



**New York City Environmental Justice Alliance testimony
to the New York City Council Taskforce on BQX
Oversight Hearing**

March 30th, 2019

Good Morning New York City Council Members. My name is Renae Reynolds; I am the transportation planner for the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA). I am testifying on behalf of our organization and the members we serve. Founded in 1991, NYC-EJA is a citywide membership network linking grassroots organizations from low-income neighborhoods and communities of color in their struggle for environmental justice, that includes transportation justice.

There is no question that New York City has a transportation equity problem. Lack of access to reliable and affordable public transportation have plagued low-income communities and communities of color, who predominately rely on transit for years. These problems can and must be fixed. However, the solutions must be rooted in true community engagement, informed by those who continue to experience the negative impacts of past top down, siloed decision making.

Transit projects must also make sense in the current context of climate change in a coastal city. Superstorm Sandy wreaked havoc along our coastlines, laying bare the reality of climate change. Just this week golf ball size hail was reported in Staten Island, and flood and tornado warnings were issued. It is unfathomable that in 2019 when extreme weather events are the new reality, that the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) and private real estate interests are proposing to build a surface level, fixed rail system along the waterfront. It makes no sense. While EDC's reporting claims that only a small portion of the BQX would be within the 100 year flood plain, it does not take into account that the majority of the route is in fact within the storm surge zone. We don't have to wait 100 years to prove that the BQX is ill conceived, we know it now.

Since the inception of this idea– to bring a gimmicky trolley to an increasingly dense urban street scape– came to our attention 3 years ago, our member organization UPROSE responded with poignant and critical questions for their community in Sunset Park. Why a trolley? When we have multiple train lines. Why a trolley? When we could support the activation and reactivation of public bus lines that have been eliminated.

The answer is that the Brooklyn Queens Connector project is not at all about transportation equity. It is about real estate development. It is a project marketed to vulnerable communities who are understandably in search of better transit, but are unaware that they are being sold snake oil. The price tag for this project has ballooned to nearly \$3 billion dollars even after its route has been shortened. The City cannot continue to throw away vital resources to fulfill the desires of the wealthy luxury developers along our waterfronts at the expense of low-income communities and communities of color and small business at risk of displacement.

The BQX is a solution in search of a problem. It would rely on value capture, a speculative financial scheme to be constructed. It would require the use of overhead contact systems or wires to power it. Along with the possible construction of substations along the 11 mile route, (according to EDC to accommodate 1 megawatt unit per mile). So in addition to the chaos of laying tracks, hanging wires, creating exclusionary trolley-only streets, we would also be forfeiting public land for substations. In the past 3 years how many electric buses could have been servicing communities and closing transit gaps?

This project must be stopped dead in its tracks and we need the City Council to help us put an end to this misadventure. We need our elected officials to support real transit equity, to focus on the future with better bus networks, real bus rapid transit, invest in zero-emissions electric buses in collaboration with our Metropolitan Transportation Authority and send luxury developers and their gimmicks/schemes and flashy renderings packing.

I would like to thank the City Council and the Taskforce on BQX for putting this hearing together and creating a platform for our critical concerns to be addressed, I look forward to a final resolution that supports real transportation equity for our communities.