's another project that's particularly important to our region – the Second Avenue Subway. These two projects will move more people than any other transportation projects in the federal budget.

Last year New York got nearly \$400 million in federal funding for these two projects – and now that a full funding grant agreement has been signed for Second Avenue Subway, we expect similar amounts until the projects are completed.

The first tunnel boring machine for East Side Access started the first tunnel drive as part of the Manhattan Tunnels Contract in September 2007. The second began drilling in December 2007. The entire United States of America has will have only four tunnel boring machines digging new rail tunnels this decade. All of them will be in my district – two for East Side Access and two for Second Avenue Subway. By contrast, the city of Shanghai has 90. Just think what we could do if we were investing in infrastructure at that pace – there wouldn't be vast stretches of the city that have no service. But construction is enormously expensive and it's hard to come up with the capital to build large project.

Our communities also require infrastructure improvements to make the city more liveable and accessible. That's why I'm proud of the nearly \$20 million dollars in federal funding that will go into making Queens Plaza the welcoming entryway a world class city deserves. Residents

will benefit from less traffic, better air quality, new and improved public space, more comfortable and speedier commutes, and a more inviting environment for business development. There will be pedestrian friendly walkways, dedicated bike lanes, reorganized traffic lanes between Crescent Street and Queens Plaza East, and streetscape improvements such as landscaping, public art, lighting, crosswalks, street furniture, directional signs and artistic banners. This project is projected to go into the ground this summer – it has been a long time coming, but I’m delighted that we’re on track to get it done.

I’m also pleased that I was able to get \$250,000 to fund a study for Long Island City Links. Long Island City Links will reduce the number of vehicles on the streets in Hunter’s Point, Court Square and Queens Plaza by encouraging wide use of mass transit and pedestrian paths. The plan calls for streetscape improvements, an expanded and improved bike path along Queens Plaza and neighboring streets, shuttle bus service and better bus service during off-peak hours.

Western Queens has seen an explosion of new residential development, but the amenities haven’t kept up with the development. When Queens West was proposed, we were promised a new library. The library is still in the planning stages – but I understand that construction is on schedule to start this year. I am pleased to report that there’s a small amount of federal funding there too.

Finally – I’ve been working to expand ferry service in the district. We’re a city of islands, but we make very poor use of our waterways. Everyone knows how important the ferries were in the aftermath of 9/11. When other forms of transportation were out, ferries were our lifeline. Ferry service should be part of the mix all the time. I support the city’s efforts to expand ferry service and build ferry terminals that will be welcoming. Along with my colleagues, I worked to get \$4.4 million for ferry service – \$1.4 million of which is mine. I hope that it will be spent in my district in Long Island City and elsewhere.

Building all of these things requires a lot of coordination and support from our Borough President. She’s been a dynamic force for Queens and a wonderful colleague – and I’m delighted to turn the floor over to the Queen of Queens – the extraordinary Borough President Helen Marshall.

Thank you, Helen.

I've worked on a lot of projects – and as a legislator, it's always a tough lift to fight for funding. But getting the funding isn't enough. Even if the funding is there, nothing happens without strong leadership from City Hall. Mayor Bloomberg has been really superb at making sure that his administration focuses on the infrastructure needs of the city – first with Dan Doctoroff and now with Deputy Mayor Robert Lieber. Bob was an investment banker at Lehman Brothers for 22 years, and later served a year as president of the city's Economic Development Corporation. He is known as a savvy leader who is focused on getting things done. And, quite frankly, that's what we need. There are a lot of projects that have been on the drawing board for quite some time. We need to get them off the drawing board and into the ground. I'm glad that Bob is someone who is focused on doing just that.

I'm pleased that Deputy Mayor Lieber has been joined by two other people who have been important to the planning and implementation of improvements in this neighborhood – Penny Lee of City Planning and Tom McKnight of EDC.

Deputy Mayor Robert Lieber: