



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jessica Ramos

NYC subway extension to LaGuardia idea gains steam after Cuomo's AirTrain nixed

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The push for an AirTrain to LaGuardia might be dead — but talk of a new subway line to the airport from Astoria is gaining steam.

Gov. Hochul on Oct. 4 [ordered the Port Authority](#) to seek “alternatives” to [former](#) Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s plan to build a rail link from Willets Point in Queens that would have connected the airport to the Long Island Rail Road and the No. 7 train.

That plan would have sent LaGuardia travelers from Manhattan past the airport and made them backtrack to reach the terminals.

Cuomo’s plan last year received [federal approval](#).

Local elected officials are among those who want the AirTrain plan replaced with a subway extension. Sen. Michael Gianaris (D-Queens), whose political base is Astoria, backs extending the N/W train to LaGuardia by building new subway tracks above the Grand Central Parkway — which would give travelers a straight ride from Manhattan to the airport.

A new overhead track that bends east from a point between the 30th Ave. and Astoria Blvd. N/W stations and then runs along the Grand Central would not require disrupting swaths of the surrounding neighborhood, Gianaris says.

“That seemed to make the most sense to me, it achieves the goal of getting the subway system linked up with the airport,” said Gianaris. “It keeps us from wreaking havoc on some of our local streets.”

Gianaris in the early 2000s was among a number of Queens officials — including area Councilman Peter Vallone — who opposed extending the N line by turning it east at the Ditmars Blvd. stop over Ditmars Blvd. to the Grand Central.

That plan would have greatly disrupted the neighborhood, Gianaris said.

The Astoria Blvd. route Gianaris now favors would run beneath the Hell Gate Bridge trestle, which Amtrak trains use for Boston-bound northeast corridor trains.

The Hell Gate Bridge issue was cited by FAA officials when they approved Cuomo’s plan earlier this year.

Also, the route would hug St. Michael’s Cemetery and would have to descend into a tunnel to make sure LaGuardia runways have enough clearance.

Gianaris thinks the problems are solvable.

“New York can figure out how to engineer this,” he said. “You could lower the Grand Central Parkway. You might not even need to raise the Hell Gate. It all needs a review.”

Another drawback to Gianaris’ preferred plan: Sending trains east below Astoria Blvd. might cut service to the N/W lines’ current northernmost stops, Astoria Blvd. and Ditmars Blvd. The new line might force the MTA to split service, with some trains terminating at LaGuardia and others at the

Astoria-Ditmars station.

But Gianaris, the Senate's deputy majority leader, believes a subway extension will work better than Cuomo's plan.

"The studies that have been done to date [of Cuomo's plan] are largely viewed as being reverse engineered," said Gianaris (D-Queens).

"The [former] governor knew what plan he wanted, and flaws were discovered in every other plan. I'm looking forward to looking at fresh ways."

The subway extension could take years to plan, review and build. But funding it may be easier since the Federal Aviation Administration earlier this year changed regulations that only allowed airport passenger facility charges to fund rail links that do not also serve communities. The shift would allow the MTA or Port Authority to use passenger charges to fund a subway extension.

Whether the project has enough political backing remains to be seen. But another area legislator is also eager to move forward.

"I've been supporting this since I was a kid growing up in Astoria," said Sen. Jessica Ramos (D-Queens), whose district includes East Elmhurst, LaGuardia's neighborhood. "I think that we can figure out a way for it not to displace any residences and perhaps make the best use of the industrial zone as possible."

"It was definitely a disappointment that the wrong project was being pushed through, but I don't think it [Hochul's suspension of the project] was a loss. It allows the community to come together around a concept that would benefit many more New Yorkers."