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CONTACT: John Collins
(212) 681-1380

GLOBAL GATEWAY ALLIANCE CALLS FOR FIRST MASS TRANSIT BRT LINE TO ACCOMPANY NEW LAGUARDIA TERMINAL

NEW YORK – The Board members of the Global Gateway Alliance today called for a true Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route to accompany the new LaGuardia Central Terminal Building (CTB) in a letter to the New York City Department of Transportation (NYC DOT) and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). [Letter below]

Currently, LaGuardia is one of the only major city airports in the country without viable mass transit. However, with passenger traffic expected to rise to 35 million by 2030 and the Port Authority embarking upon a \$3.6 billion redevelopment of the CTB, GGA argues that the modernization of the airport presents an opportunity to finally deliver 21st Century mass transit to LaGuardia.

GGA suggests a BRT line along Ditmars Boulevard or other surface roads from the N Line terminus direct to the airport, which is located only three miles away. And by limiting the number of stops, using dedicated lanes, and having passengers purchase tickets off the bus, the Airport BRT would provide passengers with a smooth transfer from their flight to the city, and vice versa.

Specially branded, express airport bus access has worked well in other cities. The “747” bus in Montreal and the “FlyAway” in Los Angeles have proven to be a popular and efficient way of getting to and from their aviation hubs.

“It’s just common sense that our closest airport, which serves more than 25 million passengers, should have real mass transit to the rest of the City,” said Joe Sitt, Chairman of the Global Gateway Alliance. “The remaking of the CTB finally provides a chance to do just that.”

GGA points out in the letter that the MTA and DOT have made progress through the introduction of the M60 and Q70 inter-borough SBS routes, which not only provide passenger with an airport link, but increase inter-borough connectivity as well. But the advocacy group makes the argument that a world class airport must offer passengers reliable and rapid mass transit access.

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Thursday, May 15, 2014

Polly Trottenberg
Commissioner
New York City Department of Transportation
55 Water Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10041

Thomas F. Prendergast
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Metropolitan Transportation Authority
347 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10017

Dear Commissioner Trottenberg and Chairman Prendergast:

We are writing today to urge you to develop a plan for a mass transit link to the redeveloped Central Terminal Building (CTB) at LaGuardia Airport.

The modernization of the 50-year-old terminal allows for a reimaging of the airport, and we shouldn't wait to finally include a fast, convenient and viable public transportation plan in the design, planning and construction of the project.

Right now, mass transit to and from the airport takes too long. As an example, GGA recently calculated average commute times to LaGuardia from Midtown and Downtown Manhattan hubs, and the average time was an hour via public transportation, including multiple transfers; triple the amount of time it took to arrive by car.¹

As such, we believe the project should allow for the first true Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line in New York City, linking the N line terminus at 31st Street and Ditmars Boulevard directly to LaGuardia, less than 3 miles away.

The short distance between the N and the Central Terminal Building presents the opportunity for the elements of a BRT line that aren't allowed by longer bus routes throughout the City – a dedicated lane, tickets purchased off the bus, and one or no stops along the route.

In addition, there are a number of potential route options. Ditmars Boulevard is the most direct and could increase foot traffic to and awareness of the shopping district. It may be difficult to

¹ The travel times to LaGuardia were calculated via GoogleMaps (www.maps.google.com), using the public transportation option at 10 am on a Monday. The following locations were used: 25 W 39th St., New York, NY 10018; 250 Broadway, New York, NY 10025; Rockefeller Center, 45 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, NY 10111; Union Square, New York, NY 10011. The average commuting time was 57 minutes while the average time by taxi was 18 minutes.

remove parking spaces along Ditmars, however, so other alignments including down 31st Street to the Grand Central or another surface road could also be explored.

Lastly, an Airport BRT presents a great branding opportunity to create an iconic new transportation option in New York. Other airports have successfully utilized this marketing strategy. For example, Montreal has the “747” bus from the rail station to Montreal-Trudeau, and Los Angeles has a “FlyAway” non-stop bus from 4 locations to LAX.

The LaGuardia BRT could capitalize on the success of the AirTrain brand, for example, and be called “AirBRT” or “RapidAir”. And it should look different than normal New York City buses, carrying a consistent and unique color scheme and positive images of LaGuardia Airport.

We know that an extension of the N line to LaGuardia was considered in the early 2000s. Ultimately, it was shelved due to community opposition from the disruption of constructing new elevated tracks.

While an N Line extension would be a great boost to LaGuardia and mean the first one-seat ride to one of our major airports, a BRT plan is more workable right now.

And since the N extension discussion, the need for mass transit to LaGuardia has only grown:

- LaGuardia handles 25 million passengers a year, a number that is projected to rise to 35 million by 2030, with the new and expanded CTB.
- Lack of viable mass transit to the airport is a frequent passenger complaint.
- Competitor airports like Reagan National and Chicago Midway have long had direct rail transit access, and other airports around the country have only increased their public transportation.
- The Central Terminal Building is being remade into a modern, 21st Century terminal. Twenty-first century mass transit should go along with this overhaul.

We know that there may be new community issues associated with any additional mass transit plan, but we believe they can be overcome. Meeting with and including the local community in the planning process now will go a long way toward making the neighborhood a partner in this effort.

We also appreciate the recent efforts by the NYC DOT and the MTA to enhance bus service to LaGuardia via the Q70 and the M60. These SBS lines are an improvement in speed to the airport, they are immediate, and they help increase inter-borough transportation options as well.

But they don’t meet the need of direct and dedicated access to link the airport back to the City’s public transportation system.

And we recognize that the majority of LaGuardia passengers will continue to utilize taxis and private car services since so many are business travelers.

But to be a world class, 21st Century airport that serves all its passengers, LaGuardia must have viable and modern mass transit. We hope the ideas highlighted above form the basis for a renewed

effort to finally seamlessly connect LaGuardia to the rest of the City and the region via public transportation, while the airport itself is being remade.

Sincerely,

Joe Sitt
Chairman, GGA
CEO, Thor Equities

Stuart Appelbaum
Vice President, GGA
President, Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union

Chris Giamo
Board Member, GGA
Regional President, Metro NY Region, TD Bank

Jennifer Hensley
Board Member, GGA
Executive Director, Association for a Better New York

George Miranda
Board Member, GGA
International VP, Teamsters, At-Large President, Teamsters Joint Council 16

Steve Sigmund
Executive Director, GGA

Alvin Trenk
Board Member, GGA
Chairman & CEO, Air Pegasus Group

Peter Ward
Board Member, GGA
President, New York Hotel Trades Council

Kathryn Wylde
Board Member, GGA
President & CEO, Partnership for NYC