

George Latimer
County Executive

March 25, 2019

Governor Andrew Cuomo
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins
NYS Senate
LOB # 907
Albany, NY 12247

Speaker Carl Heastie
NYS Assembly
LOB # 932
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Governor Cuomo, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, and Speaker Heastie,

In 2017, the Legislature approved \$200 million to fund the Empire State Trail, a 750 mile mixed-use path stretching from Manhattan to Canada and Buffalo to Albany. In 2019, advocates will ask an additional \$114 million to extend the Trail across Long Island. However, neither appropriation addresses the imminent threat to cycling across NYC and the Mid-Hudson posed by the failure of the Port Authority to widen the bike paths on the George Washington Bridge as part of its \$1.9 billion restoration. I therefore support funding that expansion as an extension of the EST.

The George Washington Bridge is the sole bikeable Hudson crossing out of New York City, as it connects to the EST at Hudson Greenway. Its 7 foot wide paths are already seriously overcrowded at 3700 cyclists a day on weekends and growing at 10% per year. Despite this pressing need, the Port Authority's plan is to restore the paths to 7 feet. This would be half as wide as needed to comply with current national standards.

The Port Authority's assertions of adequate capacity are contradicted by design drawings indicating that cyclists will have to walk the one-mile span. This will hobble the growth of cycling across the region for generations, impacting durable enhancements to public health, property taxes, sustainability and resilience that are annually worth hundreds of millions of dollars. It will also cause a drop in cycle tourism, a key justification for the EST.

A "complete" George Washington Bridge in tandem with the Mario M. Cuomo Bridge would form a 40 mile loop, drawing thousands of cyclists per day past tourist and food stops in Rockland, Westchester, the Bronx and Upper Manhattan. To this end, the New York City Department of Transportation will expand bike access across six Harlem River Bridges, connecting the Bronx and upper Manhattan; and Bergen, New Jersey will connect its parks with bikeways, providing off-road access to Rockland.

New York City's 828,000 cyclists represent a huge potential market for tourism statewide. However, unless they are afforded access to roads outside the city, their potential will be limited by facilities increasingly crowded with pedestrians and runners. A more realistic plan to upgrade the paths is the "Complete George". This proposal would cantilever a pair of 10-foot bikeways off the main span, below the existing 7 foot walkways, which would remain in use for pedestrians and runners. The Complete George configuration of anti-suicide barriers will preserve historic views of the New York and New Jersey skylines and the Palisades. Together, these improvements form a "linear park" comparable to the Walkway Over the Hudson, projected to attract 290,000 tourists spending \$42 million and sustaining 675 jobs.

Office of the County Executive

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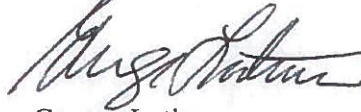
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The argument for remaking the George as a great public space is supported by early use projections and design drawings showing 16 foot wide paths extending out past the cables. 200 organizations, businesses, communities, and elected officials have already called on the PA to widen the GWB paths to comply with national standards.

Accordingly, I support funding George Washington Bridge path expansion as an extension of the Empire State Trail. Please reach out to my office for any further comment you deem helpful.

Sincerely,



George Latimer
Westchester County Executive

Cc: Senator Alessandra Biaggi
Senator Jamaal Bailey
Senator Shelley Mayer
Senator David Carlucci
Senator Peter Harckham
Assemblywoman Amy Paulin
Assemblyman J. Gary Pretlow
Assemblyman Nader Sayegh
Assemblyman Steve Otis
Assemblyman Thomas Abinanti
Assemblyman David Buchwald
Assemblyman Kevin Byrne
Assemblywoman Sandra Galef