

RAISE Grant
Reimagine the Cross Bronx
Virtual Tour
August 2024

User Selects West Part:

Song plays in the background.

Hello! Welcome to a virtual tour of the Cross Bronx Expressway. My name is [*Kenismael Santiago-Pagan; I am a Special Study Urban Designer at the Department of City Planning in the Bronx Office.*] I will be your guide through this virtual tour on the west portion of the Cross Bronx Corridor.

Before diving in, it's important to go over some housekeeping items.

This tour was prepared by the New York City Department of City Planning, the New York City Department of Transportation, the New York State Department of Transportation, and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in collaboration with local stakeholders who are working together on our two-year Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant project, **Reimagine the Cross Bronx Expressway Study**. This route, which runs along the west side of the Cross Bronx Corridor, was tested with the Community Working Group throughout summer 2023 and then opened to the public during fall 2023. The Community Working Group is a collection of representatives from community and civic organizations within the study area. In addition to this route, you can also find the central and east routes on this website.

The purpose of these tours is to develop a joint understanding of the issues and opportunities along the Cross Bronx Corridor.

This tour zigzags between Community Board 5 and Community Board 4 and pauses at several landmarks, including Bridge Playground, University Avenue, Plimpton Playground, Nelson Avenue, Jesup Avenue, Macombs Road, Mount Eden Avenue, Inwood Park, and Jerome Avenue. Walking on foot along the Cross Bronx Expressway is a unique experience because the expressway cuts through a very hilly topography. It sits in a deep trench flanked by wide bridges and overpasses. There are also several parks and playgrounds along the corridor. It can be challenging to carry a conversation next to the expressway because it generates a lot of noise. Still, the sidewalks and streets nearby are bustling.

This virtual tour starts at Bridge Playground and ends at Jerome Avenue, where you can connect to the 4 and the 6 train. At each stop, I'm going to point out issues, concerns, and ideas that community members have shared with us. Please also feel free to take notes and email them to crossbronx@dot.nyc.gov.

Stop 1: Bridge Playground

Our first stop is Bridge Playground in Morris Heights. The land for Bridge Playground was acquired in connection with larger land purchases made during the construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway. The playground opened in 1957, six years before the seven-mile expressway was completed in 1963¹.

To the west is the Washington Bridge, which was built in 1886. This bridge is one of the connections over the Harlem River, connecting University Avenue in the Bronx to Amsterdam Avenue in Manhattan. The bridge also connects to Interstate 95 in Manhattan, which connects to Fort Lee in New Jersey.

To the south, there are many residential buildings that form the Highbridge community. Highbridge was an Irish American neighborhood from the 1840s until the 1960s, shortly after the Cross Bronx was completed. Now, Highbridge is mainly home to Dominican, Puerto Rican, and Black residents².

To the north is the birthplace of hip hop³, also known as Sedgwick Houses. The buildings at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue are 14 and 15 stories tall, with 784 apartments housing over 1,600 residents. The 16.2-acre NYCHA campus was completed in 1951⁵ and is recognized as a long-time “haven for working-class families”⁶. In addition to serving as a home for many families, Sedgwick Houses has played an important role in the community. The development hosts various events and programs, including health clinics and a summer youth employment program.

The second stop on this tour is Plimpton Playground. University Avenue is on the way.

Along the way: University Avenue

University Avenue is around 157 feet wide with over eight lanes, including bus and bicycle lanes, parking, and a raised median. This bridge is relatively wide compared to other bridges that extend over the Cross Bronx. Since the early 20th century, University Avenue has become a bustling commercial hub with numerous stores, shops, and restaurants. It’s a vital artery for local businesses and residents in the surrounding neighborhoods. Bronx Community College, located near University Avenue, has played a crucial role in providing higher education opportunities for residents since its establishment in 1957. The college offers various academic programs and is a center for cultural and community events⁷.

¹ New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

² Caleb Stine, “Highbridge: The Heart and Soul of the Bronx”, *The Fordham Ram: Fordham University’s Journal of Record Since 1918*, New York, February 22, 2023.

³ David Gonzalez, “Will Gentrification Spoil the Birthplace of Hip-Hop?”, *The New York Times*, New York May 21, 2007.

⁴ Jennifer Lee, “Tenants Might Buy the Birthplace of Hip-Hop”, *The New York Times*, New York, January 15, 2008.

⁵ Sedgwick Houses Association: A Wonderful Community, *Word Press*, 2023.

⁶ Andrew Borgya, “A Museum Quest Spins On and On”, *The New York Times*, New York, September 3, 2010.

⁷ C.J. Hughes, “University heights, the Bronx Anchored by a College Campus”, *The New York Times*, New York, October 15, 2015

Stop 2: Plimpton Playground

Our second stop is Plimpton Playground. This playground was part of the Department of Housing, Preservation, and Development (HPD) Open Space Program, which constructed properties that were then turned over to community organizations. Mid-Bronx Housing Development Fund Corporation (HDFC) maintained this playground until it was officially transferred to NYC Parks in 1997⁸.

The northern edge of Plimpton Playground is less than 70 feet away from the Cross Bronx Expressway. A small plot of grass separates the park from traffic entering the expressway from the Washington Bridge. University Avenue is above and directly west of Plimpton Playground. As we orient ourselves in the playground, note that the park is cornered between two major corridors. Notice the variation in geography we have seen; if we look up, we will notice the massive difference in the angle of the incline from the ground between University Avenue and Cross Bronx Expressway. The wall under University Avenue towers over the park to the west, and the below-grade Cross Bronx is deeply entrenched in the north.

“At first glance, it seems clean, well maintained and well equipped, and I love the splash fountain. It also seems peaceful and somewhat removed from the traffic and noise, maybe because it is fairly high up above the roadway, so it is quieter than some of the other parks we visited. I noticed here and in the other parks that there are no restrooms. This one could also use some flowers and other plantings to make it brighter, and that high brick retaining wall under University Ave makes it seem a little sad and neglected. I wonder if having climbing plants on that wall would relieve some of that impression. I'm thinking like the green walls you see in certain modern buildings, where you have plants actually growing on the walls.”- Community member from west public walkshop on September 9, 2023

Along the way: ArtsBridge Senior Housing New Charter School

Exiting Plimpton Playground and continuing our tour, we see ArtsBridge Senior Housing to our right. The Cross Bronx Expressway is directly north. In 2010, the Highbridge Community Development Corporation (HCDC), a nonprofit developer and manager of low- and moderate-income housing, received approval to develop a new residence for low-income seniors through the Federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly Program.

This project has a community facility located on the lowest three levels of the ArtsBridge building, which will be home to a set of nonprofits working in partnership to provide educational, cultural, and social programming not yet readily available in the community. For example, Highbridge Voices is a nonprofit community-based organization serving 120 children in the Highbridge community through an afterschool music and academic program.

⁸ New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

“[There is] lots of new development very near Expressway [but the] overpasses [are] oppressive in heat; hard to navigate on foot”- Community member from west public workshop on September 9, 2023

Along the way: Kwame Ture Recreation Center

As we head towards Nelson Avenue, it's important to note that we are passing the Kwame Ture Recreation Center. The center is on the west side of the Nelson Avenue bridge and directly south of the Cross Bronx. Residents traveling from the north side of the Cross Bronx Expressway must navigate around the expressway to access the recreation center.

The center offers all members and visitors a range of recreational and educational activities. The recreation center offers activities from dance to indoor soccer in the 2,875-square-foot complex. The state-of-the-art gymnasium includes three basketball courts, two volleyball courts, a dance studio, a computer room, and numerous gathering rooms.

In August 2008, the center opened a 1.5-acre multi-use synthetic turf field in an adjacent lot and roadway very close to the Cross Bronx Expressway. The field, funded by the city as part of the Yankee Stadium Redevelopment Project, is designed to host soccer, softball, and little league baseball. It features new bleachers, a water fountain, a misting station, walkways, and freshly planted trees and shrubs.

Along the way: Nelson Avenue

As we approach the Nelson Avenue Bridge, it's important to note your surroundings. The Nelson Avenue Bridge is a typical example of the many bridges crossing over the Cross Bronx Expressway. It is approximately 51 feet wide and 446 feet long. It's usually packed with cars parked on both sides of the street. From here, looking to the east, we can almost see where we started at University Avenue and Sedgwick Houses; if we look to the west, we can see where we will end our tour on Jerome Avenue. Also, notice the Kwame Ture Recreation Center south of the expressway. After we get a sense of everything, we will continue to Jesup Avenue.

Along the way: Jesup Avenue

As we move to Jesup Avenue, we should note that we are on a Cross Bronx Expressway service road. However, this service road does not connect directly to the expressway. It can feel uncomfortable to walk along this road due to the lack of pedestrian infrastructure. Much of the road is being utilized for parking, but there are narrow sidewalks on the north side of the street, and on the south side of the road, there is no sidewalk.

Now that we're at Jesup Avenue Bridge, if we look to the south, we will see that there's no west-to-east connection along the expressway. Without this connection, the only option to get to our next stop is to continue north towards Featherbed Lane, then return to the Cross Bronx through Macombs Road.

Stop 3: Macombs Road

Now, we are at our third stop. We have just crossed several wide bridges over an extremely hilly topography. We had to travel into the neighborhood to get back to the expressway, which took

extra time and energy. A non-linear, zigzagging route is commonly the only way to get from one street to the next when going west to east along the expressway.

Macombs Road is a very wide street; most of the space is used for cars. Compared to the bridges we have already crossed. University Avenue is approximately around 157 feet wide and has over eight lanes. Macombs Road is 72 feet wide. The required width of a single lane is usually 12 feet. To have two lanes, that would be 24 feet. Here at Macombs, that would leave us with around 48 feet of available space to be repurposed for pedestrian access.

Along the way: Inwood Park

Although the park is fully covered in asphalt, we can see that the community has made some efforts to showcase their civic pride by painting the ground and keeping it as clean as they can.

-Brief pause (insert sounds from Jerome Avenue)-

From here, we can get a sense of what Jerome Avenue feels like from the many sounds it produces. Let's keep that in mind as we move to our next stop.

"Inwood Park is close to the Cross Bronx, very noise, mostly concrete, and not safe for kids" - Community member from west public walkshop on September 9, 2023

Community Voices:

Marie McCullough, a lifelong Bronx resident, was interviewed by Cassandra Manriquez during an in-person tour on November 4, 2023. Click play above to learn more about Marie's experience living within walking distance of the Cross Bronx Expressway.

Along the way: Jennie Jerome Playground

We have traveled through a portion of the Special Jerome Corridor District to find ourselves at Jennie Jerome Playground. The Special Jerome Corridor District, encompassing a two-mile stretch of Jerome Avenue in the southwest Bronx, was established in 2018 as part of the Jerome Avenue Neighborhood Plan to foster a vibrant mix of residential, commercial, and community facility uses.

This property was acquired in 1950 as part of the condemnation of the adjacent Cross Bronx Expressway. The parkland contains play equipment, swings, and several London planetrees. Sitting between the Jerome Avenue subway tracks and the Cross Bronx Expressway, Jennie Jerome Playground provides a place for children and adults to play and relax. In 2000, there was a \$196,000 renovation, funded by Mayor Giuliani and Council Member Wendell Foster, included the addition of new play equipment and safety surfacing.

Like other playgrounds we visited, this park is surrounded by large, high-speed roads. With exit 2A on the Cross Bronx wrapping around the park from the northwest and Jerome Avenue along the east side of the park, the playground is extremely loud from the surrounding traffic. We can smell the emissions of the vehicles.

We can also see improvised parking in the underutilized space around the Cross Bronx. Truck drivers use these spaces as rest areas between their shifts. This is a common occurrence across the corridor.

Community Voices:

Though the study team held in-person tours to identify issues along the Cross Bronx Expressway corridor, we also wanted to know what residents appreciate about their neighborhoods. Click play above to learn what Marie loves about the Bronx.

Stop 4: Walton Ave & East 174th St

We are now at the end of the west portion. We are at the intersection of Walton Avenue and East 174th Street. An interesting fact about this stop is that we are very close to the Bronx City Planning office just up the block. We are also near the Special Grand Concourse District. The Special Grand Concourse District, extending almost the entire length of the boulevard from East 151st Street to Mosholu Parkway, was created in 1989 to protect the distinctive Art Deco apartment buildings that line this wide thoroughfare. The district establishes bulk and design regulations and limits commercial uses to specific locations. The district has a Residential Preservation Area and three commercial areas where retail uses do not conflict with the district's traditional residential character.

Community Voices:

Many residents who live near the Cross Bronx Expressway cite air pollution as a major concern. Click play above for Marie's perspective and observations.

I want to close out this tour by asking: what would you change about the Cross Bronx Corridor? If you have any comments or questions you would like to share with our team, please email crossbronx@dot.nyc.gov.

That's it for now, and I thank you for being part of Reimagining the Cross Bronx Expressway. If you would like to continue learning more, there are two other routes along the Cross Bronx Corridor that you can listen to on this website. The Central Route begins at Webster Avenue and passes through three major parks: Walter Gladwin Park, Crotona Park, and Prospect Playground. The East Route begins near the Bronx River and passes through several playgrounds along with a capped portion of the expressway.

User Selects Central Part:

Song plays in the background. (View in computer: Full Central Map)

Hello! Welcome to a virtual tour of the Cross Bronx Expressway. My name is Cassandra Manriquez and I am a Special Study Borough Planner at the Department of City Planning in the Bronx Office. And I am Joslyn Schafer, an Urban Planning and Design Fellow for the Department of City Planning in the Bronx Office, and we will be your guides through this virtual tour of the central part of the Cross Bronx Corridor.

Before diving in, it's important to go over some housekeeping items.

This tour was prepared by the New York City Department of City Planning, the New York City and State Department of Transportation, and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in collaboration with local stakeholders who are working together on our two-year Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant project, **Reimagine the Cross Bronx Expressway Study**. This route, which runs along the west side of the Cross Bronx Corridor, was tested with the Community Working Group throughout summer 2023 and then opened to the public during fall 2023. The Community Working Group is a collection of representatives from community and civic organizations within the study area. In addition to this route, you can also find the central and east routes on this website.

The purpose of these tours is to develop a joint understanding of the issues and opportunities along the Cross Bronx Corridor.

This virtual tour travels along the Cross Bronx, zigzagging between Community Board 3 and Community Board 6, and notes relevant landmarks like Webster Avenue, Washington Avenue, Third Avenue, Walter Gladwin Park, Crotona Park, and Prospect Playground.

This virtual tour starts at Webster Avenue and ends at Prospect Playground, where you can take a bus to the D and B trains or the 2 and the 5 trains. As we move, I'm going to point out issues, concerns, and ideas that community members have shared with us. Please make sure to stay aware of the general map of the route, and feel free to take notes and send them our way at crossbronx@dot.nyc.gov.

Before we start, I would like to clarify what we mean by **reimagining** the Cross Bronx Expressway.

By **reimagining**, we mean an active re-evaluation of our relationship with infrastructure. Whether it's transportation infrastructure or social infrastructure, we must think critically of what our position within these systems is and how they are impacting our health. **Let's dive in!**

Stop 1: Webster Avenue

Right now, we're at Webster Avenue and Claremont. Webster Avenue is a major north-south thoroughfare here in the Bronx. The avenue is wide for most of its length and runs parallel to the Metro-North railroad tracks.

As we move under the Cross Bronx Expressway on Webster Avenue, notice that the experience for a pedestrian can be very uncomfortable. The path under the bridge is dark, and trash is scattered about. The loud traffic above speeding along the Cross Bronx is very apparent for pedestrians traveling below.

Coming from the west, the Cross Bronx Expressway runs below ground in a deep trench until it gets to this very intersection, where it goes above ground all the way to Crotona Park.

As we consider this, let's focus our attention east as we zigzag below the expressway until we get to our last stop at Prospect Playground.

"Very few pedestrians were seen walking these streets with us despite it being a nice day outside. This is an area only designed with cars and their drivers in mind." - Community member from central public walkshop on November 4, 2023

Community Voices:

Nicole Carter was interviewed by Stephane Pierre during an in-person tour on November 4, 2023. She is a gardener and mother who lives and works in the Bronx. Click play above to learn more about Nicole, her work, and her goals.

Stop 2: Park Avenue & Metro-North Railway

Right now, we are on Park Avenue and see the Metro-North Railroad right in front of us. The Metro-North Railroad is a commuter railroad serving the northern suburbs of New York City. It principally uses a fleet of electric railcars for its services. Diesel locomotives and push-pull coaches are also used for non-electrified portions of the system.

We are on Park Avenue, a wide boulevard that carries north and southbound traffic in the Bronx and Manhattan. In the Bronx, Park Avenue begins at East 135th Street in Mott Haven. The entire avenue is divided by Metro-North's right of way in the borough, with northbound traffic on the east side of the tracks and southbound on the west. We will head to 175th Street, where there is a connection over the Metro-North tracks to the eastern side of Park Avenue. Notice how the intersection of the Metro-North tracks and the Cross Bronx Expressway leads to more division and noise pollution.

"By this point in the walk shop (Park Avenue) it was clear that east/west connectivity is a major issue facing this area." - Community member from central public walkshop on November 4, 2023

Community Voices:

Nicole is a gardener who grows tomatoes, greens, herbs, and more at a community garden near the Cross Bronx Expressway. Click play above to learn more about the challenges of growing food near the expressway.

Along the way: Washington Avenue

As we move along Washington Avenue towards the Industrial Business Zone (IBZ), it's crucial to understand the transformation of this area from being residential back in the '80s to becoming industrial in the present day. The establishment of IBZs in 2006 across the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens marked a significant shift in urban planning aimed at revitalizing New York City's industrial sector. Stemming from earlier In-Place Industrial Parks (IPIP) policies, the IBZ program focuses on supporting industrial and manufacturing companies through services, infrastructure improvements, and business environment enhancements.

This transition to industrial use is vital for understanding the area's evolution. The IBZ policy not only offers support services but also incentives like relocation tax credits to attract investment to these areas, deemed pivotal for the city's industrial strength. Such strategic urban planning decisions have reshaped the landscape, from former residential zones into industrial hubs, and significantly influence adjacent neighborhoods both economically and socially.

As we walk along, under the Cross Bronx Expressway, we notice that there is very little space dedicated to pedestrians. The space under the Cross Bronx Expressway is utilized primarily by vehicles. There is on street parking and NYPD parking and storage, which often spills over onto the sidewalk, creating a space where pedestrians are surrounded by vehicles.

Along the way: Third Avenue

Now, we are moving along Third Avenue, a north-south thoroughfare that passes through the east side of Manhattan and the center of the Bronx. Many pedestrians utilize Third Avenue to access Walter Gladman Park. As a pedestrian on Third Avenue, it can feel very unsafe due to fast traffic using the off- and on-ramps from the service roads connecting to the Cross Bronx Expressway.

Third Avenue was once the location of the Third Avenue Railroad, a horsecar line established in 1853 that evolved into one of the largest streetcar routes in Manhattan, the Bronx, and Westchester County. Later, it was served by the Third Avenue elevated line, which operated from 1878 until 1955 in Manhattan and 1973 in the Bronx. The Bx55 replaced the Third Avenue Line in the Bronx in 1973.

Along the way: Walter Gladwin Park

We have just passed through Walter Gladwin Park. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Bronx Office is in front of the park and adjacent to the Cross Bronx. The Bronx Department of Health was opened in the 1920s as part of a campaign to provide more specialized public health resources in each borough. The Department of Health building is evidence that, before the construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway, there was a dense, thriving community where the Cross Bronx now exists. We are approaching Crotona Park through a connecting bridge over the Cross Bronx Expressway. As we move through Arthur Avenue, there's a lot to absorb. The park has playgrounds and greenery, Cross Bronx Expressway ramps within view, and informal businesses that often operate on bridges over the Cross Bronx.

I would like to point out that before the construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway, Walter Gladwin Park was part of Crotona Park and was one of the six original parks in the Bronx, established in 1888. After the expressway was built, the parks separated into Walter Gladwin and Crotona. The old borough hall was built in the now called Walter Gladwin Park in 1897. After World War I, an adjacent parcel of Crotona Park was dubbed Victory Park, and a formal garden with paths radiating from a circular fountain embellished Borough Hall. In 1899, a grand stairway was constructed along the steep slope connecting Borough Hall to bustling Third Avenue.

The new Borough Hall opened in 1935 at Grand Concourse and 161st Street, and by 1964, the only office left at the old building was the marriage license bureau. Though landmarked in 1965,

the building fell into disrepair and was demolished in 1969. The vacated property was landscaped as a passive sitting area with a comfort station. The historic staircase remains the only vestige of its historic past. In 1987, this section of Crotona Park was given an independent identity and name, "Highland Park." After a park renovation, it was renamed Tremont Park in 1999. In 2019, the park was again upgraded to what we know today as Walter Gladwin.

Stop 3: Crotona Park

We're at our third stop, inside Crotona Park. Thanks to the natural sound barriers trees provide, it is much quieter inside the park than at the other stops. This makes it easier to focus and hear others inside the park than near the Cross Bronx Expressway. Crotona Park has been a staple for the Bronx community since its acquisition by the city in 1888. The park has been an urban oasis known among naturalists for its diversity of tree species (28 in total) and a beautiful 3.3-acre lake hosting turtles, ducks, and fish. However, its tranquility was disrupted by the construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway.

It's important to note the division of Crotona Park by the Cross Bronx Expressway as an example of how urban planning decisions can profoundly impact local communities. As detailed in 'The Power Broker' by Robert Caro, planning the routing of the Cross Bronx Expressway was a contentious process, heavily influenced by urban planner Robert Moses. Moses' vision and power in city planning led to the expressway cutting through established neighborhoods and Crotona Park. Residents protested this development that would evict them from their homes. However, Robert Moses successfully led the construction of the Cross Bronx and left thousands of residents displaced. His approach prioritized efficient transportation, often at the cost of existing community spaces and structures. Robert Moses' impact illustrates urban development's complex and often controversial nature and lasting effects on community spaces like Crotona Park.

"Crotona Park has no noise; the air quality is the best so far; it is green; it feels peaceful and calm; compared to the last stop this is totally different" - Community member from central public walkshop on November 4, 2023

Along the way: Murphy Houses

As we keep moving in our route you may notice two tall buildings to the left, known as Murphy Houses. They were constructed in the early 1960s and contain 281 apartment units. The two 20-story buildings sit on nearly 2.5 acres, with the Cross Bronx Expressway as a northern boundary. L+M Development Partners, Camber Property Group, and MBD Housing Corp. partnered with New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) on the rehabilitation and preservation of 722 units of public housing, which were converted under a project-based Section 8 contract. The development, part of NYCHA's Next Generation Permanent Affordability Commitment Together (PACT) program, was awarded the partnership as part of a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) process.

Murphy Houses have many amenities for their residents, such as a playground and basketball court. In addition, a pedestrian pathway with trees and landscaping connecting Arthur Avenue and Crotona Avenue is nestled between the Cross Bronx Expressway and Murphy Houses.

Along the way: Admiral Farragut Playground

Before approaching our final stop, I'd like to point out Admiral Farragut Playground. The city acquired this property in conjunction with the construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway, and Admiral Farragut Playground was built in 1950. The playground contains play equipment, swings, benches, and a baseball diamond. Children use the park frequently, thanks to its location on Clinton Avenue next to the Farragut School, C.S. 44. We see playgrounds directly adjacent to the expressway along the length of the Cross Bronx.

Stop 4: Prospect Playground

This is the end of the central portion. We have arrived at Prospect Playground. NYC Parks acquired Prospect Playground in conjunction with the construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway, which started in 1948 and was completed in 1972. Despite the protests of East Tremont residents, construction went ahead, resulting in the razing of 54 apartments and 5,000 evictions to make way for the one mile of the Cross Bronx that cut through the neighborhood.

This site is part of NYC Parks' *Community Parks Initiative*, a multi-faceted program to invest in under-resourced public parks and increase the accessibility and quality of parks throughout the five boroughs. In 2021, this project constructed new play equipment, including a spray shower, a volleyball court, a painted track, and a basketball court.

One important thing to note is that we are on top of one of the covered portions of the Cross Bronx. Schools and residential buildings surround the playground. On an average day, you will see youth and adults playing basketball, running on the field, or residents walking their dogs.

I want to close out this tour by asking: what would you change about the Cross Bronx Corridor? If you have any comments or questions you would like to share with our team, please email crossbronx@dot.nyc.gov.

That's it for now, and I thank you for being part of Reimagining the Cross Bronx Expressway. If you would like to continue learning more, there are two other routes along the Cross Bronx Corridor that you can listen to on this website. The west route begins at Bridge Playground and runs along many of the below-grade portions of the expressway. The east route begins near the Bronx River, passes through several playgrounds, and pauses at a capped portion of the expressway.

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of City Planning in the Bronx Office, and we will be your guides through this virtual tour of the east part of the Cross Bronx Corridor.

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The tour travels along the Cross Bronx, zigzagging between Community Board 6 and Community Board 9, and notes relevant landmarks like Starlight Park, West Farms NYC Transit Bus Depot, SRM Concrete plant, Bronx River Houses, Noble Playground, East 174th Street, Parkchester, Virginia Playground, Virginia Park, and Hugh J. Grant Circle.

The tour is going to take about one hour and we're going to start at Devoe Avenue and end at Hugh J. Grant Circle where you can take the 6 train. As we move, I'm going to point out issues, concerns, and ideas that community members have shared with us. Please make sure to stay aware of the general map of the route, and feel free to take notes and send them our way at crossbronx@dot.nyc.gov.

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Stop 1: Devoe Avenue & Starlight Park

Right now, we are at Devoe Avenue and West Farms. Coming from the west, the Cross Bronx Expressway runs below ground in a deep trench from Prospect Playground until we arrive at Starlight Park. The park is alongside the Sheridan Expressway and offers access to the Bronx River.

Starlight Park was established in the late 1950s alongside the construction of the Sheridan Expressway. The park runs along the Bronx River, the only freshwater river in the city, and is home to a diverse urban ecosystem. This has not always been the case. Industrial development grew around the Bronx River in the 1800s, and it was common practice for companies and households to dump waste into the river. For decades, the river gained a reputation for being an

“open sewer.” In the 1970s, a group of Bronxite advocates formed the Bronx River Restoration and launched its cleanup process. In 2003, the Bronx River Alliance was established and collaborated with NYC parks and many community organizations to continue the river cleanup process.

In 2013, a significant renovation to Starlight Park was completed, and a section of Starlight Park was reopened. In 2016, an environmentally friendly headquarters for the Bronx River Alliance was established there. Further expansion and environmental cleanup were announced in 2017. This project was announced alongside plans to downgrade the Sheridan Expressway to improve park access and pedestrian safety, which was completed in December 2019. In April 2023, a newly renovated 2.7-acre section of the park was opened, marking the culmination of a series of extensive improvements and expansions. This 13-acre park features environmentally conscious approaches to the many issues we are trying to solve along the expressway. Starlight Park is part of the initiative to create the Bronx River Greenway. The Bronx River Alliance is working toward connecting 23 miles along the Bronx River with a shared-use path for pedestrians and bikers. The Bronx River Greenway currently exists along 20 miles of the Bronx River.

Community Voices:

Leslie Vasquez was interviewed by Cassandra Manriquez during an in-person tour on November 4, 2023. She lives, bikes, and works in the Bronx. Click play above to learn more about Leslie.

Along the way: Bronx River Houses and SRM Concrete Plant

On the way to Noble Playground, we will see Bronx River Houses, a low-income public housing development in the Soundview section of the Bronx. It consists of nine buildings with 1,260 apartments. The 13.94-acre Bronx development, completed in 1951, is bordered by East 174th Street, Harrod, and Bronx River Avenues.

The houses are beside SRM Concrete, the largest ready-mix concrete supplier in New York City, with 13 locations across Brooklyn, Queens, Flushing, The Bronx, and New Rochelle.

The Cross Bronx Expressway runs right next to the Bronx River Houses. The Cross Bronx and arterial roads make pedestrian transportation very difficult. The tangle of exits and roads north of the Bronx River Houses has few pedestrian crossings and sidewalks. Residents often have to utilize dirt paths on the side of roads due to the lack of sidewalks.

Community Voices:

Many residents who live near the Cross Bronx Expressway cite North-South connectivity as a major concern. Click play above to for Leslie’s perspective as a Bronx resident and cyclist.

Stop 2: Noble Playground

Noble Playground was temporarily closed in 1951 during the construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway. It was reconstructed and reopened in 1954 with a comfort station, game area, and ballfield with bleachers. In 1995, the Department of General Services transferred an additional .17 acre to Parks to increase the field's size. The comfort station was reconstructed in 1998 and

2022. The play area was renovated in 2023 to include new play and adult fitness equipment, a spray shower, and a seating area.

This is the first playground we've seen so far in the east portion of the Cross Bronx Corridor.

“Playgrounds” are extremely unsafe for children and families, most of them are not real greenspace, not pedestrian/ bike friendly, there aren't many entry points, and sidewalks are narrow. Environment is extremely loud [there is] not much to do in the proximity to highway [and] people are not attracted to the area.” - Community member from east public walkshop on November 4, 2023

Community Voices:

Marie McCullough, a lifelong Bronx resident, was interviewed by Cassandra Manriquez during an in-person tour on November 4, 2023. She lives in the South Bronx and wanted to learn more about the Cross Bronx Expressway-related issues that residents face along the east corridor. Click play above to learn more about Marie.

Stop 3: St. Lawrence Triangle

St. Lawrence Triangle is our third stop. This traffic triangle provides one of the few green seating areas to residents, pedestrians, and passersby waiting at the nearby bus stop. As with other similar triangles in the neighborhood, the St. Lawrence Triangle was acquired during the construction of the adjacent Cross Bronx Expressway⁹.

This is predominately a residential area. There are single- and multi-family homes to the south. A block away, on Beach Avenue, there's a gas station and auto repair shop. Along the Cross Bronx, it's common to see businesses that service vehicles.

It's important to note that the east part of the Cross Bronx Corridor is generally closer to ground level as opposed to other portions.

As we keep moving forward to Virginia Park, there are on-ramps and exit ramps that impact the overall flow of pedestrian movement in the area.

Community Voices:

More than 144,000 people live in the Cross Bronx Expressway area. Click play above for Marie's questions regarding the Cross Bronx Expressway's impact on property values and generational wealth.

Stop 4: Virginia Park

We have reached our fourth stop, Virginia Park, located at the south entrance of Parkchester. Parkchester is a diverse, planned community originally developed by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and home to a mix of ethnicities and cultures. The many languages spoken here, like Spanish, Bengali, Urdu, and Arabic, reflect its varied demographic.

⁹ New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Virginia Park plays a significant role in this setting as it was acquired in the late 1940s in conjunction with the design and acquisition of land for the Cross Bronx Expressway, which runs below the park. Virginia Park and nearby Virginia Playground opened in 1956. The park's walkways were reconstructed in 1996. Although Virginia Park and Virginia Playground are located parallel to each other, they are separated by a trenched Cross Bronx Expressway.

“Virginia Park is by the Parkchester Subway, we can see fumes coming from the vents housed between trees of a greenspace. [There is] notably loud noise from both the subways and highway within the area, area used to be fenced off greenspace with a few benches but, through community efforts, now houses movie night.” - Community member from east public walkshop on November 4, 2023

Stop 5: Hugh J. Grant Circle

Right now, we are at Hugh Grant Circle. Through condemnation, the city acquired the land for Hugh J. Grant Circle in 1904. The Cross Bronx Expressway runs below Hugh J. Grant Circle; vents around the park emit the pollution created by the vehicular traffic below. At the center of the park is the Parkchester station on the MTA's 6 train line, which opened in 1920. It was gradually renovated in conjunction with the Cross Bronx Expressway and incorporated into long-term plans for the neighborhood's development. The park reopened in 1956.

Along with neighboring Virginia Park, Hugh J. Grant Circle was completely reconstructed in 2021 as part of NYC Parks' *Parks Without Borders* initiative to make the area a more open, accessible, and seamless part of the community. The project redesigned the park's entrances and provided new paving and fences to redefine this public space. Additional features like benches, drinking fountains, and plantings were added to enhance the overall feeling and appearance of the site. Park security lighting will further activate the public area, providing a safer, more welcoming passage. Today, the park remains a green oasis in several major thoroughfares.

Along the way: Pedestrian Bridge

This bridge is the sole pedestrian pathway that connects the two sides of the Expressway between Hugh J. Grant Circle and Castle Hill Avenue. It is a crucial link for pedestrians, offering a safe and direct route over the bustling Cross Bronx below. The bridge provides a necessary means of crossing for residents and visitors. It offers a distinct perspective of the surrounding urban landscape, showcasing the dynamic relationship between the city's infrastructure and communities.

As we cross this bridge, notice the service road along Dennis L. Devlin Park. This service road to the Cross Bronx Expressway highlights the challenges for pedestrians in this area. High-speed car and truck traffic exits and enters the expressway a few feet away from the crosswalk connecting to the pedestrian bridge, making an unsafe environment for pedestrians.

Community Voices:

Many residents who live near the Cross Bronx Expressway cite trash management as a major concern. Click play above for Marie's observations.

Stop 6: Castle Hill Avenue

Our last stop is Castle Hill Avenue. To the east, we can see where the Cross Bronx Expressway and the Bruckner Expressway intersect. Bruckner Expressway is another Robert Moses project, and the construction was completed the same year as the Cross Bronx Expressway¹⁰.

“There is a lot of weeds and bad sidewalks along the CBX; more lighting needed along the sidewalks.” - Community member from east public walkshop on November 4, 2023

Community Voices:

Local residents face many inconveniences caused by the Cross Bronx Expressway. One inconvenience is the lack of commercial development and investment along the corridor. Click play above for Marie’s observations and questions.

I want to close out this tour by asking: what would you change about the Cross Bronx Corridor? If you have any comments or questions you would like to share with our team, please email crossbronx@dot.nyc.gov.

That’s it for now, and I thank you for being part of Reimagining the Cross Bronx Expressway. If you would like to continue learning more, there are two other routes along the Cross Bronx Corridor that you can listen to on this website. The West Route begins at Bridge Playground and runs along many of the below-grade portions of the expressway. The Central Route begins at Webster Avenue and passes through three major parks: Walter Gladwin Park, Crotona Park, and Prospect Playground.

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