



**Comments of Reinvent Albany
on Draft Scope for Belmont Park Redevelopment Project
and Draft Environmental Impact Statement**

March 22, 2018

Reinvent Albany advocates for transparent and accountable state government. We are a leading voice for sensible and transparent economic development subsidies and for more accountable public authorities, including Empire State Development (ESD).

Broadly, we ask that ESD ensure that scoping documents estimate the full cost to state and local taxpayers, and the value to the businesses building the project, of each development scenario and each part of each scenario.

We have a number of questions about the Belmont Park Redevelopment Project that scoping documents should answer before a decision is made on a particular scenario. We note that a formal Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) often identifies impacts without attempting to fully estimate the cost of mitigation measures. Where will the costs to taxpayers be displayed before decisions are made?

Local residents and community groups should have their questions about the Belmont project answered. They deserve to know how the project will affect them and their neighborhoods. However, more broadly, there is a statewide public interest in this project because taxpayers across the state may end up footing part of the bill for this local redevelopment.

We note the Draft Scope document mentions only in passing what could be a major cost born by the overall public --- the cost of increasing Long Island Railroad Service to Belmont. The Draft Scope says on page 23:

The LIRR is committed to developing a plan to expand LIRR service to Belmont Park station for events year-round; the extent and utilization of this service expansion will be confirmed with MTA/LIRR.

However, we are unable to find any record of a vote by the governing board of directors of the MTA that says the MTA will fund, or has budgeted for an expansion of service to Belmont. MTA Chairman Joe Lhota stated at a state legislative budget hearing in January 2018 that an MTA study to assess costs is underway, but it has not yet been released, and no costs have been discussed at MTA meetings. Further, at the last discussion at the LIRR Committee of the Board in February, Board members raised concerns about the unknown costs, and where the money will come from.

The Draft Scope says nothing about how much this expanded service could cost. Further, the MTA is not listed among the agencies for which approvals are required, or there is involvement or interest on page 8. Therefore, our question is, if it is not detailed in the DEIS, and not yet detailed by the MTA, what scoping document will spell out the cost of expanded LIRR service to Belmont?

On the topic of transportation costs, if the DEIS determines that engineering work is needed on the Hempstead Turnpike and “key intersections identified previously along Jericho Turnpike and Plainfield Avenue,” who will pay for that work? Will ESD, or will the cost be born by NYS DOT, or NYC DOT?

Judging from the draft scoping document, the DEIS will not answer basic questions about how much the Belmont Redevelopment Project will cost taxpayers. We want to know where and when the ESD will clearly explain how much this project will cost, and who will pay. Without this crucial information, the public cannot adequately determine whether the reported benefits will outweigh the costs.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. Should you have any questions, please contact Rachael Fauss, Senior Research Analyst, at rachael@reinventalbany.org.

Sources

Baumbach, Jim. “MTA chairman ‘concerned’ about obstacles of LIRR service to Islanders’ arena at Belmont Park.” Newsday. January 25, 2018. Available at:

<https://www.newsday.com/sports/hockey/islanders/islanders-belmont-lirr-1.16348814>

MTA LIRR Committee Meeting Materials, February 2017 Meeting Minutes, p 9:

http://web.mta.info/mta/news/books/pdf/180319_0930_LIRR.pdf