

Should the Interborough Express Connect with the Hell Gate Line?

By John B. Pegram¹

The biggest complaint about the proposed Interborough Express (IBX) Line is that it will not go to the Bronx. That is not going to happen. The improved Hell Gate Line will have stations in the Bronx, crosses the Hell Gate Bridge and passes through Queens *en route* to Penn Station, but has no stations in Queens. I propose that the IBX Line could be extended one mile to provide a transfer station with the Hell Gate Line. Such a transfer station should be considered.



*Above: Hell Gate Bridge, November 2022
Photo Credit: Trent Reeves/MTA*

Interborough Express Line

The Interborough Express (IBX) is a proposed rapid transit project that will connect currently underserved areas of Brooklyn and Queens. The project would be built along an existing 14-mile freight line consisting of the LIRR-owned Bay Ridge Branch, between Bay Ridge in Brooklyn and Fresh Pond Yard, which is 0.3 miles (0.5 km) south of Metropolitan Avenue in Queens, and the southern part of the CSX-owned Fremont Secondary, which extends from Fresh Pond, through Jackson Heights and over the Hell Gate Bridge to the Bronx. See IBX map below:²

¹ © John Pegram, 2024.

² From MTA, Interborough Express Planning & Environmental Linkages Study (Jan. 2023) (PEL Report), p. 4, available at <https://new.mta.info/document/103686>.



The Hell Gate Line

The Hell Gate Line is part of Amtrak's Boston to Washington route. It runs from New Rochelle on the New Haven Line (red on map below), through the east Bronx, over the Hell Gate Bridge, loops through northern Queens and then goes through the East River tunnels to Penn Station, as shown in orange on the map below.³

³ From: <https://new.mta.info/document/90166>.



The Hell Gate Line is now being improved as part of the MTA’s Penn Access plan. The line is being expanded from two to four tracks in the Bronx. Four new stations are being built in the Bronx, which will be served by Metro North trains on the New Haven Line. According to the Penn Access Fact Sheet, 60 Amtrak trains and 102 Metro-North trains are expected to operate daily on the Hell Gate Line.⁴ (It is not clear how many of the Metro-North trains will stop at the new stations).

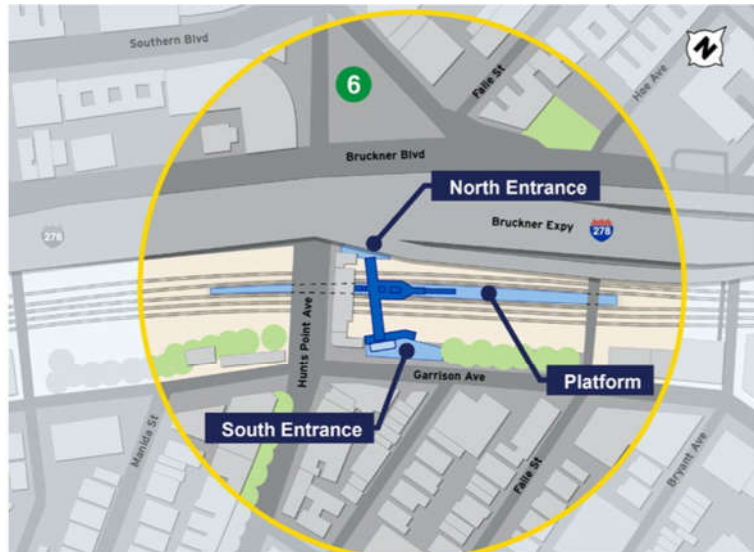
An early Penn Access study, in 2002, considered the possibility of a station in Queens at Astoria or Sunnyside Yard; however, ridership predictions for stations there were low, the predicted cost of a station at Astoria was very high, and it was believed that a station at Sunnyside would interfere with smooth operations of train services there.⁵ Consideration of these

⁴ MTA, Penn Station Access Fact Sheet, available at https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d278d57950ce60001fd9b83/t/61df57cff6cc6f4b663ec0ea/1642026960672/20220111_PSA-FACTSHEET.pdf

⁵ MTA, *Metro-North Penn Station Access: Comparative Screening Results Report*, pp. 39-40, 43: Appendix C, p.2, available at https://new.mta.info/sites/default/files/2021-04/comp_results.pdf.

stations was not advanced for further study. A station providing transfers with the IBX Line does not appear to have been considered.

The new Penn Access stations will be at Hunts Point, Parkchester/Van Nest, Morris Park and Coop City. The Hunts Point station on the Hell Gate Line will be about 400 feet from the NYC Transit Hunts Point subway station on the number 6 line to Pelham Bay. See map below.⁶

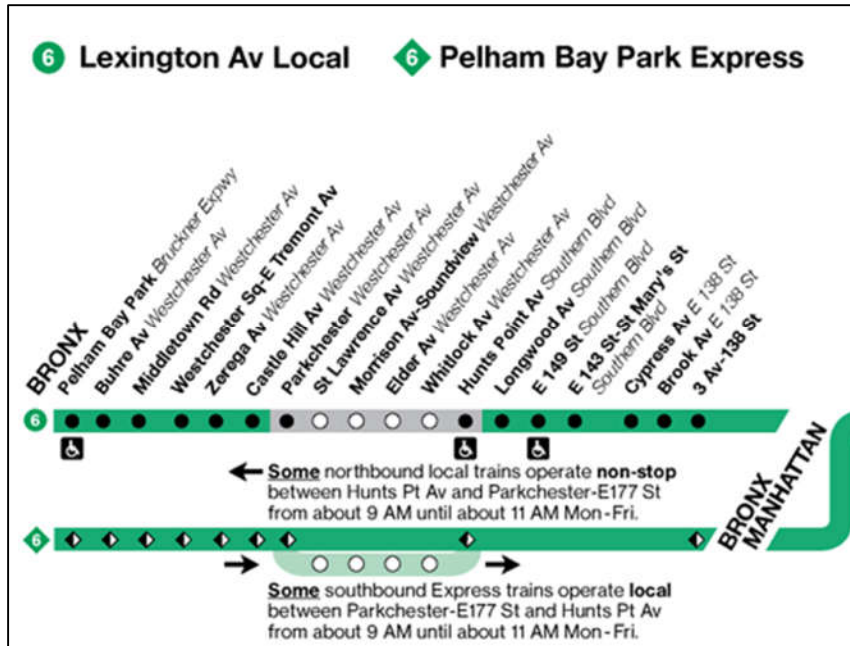


Above: Conceptual map of new Hunts Point station, to be located on Hunts Point Avenue between Garrison Avenue and Bruckner Boulevard, near the Bruckner Expressway overpass.

At Hunts Point, a connection will be available between the Hell Gate Line and 17 subway stations on the 6 line in the East Bronx. See strip map below:⁷

⁶ From MTA, Penn Station Access Newsletter (Nov. 2022), available at <https://new.mta.info/document/99296>.

⁷ From MTA, 6 subway timetable 2023, p. 29, available at <https://new.mta.info/document/9456>.

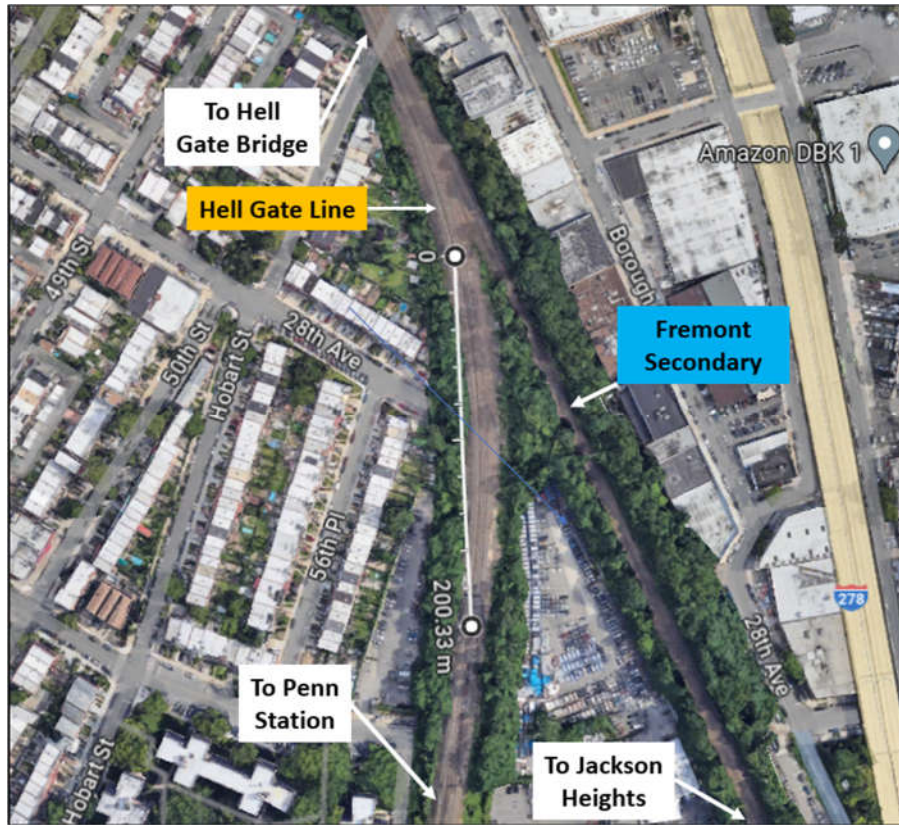


The Proposed Connection

The currently proposed northern terminus of the IBX Line is at Roosevelt Avenue in Jackson Heights, Queens, on the right-of-way of the CSX Fremont Secondary. I propose extending the IBX Line one mile north of there, and placing a transfer station where the Fremont Secondary meets the Hell Gate Line. See map below:



The aerial photo below⁸ depicts the location of the proposed transfer station. The triangle where the Hell Gate Line and the Fremont Secondary meet is currently occupied by a parking lot. The white, 200.33 meter (657 feet) line indicates that there is more than enough length available along each line for long station platforms.



Four tracks could be provided on the Hell Gate Line at this site, with the inner tracks and a central platform for the station. Trains not stopping here would use the outer tracks. A track for the CSX freight line would be provided on the east side of the Fremont Secondary (the same side as proposed at Jackson Heights). A two track IBX Line station would be parallel to the CSX track, closer to the Hell Gate Line. It is not clear whether there would be significant, local use of this station; however, the potential for transfers alone should be adequate to justify the station.

⁸ From Google Maps (2024), with labels added by the author.

The Q16 bus line, running between Astoria and Maspeth, is nearby on Hobart Street. That route might be diverted to have a stop adjacent the proposed station.

If local boardings are not significant, and because IBX trains are expected to be four to five times more frequent than those on the Hell Gate Line, it might be appropriate for only some IBX trains to travel beyond Roosevelt Avenue to the transfer station. Such connecting trains could be easily arranged with modern technology, especially if the IBX Line uses automated, driverless trains.

This article expresses the personal views of the author and does not express the views of his employer, or any client or organization. The author has degrees in law and physics, and has taken several engineering courses. After five years of work as an engineer, he has practiced law primarily in the field of patents for over 50 years, dealing with a wide variety of technologies. He is a life-long railfan and user of public transportation in the United States, Europe and Japan.