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Before Thanksgiving Travel Weekend, Report Reveals: Free LaGuardia Subway Shuttle Bus Would Revolutionize Transit Access to LGA—at No Cost to the MTA

Riders Alliance Study Finds Free, Rebranded Shuttle Would Increase Ridership, Bring New Revenue—and Can Be Implemented Today With No New Construction

New York, NY—A report released today by the Riders Alliance, a grassroots organization of transit riders, showed that turning the MTA's Q70 route into a Free LaGuardia Subway Shuttle would result in thousands more travelers using the subway to get to LaGuardia—and could be implemented immediately with likely no net cost to the MTA.

The Riders Alliance report recommended turning the Q70 into a free shuttle bus, rebranding it as the “Free LaGuardia Subway Shuttle,” and implementing basic user- and traveler-friendly improvements like regular ten-minute departure intervals, countdown clocks at bus stops, clear signage at LaGuardia and the bus’s two other stops, and on-board signs and announcements showing which airlines operate at which terminals.

Global Gateway Alliance, a regional airport advocacy group that has long made the case for better access to LaGuardia, joined the call today for a free airport shuttle to provide passengers with a viable mass transit link to the city and boost LaGuardia’s reputation in an increasingly competitive global market.

The Riders Alliance proposal was also endorsed by Ydanis Rodriguez, Chair of the City Council Transportation Committee, and by the Regional Plan Association and NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign.

The Q70 currently connects LaGuardia terminals with the E, F, M, R and 7 trains at 74th Street-Roosevelt Ave and with the LIRR at Woodside, running on the highway and making no local stops. The Riders Alliance report recommended keeping this well-planned route intact, but repurposing the service into a Free LaGuardia Subway Shuttle.

In a survey conducted of more than 700 Q70 bus riders and travelers landing at LaGuardia airport, as well as a review of official Port Authority travel statistics, the Riders Alliance found that:

- Only 12.5% of people going to or from LGA currently use public transit; but
- An additional 49% said they would do so if there were a free shuttle to the subway;
- 85% of people on the Q70 bus already transfer to or from the subway, meaning that their Q70 ride is already a free transfer that brings no revenue to the MTA;
- If just 1% more travelers chose public transit, the new revenue would more than offset the cost of making the bus free for the riders who are not already getting a free ride—and precedent from Boston shows that making the airport shuttle a free ride increased ridership by 18% there in just one year.

In 2014, the Q70 carried 3,419 riders on an average weekday, and 1,185,485 riders total over the course of the year. An 18% increase, comparable to Boston's, would bring another 213,000 LaGuardia travelers to public transportation, more than off-setting any revenue lost by making it a free shuttle to the subway.

John Raskin, Executive Director of the Riders Alliance, said, "Transit access to LaGuardia shouldn't be New York's best-kept secret. It should be intuitive and simple. Turning the Q70 into a free LaGuardia subway shuttle is a cost-effective improvement that could revolutionize how New Yorkers get to the airport. It's not a billion-dollar project; it's a free project with billion-dollar returns."

Joe Sitt, CEO of Thor Equities and Chairman and Founder of the Global Gateway Alliance, said, "Mass transit access to LaGuardia is limited at best, and complex and convoluted at worst, costing passengers time and money and our region its reputation. A clearly branded, free airport subway shuttle, however, is a low cost solution that would provide LaGuardia's 27 million passengers with a 21st century access link. And with plans to modernize LaGuardia underway, the time to act is now."

NYC Council Transportation Chair Ydanis Rodriguez said, "I have long been an advocate for a rail connection to Laguardia airport to allow for individuals to travel as efficiently as possible to one of our nation's busiest airports. Though we must continue to work towards that goal, we must also develop alternative strategies to close this transit gap faster than a decade. Converting the Q70 will provide the MTA with revenue generating user friendly mechanism of getting to the airport. I commend the Riders Alliance for their continued leadership in advocating for the needs of New Yorkers."

George Miranda, President of Teamsters Joint Council 16 and Global Gateway Alliance Board Member, said "A free LaGuardia subway shuttle would boost ridership and

access to an airport that is a job engine for New York. City residents depend on LaGuardia for jobs, from pilots and maintenance workers to facilities and security staff. Improved access would be a win for visitors, New Yorkers, and workers alike."

Gene Russianoff of the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign said, "There are simple and cost-effective ways to help revive the spirit of LaGuardia while the airport awaits a proposed \$4 billion overhaul by 2021. As our colleagues at the Riders Alliance show, heading the list is vigorously promoting and expanding the current non-stop shuttle bus to the subway."

Tom Wright, President of Regional Plan Association and Global Gateway Alliance Board Member, said, "As RPA's 2011 study of the state of the region's airports made clear, travelers face significant challenges reaching LaGuardia without the use of a personal car or taxi. Bus service remains the best option for public transit access to LGA, especially for the outer-boroughs, but routes must be branded and managed to attract ridership and serve airport travelers. This report presents some strong recommendations that will provide better options for customers."

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