

## North Brooklyn brainstorms future for Meeker Avenue underpass

by Benjamin Fang | Sep 19, 2017 |



The city's Department of Transportation (DOT) is taking suggestions on how to redesign the underpass along Meeker Avenue directly under the elevated Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (BQE).

Last Thursday night at the Swinging Sixties Senior Center, dozens of residents and students offered their ideas and thoughts on how to enhance street safety, bike connections and public space on the corridor.

Julio Palleiro, senior project manager at DOT, emphasized that the city agency does not have a proposal yet. They're still collecting public ideas before formulating a plan.

"We do not have any master plan," he said. "This is the first of many conversations we will have."

DOT workers surveyed neighborhood residents to get a sense of what they'd like to see happen with the underpass. Top ideas include creating a public space, more greening, bike facilities and lighting, according to Palleiro.

Safety was one of the main priorities. According to DOT data, there have been three fatalities along the corridor since 2010. Between 2010 and 2014, there were 145 total injuries, including 10 pedestrians and seven cyclists.

Palleiro noted that trucks and cars use the thoroughfare to enter and exit the BQE, leading to heavy congestion. The underpass is currently filled with parked cars and some abandoned vehicles.

The DOT is also considering how to best connect north Brooklyn cyclists to the new Kosciuszko Bridge, which will include a new bike and pedestrian path. The second bridge is slated for completion in 2020.

Councilman Antonio Reynoso said he's concerned about park space. According to the councilman, his district, which includes Williamsburg, East Williamsburg and Bushwick, has the third least amount of green space and third highest asthma rates in New York City.

"I'm just hoping that the neighborhood really understands that and is informed about the lack of park space that we have, and use this as an opportunity to address that issue," he said. "But again, we really want to leave it to them. They can be much more creative, they can have many ideas we haven't thought of."

Reynoso said he would support any recommendation that includes bike lanes, which he said “are appropriate everywhere.”

The councilman called Meeker Avenue and Union Avenue “one of the most dangerous intersections” in his district. Since 2010, there have been 43 injuries at that intersection alone.

“It’s been a long time coming,” he said. “The Department of Transportation knows that it has to focus on areas that are extremely dangerous for it to reach Vision Zero.”

Reynoso added that he’s excited to see DOT including the community input in the process.

“It’s also a poorly thought-out space,” he said. “It’s been an underground, dark, dingy parking lot for a long time. It’s about time we see some changes and some improvements.”

A group of students from Williamsburg High School for Architecture and Design attended the visioning session. Their school sits just two blocks from the underpass.

Christie Dorestant, a senior, said she would like to see a public space that addresses the pigeons, rats and dust that occupy the underpass. She also wants artwork, a place for bikes, seating and lighting.

“Especially at night because some of us leave school really late,” she said.



“It’s not too bad, but the pigeons, sometimes you’re walking and poop just lands on your shirt,” added classmate Hanna Figueroa. “Can somebody do something about this?”

Cheyenne Felton, also a senior, rattled off a similar list of wishes for the space.

“Williamsburg is known for its art and graffiti,” she said, “so to just have this one dark area in the middle of everything is just totally off.”

Two other seniors from the Williamsburg school, Lynette Arauz and Kalyssa Carter, mentioned that they hope future students play a role in maintaining and taking care of the future public space. They hope students come up with their own ideas to keep improving it.

For Dorestant, traffic safety is another concern. She hopes the changes will improve conditions for pedestrians.

“Sometimes, some people don’t obey traffic laws,” she said. “If you’re crossing the street and it’s your light, sometimes cars will fly by.”

DOT is still taking comments for the Meeker Avenue project.