



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michael Gianaris

Queens Elected Officials Send Letters to MTA Opposing Subway Station Construction Projects and Station Closures in Astoria

MICHAEL GIANARIS February 16, 2018

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Astoria, N.Y. - State Senator Michael Gianaris, State Assemblymember Aravella Simotas, and Council Member Costa Constantinides today sent two letters to the MTA New York City Transit President opposing a planned subway station construction project and asking for shuttle bus service to alleviate the problems from current station closures. In one letter they called for the planned Station Renewal construction project at the Ditmars Boulevard Station to include accessibility upgrades and service improvements. In the second they

detailed the suffering of Astoria businesses stemming from the closures of the 30th Avenue and 36th Avenue station closures.

The letters were sent following a rally held with community groups and members of the public to oppose the Ditmars Boulevard project as it is current planned.

Regarding the two closed stations, which are part of the Enhanced Station Initiative, their letter requested shuttle service to alleviate the devastating impact on Astoria small businesses (full letter attached):

Over 850 people have already signed a petition by the officials to oppose the construction.

The full text of both letters appears below:

LETTER 1 Re: 30th Ave

Dear Mr. Byford:

We write to follow up an urgent request from Astoria business owners for relief, including shuttle bus service between subway stations that are completely shut down while undergoing mainly cosmetic construction as part of the Enhanced Station Initiative (ESI) in Astoria, Queens.

In late October 2017, the MTA closed the 30th Avenue and 36th Avenue stations on the elevated N and W line as part of the MTA's Enhanced Station Initiative, which implements cosmetic enhancements without any structural, signal, or accessibility improvements to these stations. This ill-advised approach is now having serious impacts on Astoria residents and businesses. Unfortunately, the MTA failed to take into account the effect these shutdowns and attendant street impediments would have on the numerous businesses along these busy corridors that depend on the foot traffic from these stations.

On February 1, a meeting that Assemblymember Simotas coordinated was held between the MTA and local business owners to give them a chance to inform the MTA of the devastating impact from those station closures and construction. Over sixty business owners came to that meeting and expressed the dire drop-off in business and pressing need for shuttle bus service to help usher people back to 30th and 36th Avenues. Small businesses in our community cannot be allowed to suffer while these stations are closed for aesthetic enhancements.

We understand that any improvement project entails inconvenience for the surrounding community. But when livelihoods are threatened, this goes beyond mere inconvenience. When a project will not improve train service or accessibility, it is especially appropriate that the MTA do everything in its power to alleviate the community's suffering.

We respectfully request that you provide shuttle service or other relief businesses and residents suffering because of the 30th Avenue and 36th Avenue stations that are currently undergoing construction and for the Broadway and 39th Avenue stations that will be affected starting in July. We look forward to reaching a solution to protect the livelihoods of Astoria's small business owners.

Sincerely,

Senator Michael Gianaris

Assembly member Aravella Simotas

Council member Costa Constantinides

LETTER 2, Re: Ditmars

Dear Mr. Byford,

We write to oppose the plans for the Station Renewal construction project at Ditmars Boulevard unless it includes accessibility upgrades and service improvements. Our community agrees – over 850 New Yorkers have already signed our petition to oppose the construction.

Residents and small business owners will have to endure sidewalk congestion, intermittent weekend closures, noise, loss of parking, and traffic from the construction materials and equipment that will be stored on 31st Street throughout the entire 14-month renovation. Small business owners are understandably worried that they will lose business as a consequence of the construction hurting visibility of their shops and restaurants, eliminating parking spots and increasing sidewalk congestion.

We understand the station is old and needs repair work, but the MTA must take this opportunity to make long-term infrastructure updates to the station. These infrastructure updates should include making the station accessible in compliance with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as well as track work and signal upgrades to improve subway service. Our community is already suffering the effects of the ill-advised Enhanced Station Initiative that has closed the 30th Avenue and 36th Avenue stations at a great cost for cosmetic upgrades. As there are currently no elevators along any of the N/W stations in Western Queens, ADA accessibility is needed by people with disabilities, parents with strollers, and seniors. Commuters across Astoria are in dire need of service improvements as subway delays and signal failures are now an everyday occurrence.

The MTA has shown a blatant disregard for our community and its representatives during this process. There has been no opportunity to collect public input. Elected officials and the community board were informed about the project 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.

If the MTA does not comprehensively address infrastructure along our subway lines with long-term improvements including modernized signals and accessibility upgrades, it will continue to fail Astoria residents.

Sincerely,

State Senator Michael Gianaris, 12th Senate District

State Assemblymember Aravella Simotas, 36th Assembly District

City Council Member Costa Constantinides, 22nd Council District