

Community Rallies Against MTA Construction Plan at Ditmars Boulevard Station

Astoria, N.Y. – Elected officials, community leaders, small business owners, and members of the public gathered today to rally in opposition to the planned construction project at the Ditmars Boulevard N/W Station in Astoria. The rally was a response to the MTA's announcement to Community Board 1 on February 5th that the station will be renovated from April 2018 through June 2019 as part of the Station Renewal initiative. The officials oppose the project because it doesn't include accessibility upgrades and there are no plans for improving subway service.

The MTA announced the Ditmars Boulevard project at the February 5th Community Board 1 Transportation Committee meeting – only two months before the planned start. The authority did not provide any written notification or written information to the community board or to elected officials. There has been no opportunity to collect community input about this project.

Speakers at the rally included Council Member Costa Constantinides, State Senator Michael Gianaris, State Assemblymember Aravella Simotas, Community Board 1 Chair Marie Torniali, Christine Yearwood of the Up-Stand movement for pregnant women and families, Colin Wright of Transit Center's Access Denied campaign for transit riders with disabilities, seniors from the HANAC Douris Tower Senior Residence, Hearts Across Queens, and others.

The Ditmars Boulevard project is planned in addition to the already-planned closure of the Broadway Station and current closure of the 30th Avenue Station as part of the Enhanced Station Initiative. While the Ditmars Boulevard project will not fully close the station, construction materials will be stored on 31st Street throughout the entire 14-month renovation. Residents, visitors, and small business owners will have to endure sidewalk congestion, noise, loss of parking, and traffic. Even with all these burdens, the MTA will not improve subway service, update signals, renovate the track, or install an elevator. The renovation plans include updating the platform floors, lighting, public-address system, mezzanine stairs and railings, tiles, and artwork.

Small business owners said they were bracing for a loss of business as they expect the construction will hurt visibility of their shops and restaurants, remove parking spots, and increase sidewalk congestion.

Community members reiterated the need for ADA accessibility improvements for people with disabilities, parents with strollers, and seniors – there are currently no elevators along any of the N/W stations in Western Queens. Residents also spoke about the need for service improvements as delays and signal failures have become more commonplace.

The elected officials unveiled an online petition for subway riders to show the importance of better accessibility and service. The petition can be [signed here](#).

Council Member Constantinides said, “Our subways must serve everyone, including people with disabilities, seniors, and parents with strollers. The 14-month construction project at Ditmars Boulevard, along with the simultaneous closures along additional stations on the N/W line, is a slap in the face of Astorians. We deserve a reliable subway system that operates with few delays and is accessible to all.”

Senator Gianaris said, “Our subways are in desperate need of better service and more accessibility, yet the MTA continues to embark on projects that inconvenience communities at great cost without improving either. The MTA must reconsider its approach to fulfilling its obligations and I will keep fighting until they do so.”

Assemblymember Simotas said, “Our community is already feeling the pain of current station closures and on top of that will now have to cope with Ditmars Boulevard construction. All this construction is a recipe for disaster, inconveniencing riders, hurting small businesses and blocking busy streets. The MTA seems oblivious to this pain and the things that subway riders really need – working trains that run on time and elevators to help the elderly, the disabled and parents with children – the MTA is ignoring.”

Congressman Joe Crowley said, “For years, the MTA has failed to address the needs of our aging subway system. Tracks have fallen into disrepair, subway signal systems are outdated, and many stations throughout Queens are inaccessible to those living with disabilities. I fully support plans to address these shortcomings. However, the MTA has so far failed to justify the extent to which this upcoming project will disrupt local businesses and the lives of my constituents. The MTA cannot spend \$20 million dollars on a highly intrusive project that does nothing to ameliorate the most pressing issues facing commuters in Astoria.”

Community Board 1 Chair Marie Torniali said, “The MTA has now come to the Ditmars Station where the scope of work includes both structural and aesthetic Improvements. However, again they have been dismissive of our plea to include elevators that will give equal access of transportation to our disabled neighbors. Aesthetics are nice, but not necessary. What is necessary is improving service and structural changes that will make our stations accessible to all Astorians; the disabled as well as seniors and parents with children in one hand and strollers in another.”