

Feds: No grant for BQE fix

City DOT hoped \$800M would help with repairs

BY LORENA MONGELLI

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Federal highway officials have turned down an \$800 million grant application to revamp an aging section of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, with some advocates hoping city officials will continue tweaking proposed designs.

The funding snag isn't expected to slow the city transportation department from moving forward with an estimated \$5.5 billion plan to reconstruct the city-owned 1.5 mile section dubbed BQE Central, stretching from Atlantic Avenue to Sands Street in Brooklyn. It includes the triple-cantilever structure that has two decks of highway traffic and is topped by the Brooklyn Heights promenade.

Another 10.6 miles of the BQE is owned by the state.

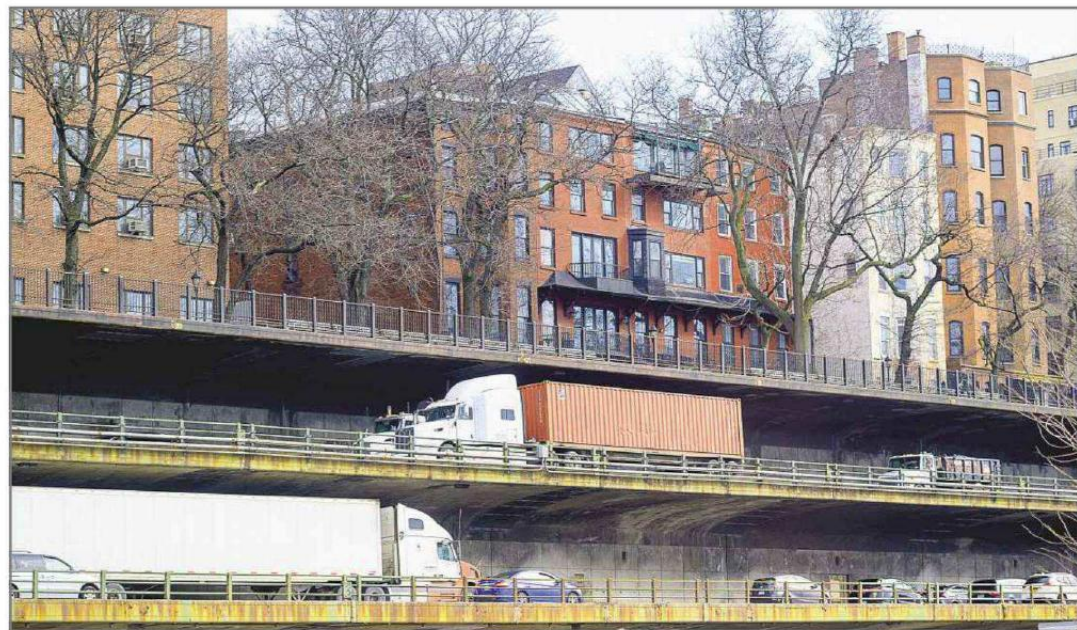
The city transportation department said it will reapply for federal funding with more input from the Federal Highway Administration. A federal spokesperson said the agency doesn't comment on specific project applications.

While plans are still in a conceptual phase, construction is expected to start in mid-2027 and a completion date is slated for the end 2032, according to an online timeline.

Mona Bruno, a city DOT spokesperson, noted other projects that eventually materialized were initially denied before being awarded money.

"We are committed to delivering a long-term fix for the city-owned portion of the BQE while developing projects to reconnect communities along the highway's entire corridor in Brooklyn," she said in a statement.

Some advocates and local community groups, which remain opposed to earlier plans



A city-owned portion of the BQE around Atlantic Avenue that is still slated for reconstruction.

to expand the highway, said they hope city officials will go back to the drawing board.

Tiffany-Ann Taylor, vice president for transportation at the Regional Plan Association, doesn't believe the grant rejection will impact the timeline but said city transportation officials will have to find creative funding sources while developing a clearer proposal, especially as it relates to the number of traffic lanes. In 2021, the number of lanes was reduced to two lanes from three in each direction, in part to limit the weight load on the infrastructure.

Lara Birnback, executive director at the Brooklyn Heights Association, which has 1,200 paying members, said the group doesn't support any current proposals but hopes the city and state will now "work together collabora-

tively on a plan that's cheaper, more sustainable, more equitable and that comes with community support."

Last year, several local, state and federal officials, including State Sen. Andrew Gounardes (D-Brooklyn) wrote a letter to Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, describing the cantilever as "falling apart," and urging the agency to continue maintaining just two lanes throughout the city's 1.5 mile portion.

The section is a critical passageway for freight trucks moving goods throughout the region and serves over 150,000 vehicles daily.

The city-owned stretch of the BQE has had high levels of congestion and crashes due to several design issues, including lack of shoulders, narrow lanes that were less than the standard 12 feet

width for highways, curves and unsafe on- and off-ramp mergers, according to a 2020 report.

Other local projects have also been denied federal funding. At a Metropolitan Transportation Authority Board meeting last week, MTA chairman and CEO Janno Lieber acknowledged that the Federal Railroad Administration recently rejected a "relatively small request" for funding to help advance the design phase of the MTA's proposed \$7 billion reconstruction of Penn Station. He did not disclose how much was requested.

With Alfonso Castillo

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State takes aim at hidden credit card fees

BY CHRIS KAHN

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Credit card users soon may be able to wave goodbye to hidden processing fees.

Long Island authorities on Sunday can begin enforcing a state consumer protection law that requires businesses to be much more transparent about how they're passing on those surcharges to customers.

The law, which Gov. Kathy Hochul signed Dec. 13, codifies previous legal interpretations from the New York State Court of Appeals and clarifies rules that merchants must follow when their customers pay with

credit cards. It also authorizes local governments to enforce those rules.

Previous reporting by Newsday showed that some business owners thought they were complying with the law when they were not.

Going forward, the law will require New York merchants to include credit card fees in the sticker price. They are not allowed to display just the lower "cash" price for an item, even if they post a sign that says they'll charge more for credit card purchases.

Merchants are also forbidden from adding credit card surcharges as extra line items

to a bill, which sometimes have been concealed with generic descriptions like "convenience," "service" or "technology" fees. And customers cannot be charged higher surcharges than what the merchant pays in processing fees.

"New Yorkers should never have to deal with hidden credit card costs, and this law will ensure individuals can trust that their purchases will not result in surprise surcharges," Hochul said in a statement.

Credit card processing fees, which can range between 3% and 5% of the price, have been increasingly popping up from grocery stores to hair salons.

In many cases they're a surprise entry at the bottom of the receipt as some businesses do not clearly communicate higher prices for using credit cards.

The state's Division of Consumer Protection, which recently published additional guidance related to the new law, said that businesses must list the total price of an item, including any credit card fees.

They have a few options that will comply with the new law. Merchants can, for example, list both the credit card and cash prices. Or they can list the higher credit card price while advertising a dis-

count for cash. And they can simply charge the same price for credit card and cash transactions.

Businesses that violate the law may be liable for civil penalties of up to \$500 per violation, according to the Division of Consumer Protection.

If you think a business is not following the law, state authorities recommend filing a complaint with the consumer protection office, at dos.ny.gov/consumer-protection or by phone at 800-697-1220. You can also file a complaint with the New York attorney general's office at ag.ny.gov/file-complaint or by calling 800-771-7755.