

Kevin J. O'Toole  
*Chairman*

February 15, 2018

Nicholas Himidian Jr.  
Chairperson  
William Rivera  
District Manager  
Bronx Community Board 9  
1967 Turnbull Avenue  
Bronx, NY 10473

Dear Mr. Himidian and Mr. Rivera:

Thank you for your February 2 letter regarding the widening of the bicycle-pedestrian paths on the George Washington Bridge (GWB). I understand your desire to ensure your community has safe and reliable access to the GWB and I appreciate the opportunity to respond. The following paragraphs outline the Port Authority's steadfast commitment to providing safe bicycle and pedestrian access at all of our bridges.

As you know, bicyclists and pedestrians at the GWB currently share the South Sidewalk. This interaction can create congestion and a less than favorable experience for all who wish to cross the bridge by the walkway. We are working to improve these conditions for our customers as part of a \$1.9 billion capital program at the GWB known as "Restoring the George", which includes high-priority bridge and roadway projects that will take place on both the New York and New Jersey approaches and the main span of the bridge (<http://www.panynj.gov/bridges-tunnels/restoring-the-george.html>). The central project of "Restoring the George" is the Suspender Rope Replacement and Main Cable Rehabilitation which is scheduled for construction from 2017-2025. This effort will replace the critical structural elements of the bridge that are original elements of the bridge from its first days of service in 1931. This complex \$1.03 billion project includes replacement of the bridge's 592 suspender ropes and rehabilitation of its four main cables and their 488 anchorage strands.

We are using the Suspender Rope Replacement and Main Cable Rehabilitation project as an opportunity to advance a number of long-standing pedestrian and bicyclist access improvements to the GWB. The development of design alternatives considered the widening of the walkways as part of the overall goal of improving access and flow. Following the review process, the planned improvements to the GWB include the removal of steep ramps and steps, the separation of bicycle and pedestrian traffic, provision of access for disabled people in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and construction of a new 11-foot-high pedestrian safety fence along the entirety of both sides of the bridge. Although the decision was ultimately made not to widen the walkway, we are confident that these planned project improvements will provide our customers with unencumbered access and improve the overall user experience at the GWB main span sidewalk. The location of the current sidewalks does not preclude widening them in the future. Depending on the actual growth of users on the sidewalks and the availability of agency financing, widening of the sidewalks could still be undertaken at a later date.

4 World Trade Center  
150 Greenwich Street, 23rd Floor  
New York, NY 10007  
T: 212 435 4173 F: 212 435 4172  
[kevotoole@panynj.gov](mailto:kevotoole@panynj.gov)

The programmed improvements will require a staged approach. The South Sidewalk was initially closed to accommodate the installation of new temporary pedestrian safety fencing; all users had been moved to the North Sidewalk. With the temporary fencing installed, the South Sidewalk was reopened in December, two weeks ahead of schedule, and the North Sidewalk is now closed to allow for improvements that include new permanent safety fencing. When completed, the North Sidewalk will reopen and the South Sidewalk closed to allow for the installation of permanent safety fencing.

Upon completion of the Suspender Rope Replacement and Sidewalk Replacement project, both GWB sidewalks will be open simultaneously, allowing pedestrians and users requiring ADA access on the South Sidewalk and bicyclists on the North Sidewalk. Separating the two user groups will enhance the current operation by eliminating conflicts between pedestrians and bicycles and improving safety and enjoyment for all of our customers.

Our project development process was informed by direct input from the public. Early in the process, a working group, including several bicycle advocacy groups, was formed to support planning efforts for the project and consider the design options to improve access and flow for the GWB walkway, including the proposed widening of the walkways. Their input was invaluable to the design process, with members of those organizations voicing their support for the current GWB sidewalk replacement plan.

In addition to the GWB program, the Port Authority is also providing bicycle and pedestrian access on the new Goethals Bridge and Bayonne Bridge, representing a total commitment of over \$275 million for bicycle and pedestrian improvements in the agency's ten-year capital program. Additional information on these projects as well as other facilities and capital investments is available online at [www.panynj.gov/bridges-tunnels](http://www.panynj.gov/bridges-tunnels) and [www.corpinfo.panynj.gov/documents/Proposed-Capital-Plan-2017-2026-2](http://www.corpinfo.panynj.gov/documents/Proposed-Capital-Plan-2017-2026-2)

Thank you for taking the time to share your concerns. I hope that this information has been helpful to you.

Sincerely,



Kevin O'Toole  
Chairman

cc: Rick Cotton, Executive Director, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey  
Diannae C. Ehler, Director, Tunnels, Bridges and Terminals Department, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey  
The Honorable Andrew Cuomo, Governor of New York  
The Honorable Bill de Blasio, Mayor of New York  
The Honorable Ruben Diaz Jr., Bronx Borough President  
The Honorable Joseph Crowley, New York Congressman  
The Honorable Jose E. Serrano, New York Congressman  
The Honorable Jeffrey D. Klein, New York State Senator  
The Honorable Gustavo Rivera, New York State Senator  
The Honorable Marcos A. Crespo, New York State Assemblyman  
The Honorable Luis R. Sepulveda, New York State Assemblyman  
James Vacca, New York City Councilmember