

# NEW YORK'S HIGHWAY HEIST

New York State Spends Billions to Widen Roads,  
While New Yorkers Remain Cut Off From Basic Needs

**Wherever we live across New York, we need and deserve safe, reliable transportation options.** Public transit and accessible walking and bike routes give us healthy, clean, and affordable ways for everyone to get around. But for too long, politicians and their wealthy donors have sold us the idea we can't have the options we need.

With some high profile investments underway across upstate New York to remedy the racist legacy of urban highways, communities across the state, especially in New York City, are still suffering highway expansions that isolate and divide. Exclusionary highway projects leave out anyone who can't afford or operate a car or truck. **When New Yorkers are increasingly in need of more inclusive options, state leaders are squandering billions of federal dollars.**

New York's transportation spending must catch up with our visionary Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, which says that carbon emissions must come down 40% by 2030 and 85% by 2050, and the law's equity mandate, which says that at least 35% of investments must be made in disadvantaged communities – almost always the very same communities that have been isolated and divided by highways.

Now is the time to redirect investment away from projects that widen highways and toward fast, frequent public transit and safe, accessible walking and cycling infrastructure. Rather than encourage more driving, we must direct the New York State Department of Transportation to cut vehicle miles traveled, and instead invest federal and state resources in transit, biking and walking to give New Yorkers more options and more freedom of access and mobility.

Yet between projects in Queens, the Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan, the state is now spending more than \$5 billion on projects that widen highways — in the nation's largest city, where 7 million people ride public transit, which reaches every neighborhood. **Without shifting gears, New Yorkers can expect more of the same traffic congestion and air pollution that make it tough to get around without a car in many communities and hard to breathe all across the five boroughs.**



# STOP THE HIGHWAY HEIST: BY THE NUMBERS

## A DIRTY HALF DOZEN: HIGHWAY EXPANSIONS IN NEW YORK CITY

### QUEENS

#### Van Wyck Expressway

At a cost of **\$1.22 billion**, the state is widening the Van Wyck Expressway through downtown Jamaica and Southeast Queens, to welcome more cars between the spaghetti-like Kew Gardens Interchange and JFK International Airport. While the bistate Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, controlled by the two governors, has repeatedly hiked AirTrain fares, discouraging transit use, New York is meanwhile encouraging more travelers to drive or be driven to the airport. As a result, local residents and communities across the region will breathe more exhaust for decades to come.

### MANHATTAN

#### FDR Drive

As part of **\$700 million** in RFK Bridge upgrades, the state is widening half a mile with a third lane on the southbound FDR Drive. The project will put more cars on the road and more pollution in the air in East Harlem, which is an environmental justice community, and detract from the benefits of the state's simultaneous multibillion dollar investment in the Second Avenue subway expansion just a few blocks away.



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## A DIRTY HALF DOZEN: HIGHWAY EXPANSIONS IN NEW YORK CITY

### THE BRONX

#### Bruckner Expressway

For **\$1.7 billion**, the state is widening more than a mile of the Bruckner Expressway and adding exit ramps that will overshadow a new, beloved park. Advertised to the Hunts Point community as an effort to get trucks off neighborhood streets near the massive Terminal Market, additional capacity will have the effect of making more room for driving in the area. While electrifying the market itself and the thousands of trucks that travel to it each day will improve air quality, the transition will take decades. Meanwhile, more lanes will bring more traffic congestion and air pollution to the South Bronx.

#### Cross Bronx Expressway

For **\$150 million**, the state is building a new access road alongside the world infamous Cross Bronx Expressway. While part of it may eventually become a bus-only corridor, its immediate purpose is to avoid road closures and reduced capacity during bridge construction on the aging highway. The MTA as yet has no plans for transit operations along the route. Regardless, additional traffic meanwhile will mean more congestion and pollution in an environmental justice community long-subject to the worst excesses of Robert Moses' highway building binge.

# STOP THE HIGHWAY HEIST: BY THE NUMBERS

## A DIRTY HALF DOZEN: HIGHWAY EXPANSIONS IN NEW YORK CITY

### BROOKLYN

#### Brooklyn Queens Expressway:

While New York City's recent federal application for **\$800 million** to begin widening the Brooklyn Queens Expressway in Brooklyn Heights was rejected, another application is in the works and the project is expected to balloon to at least \$5.5 billion. Replacement of the triple cantilever beneath the Promenade with more capacity for cars and trucks and sprawling new access ramps would further overburden environmental justice communities for miles to the north and south including Williamsburg and Sunset Park and stretching as far as Queens and Staten Island.

#### Belt Parkway

As part of **\$1.1 billion** in Verrazzano Narrows Bridge upgrades, the state is widening two miles with a fourth lane on the eastbound Belt Parkway. The project will put more cars on the road and more pollution in the air in Southern Brooklyn, including Coney Island, which is an environmental justice community.





# STOP THE HIGHWAY HEIST: WIDENING IS THE WRONG WAY FOR THE “QUICKWAY”

## ORANGE & SULLIVAN COUNTIES

Converting New York Route 17 to Interstate-86 in Orange and Sullivan Counties can happen without widening the highway but the state is evaluating an additional, third lane for 30 miles in each direction at a cost of at least **\$1 billion**. The nearby New York State Thruway is two lanes wide in each direction and has been designated Interstate-87 since 1957. Widening the “Quickway” would worsen congestion and pollution from the Hudson Highlands to the Catskill Mountains and increase sprawl development pressures. Investing in public transit, cycling and walking instead would afford substantially greater freedom of access and mobility in this heavily car-dependent region.



# STOP THE HIGHWAY HEIST: UPSTATE LEADS THE WAY

While New York City and downstate communities continue to struggle against the old paradigm of road expansion, upstate cities are leading the nation in reconnecting communities long-divided by highways. From Albany to Buffalo, advocates are pushing transformative projects ahead. At the same time, major new investments in bus service are complementing highway removal, giving urban residents more freedom to get around, meet basic needs, and access opportunities without a car.

All of these crucial advances come at a cost. They offer a caution to New York City communities, where eventual remediation and removal of misguided infrastructure will be even more expensive. And they offer a compelling rationale for aligning transportation spending today with our climate law and its equity mandate. Widening highways now is throwing good money after bad. **Investing federal and state resources in freedom of mobility and access must be a top spending priority.**



## **Interstate-787:**

Removing Interstate-787 from the Albany riverfront could cost between \$2.8 and \$7.4 billion.

## **BusPlus Purple Line Bus Rapid Transit:**

Launched last fall, Albany's new bus rapid transit corridor cost \$81.2 million.



## **Interstate-81:**

Replacing the viaduct through downtown Syracuse with a community grid will cost \$2.25 billion.

## **Bus Rapid Transit:**

Centro's plan for fast, frequent transit service crisscrossing downtown will cost an estimated \$35 million.

# STOP THE HIGHWAY HEIST: UPSTATE LEADS THE WAY

## Conclusion

Widening highways comes at a great cost, in communities divided, opportunities missed and eventual remedies to reconnect people and places isolated by exclusionary, car dependent infrastructure. In New York today, we are simultaneously compounding past errors and learning from our grievous mistakes. Both efforts involve many billions of dollars in federal and state resources. But only one is a worthwhile investment; the other guarantees more expense and heartache down the road.

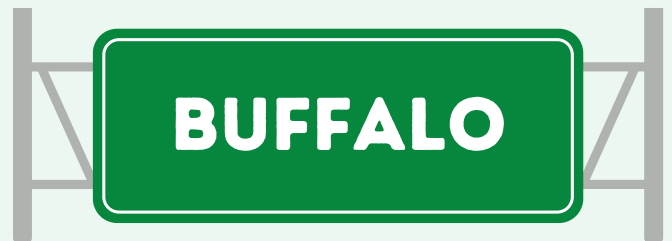
Expanding roads in New York City and northwest of the city as planned flagrantly violates our climate law, locking in more transportation emissions rather than cutting them — further harming communities that are already disadvantaged by highway infrastructure, traffic congestion, and air pollution. We need to stop squandering resources on these obsolete projects and instead target our transportation investments in ways that afford all New Yorkers more freedom to get around.

**IT'S TIME TO STOP  
THE HIGHWAY HEIST**



### **Inner Loop:**

Removing Inner Loop East cost \$21 million and removing Inner Loop North is projected to cost \$100 million.



### **Kensington Expressway:**

As planned, burying the Kensington Expressway with a tunnel will cost \$1 billion.

### **Bus Rapid Transit:**

The newly funded Bailey Avenue bus rapid transit line on Buffalo's East Side will cost \$102.7 million.

