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300 South Bronx Youth Gather to Celebrate State Funding for Transformation of Sheridan Expressway by Planning for New Boulevard

Fresh off the announcement that the final 2016-2017 New York State Budget includes $97 million to convert the at-grade portion of the 1.3 mile Sheridan Expressway into a boulevard, the Southern Bronx River Watershed Alliance (SBRWA) held a teen summit today where it highlighted this victory to young community residents at Hyde Leadership Charter School in Hunts Point.

South Bronx residents have been an integral part of the 18 year community-led campaign to transform the Sheridan Expressway from a little-used and dangerous burden to an asset for the community. An unfinished and ill-conceived highway stub that is part of Robert Moses’ legacy, the roadway has separated communities, blocked access to the Bronx River, and created dangerous street conditions since it was built in 1962. Community members from the neighborhoods of West Farms, Bronx River, Hunts Point, and Longwood, organized through SBRWA, created the Community Vision for the Sheridan Expressway Corridor in 2006. This Community Vision formed the basis for many of the City’s recommendations to convert the Sheridan to a boulevard, officially released in 2013.

Young people have a strong stake in seeing the neighborhood improve, because their lungs are more vulnerable to diesel pollution and they are active users of local parks that the Expressway
currently makes difficult and dangerous to access. The South Bronx’s future is their future, which they can shape for their benefit through this community effort. The summit engaged young people with interactive workshops and participatory planning exercises to envision the future of the neighborhood made possible by conversion.

The teen summit was highlighted by the news that thanks to the efforts of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, Senator Jeffrey D. Klein, Assembly Speaker Carl E. Heastie and Assembly Member Marcos A. Crespo, funds have been designated in the State Budget for converting the Sheridan Expressway into a boulevard. These changes will reshape the area with pedestrian and waterfront access improvements for the teens, their friends and their families, as well as make possible new affordable housing and community facilities.

Congressman Jose E. Serrano, a long-time advocate for the plan and supporter for funding of the City’s study, said, “I am thrilled to see continued progress in the reimagining of the Sheridan Expressway. The $1.5 million federal funds for planning have helped propel this project into its next phase, and I am happy to have played a role in this process, alongside some of our community’s finest advocates. I want to commend my colleagues in government for their continued dedication to this project, and reassure them that I will continue to support strong federal investment for the full realization of this vision. US DOT Secretary Foxx is pushing our institutions to recognize the problems we’ve championed as a community for many years, and I am grateful to see true appreciation for real problems and strong leadership for real solutions.”

Senator Klein, who advocated for the project at the state level, said, “I’m proud that I helped secure $97 million to revamp the Sheridan Expressway into a community corridor that allows residents to enjoy its gems like The Bronx River, The South Bronx Greenway, and surrounding parks. This community-driven vision will breathe new life into the area, drawing residents together to enjoy natural beauty while bringing increased business to these streets.”

Assembly Member Crespo, who has been a vocal advocate of the project for years, said, “This is an exciting moment in the history of the South Bronx, where we are building real power to transform the neighborhood to better achieve environmental justice and to create and preserve quality jobs at the markets. There is much to celebrate, and I am grateful to Governor Cuomo and Speaker Carl Heastie for their leadership in securing this funding. I am also eager to get to work with my colleagues, agencies, and the community to take the next step in this continued revitalization effort.”
Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., an advocate for transforming the Sheridan into a neighborhood-friendly boulevard, said, “The Sheridan Transformation Project is reflective of the transformative changes taking place in the Bronx today. Rather than seeing obstacles to neighborhood development, we are leveraging them, such as with the Sheridan Expressway. The Sheridan Transformation Project is key to realizing vast improvements in the neighborhood’s quality of life with the opportunity to access Starlight Park and hundreds of new affordable housing units within easy access to rapid transit, and spectacular views of the Bronx River watershed. I thank the Governor for his financial support of this project, which saw $97 Million allocated in this year’s budget.”

Council Member Rafael Salamanca, Jr., said, “I was incredibly pleased to see funds secured by colleagues in Albany to go towards the Sheridan Expressway project. This project will provide for a safer, more unified community with access to beautiful green space along the Bronx River, and I look forward to continuing to work together in making this improvement a reality.”

With these funds, the New York State Department of Transportation will advance the conversion of the Sheridan Expressway from plan to reality. This project will be transformative for the residents of the South Bronx, especially for teens as they have the most at stake if the South Bronx were to continue to be cut off from the South Bronx Greenway, Starlight and Concrete Parks. After conversion, residents and visitors will have easier access to these great public spaces. The new boulevard is similar in concept to the West Side Highway in lower Manhattan today, which also is the site of a former expressway. The community-driven project also has the potential to create improved economic development opportunities, enhanced resilience, a better future for the Hunts Point markets, and new affordable housing, safer streets, less pollution, and more jobs.

This summer, SBRWA looks forward to meeting and working with the New York State Department of Transportation, elected officials, relevant agencies and, of course, community residents and workers to implement the plan in a way that is aligned with the community vision.

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SBRWA is a collaboration among four community-based – Mothers on the Move, The POINT CDC, Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, We Stay/Nos Quedamos – and two city-wide organizations – Pratt Center for Community Development and Tri-State Transportation Campaign. Through consensus building among community stakeholders, SBRWA works toward a vision of the southern Bronx River watershed that includes a healthy environment, a prolific economy and a community that reaps the benefits of the river as a rich natural resource.