



Updated : February 4, 2016
- Published : February 4, 2016

Proposed streetcar to allow NYC to compete globally, but not anytime soon

For people who question the project, one transit expert says to contribute to the planning process and give it a chance.



Friends of the Brooklyn Queens Connector

Photo:



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A proposed streetcar, which will stretch along the East River connecting Brooklyn and Queens, is expected to bring New York City up to date with cities across the world — but much has to be done before it becomes a reality.

Mayor Bill de Blasio is expected to unveil the proposal for the waterfront rail line during his State of the City speech Thursday night, according to [The New York Times](#).

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The idea of the 16-mile ride, which plans to take passengers from Sunset Park all the way up to Astoria, was drafted by the nonprofit group Friends of the Brooklyn Queens Connector — made up of real estate and community leaders.

“It’s something I think is going to make a huge impact for hundreds of thousands of people. And by the way, we’re talking about neighborhoods that are growing in terms of population,” de Blasio said during a radio interview with Hot 97.

For Robert Paaswell, distinguished professor of civil engineering at CUNY City College, the idea of the streetcar — which he says will be more of a light rail — will allow the Big Apple to get on the same page as many European cities.

“New York has to compete in the world and to compete in the world it has to have incredible accessibility,” Paaswell said. “We’re falling behind.”

He added that the proposed line would bring accessibility to areas, which in just the past few years have been restored with vibrancy because of younger generations moving in.

When questioned about the possibility of congestion or causing conflict with cars, Paaswell explained that the rail line is coming during a time when less people are depending on cars and want to find alternatives to getting around.

Urban designers should be able to design a streetscape around the line that would allow for multiple use.

“When you take cars off a street, people find other ways and they adjust to it so it isn’t a tragedy,” he said.

Although some people have commented asking why the city doesn’t use the funds that will go to creating this rail line and instead improve the MTA subway system, Paaswell said that the city needs all options and that the MTA is doing well with the money it has.

“That doesn’t mean you have to ignore the rest of the city because you’ll always be playing catch up,” he said.

According to an MTA spokesperson, the agency has had “productive discussions with the private sector leaders who have developed this idea.”

“We are interested in hearing more about the mayor’s plan and any other proposals to improve transportation options,” the spokesman said.

When it comes to paying for the project — de Blasio said the project would cost about \$2.5 billion in taxes from the higher property values in the surrounding areas — Paaswell said the investment is small compared to what the city will get back.

However, he added that because the rent in the area will increase and more taxes will be paid he believes developers in those neighborhoods should have to put money into the project as well. “The public shouldn’t invest to make investors rich,” he said.

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Although reports have said that construction could begin by 2019 — with service not starting until 2024 — Paaswell said that he believes it would be close to 4 to 5 years before anything actually begins to happen.

The city must now begin to plan the project, go through zoning approvals, hold public hearings, respond to the hearings, conduct environmental impact studies, go over preliminary costs and much more.

And he added that people should see the renderings that have been revealed as a look into what “incredible potential” the project could have — but not exactly what it would be like or even would cost.

He recommends those people who might question the project, especially those who live in the neighborhoods that will be affected, to take the time and become involved especially when the city begins to look at the environmental impact.

“If you are weary, give it a chance,” Paaswell said. “When the people come around to your neighborhood, contribute to the ideas...be part of the solution.”

Angy Altamirano
Reporter