

---

## **Mott Haven: Hinge connecting S Bronx and E Harlem**

Before “The Bronx” existed as a county, the southwest corner of Westchester, on the bend of the Harlem River, became the transportation hinge to Manhattan. At the dawn of the industrial age, early in the 19th century, Jordan Mott’s iron works located here. Later (about 1850) the New York and Harlem railroad bridged the Harlem River when technology was sufficiently advanced. After the area west of the Bronx River was annexed to New York City in 1874, the Third Avenue Elevated train from Manhattan brought inexpensive mass transportation here. Planned wide roadways, the Grand Concourse and Bruckner Boulevard, led the way into the interior. A generation later, three IRT subway lines linked Manhattan to the Bronx through Mott Haven.

Begin outside the 138 St station (4.5) and walk west under the Grand Concourse viaduct for a view of the Madison Ave Bridge over the Harlem River to 137 St in Manhattan. (What feeder roads form the Grand Concourse? You can’t see the Concourse here but it does assume its mature form a few blocks to the north!) Go back under the viaduct and also under the elevated Metro North railroad structure along Park Ave, coming from East Harlem. Continue east along 138 St passing Canal St. and Canal Pl. the sites of short canals that served the Mott Iron Works. At the diagonal intersection of Lincoln Ave and Third Ave. note the triangles that form the World War I memorial to the north and the Chase Bank (formerly the Northside Board of Trade) to the south. Why is this the “Northside”? Imagine the area with the Third Avenue El running through and no cars or subways as was the case for more than thirty years!

Follow Third Ave south under the Bruckner Expressway, **staying on the left (east) side. Ignore the new roadway and stairs on the right.** The stairway that you want leading to the Third Ave. bridge is straight ahead and you will climb it after crossing Bruckner Blvd. Cross the bridge on the east side and pause in the middle to view the Willis Ave Bridge, two branches of the Triboro Bridge and the Hellgate railroad bridge (now used by Amtrak). Below, on the Bronx side note the new railroad tracks that connect the Hellgate route with the Metro North Harlem and Hudson lines and the railroad yards to the east. To the west is the Park Ave bridge carrying Metro North commuter trains. (Why is the Harlem River not really a river?) Cross the Harlem River and over the Harlem River Drive into Manhattan at 128 St and Third Ave. Continue down Third Ave to 125 St. (Why are the buildings along Third Ave so small and dull?) At 125 St head west for the subways (4,5,6) at Lexington Ave (Pathmark!) or the MetroNorth trains at Park Ave.

## **Long Island City; Hinge Connecting Midtown and Queens**

Historically, Long Island City was a wetland at the western edge of Queens County. Due to flooding, it was not an important settlement until the railroad era. After downtown Brooklyn pushed back the Long Island Rail Road from the Atlantic Avenue waterfront, railroad interests in Queens sought outlets in Hunters Point in the mid-nineteenth century and Long Island City was chartered in 1870 as an industrial and transportation satellite friendly to heavy industry. After consolidation, Long Island City became rationalized. Landfill and sewers remade it as a modern industrial district at the center of NYC's transportation options early in the 20th century. As American manufacturing declined, LIC's buildings and transportation have attracted new uses.

Coming from Manhattan, exit the #7 train at the rear (western end) of the Vernon/Jackson station to Vernon Blvd. With Dorian's restaurant behind you, walk to the end of the "Vernon Mall" to the angular intersection of Vernon Blvd (which parallels the East River Shore) and Jackson Ave (which runs northeasterly and parallels the original Flushing railroad route). Looking up Jackson Ave view the Citicorp Bldg, the tallest building on Long Island, while a small brownish tower in the background to the rear and right of Citicorp was the tallest building in Queens in the 1920's. In the opposite direction are some large 19th century industrial lofts in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. The midstreet parking in the "Vernon Mall" is on the right-of-way of a 19th century bridge to Brooklyn. The bridge went over the LIC railroad station where trains from Jamaica and points east discharged passengers to Manhattan ferries. A century ago, this was the busiest place in Queens County. (Imagine the scene!)

Now, the #7 train takes people under LIC to 42 St. (1914) The G train takes underground subway riders to Brooklyn. (1930s) The Long Island Expressway (just east of Jackson Ave) becomes the Midtown Tunnel to 38 St; the tan-colored ventilation tower is visible to the right. (1940) Under the LIC railroad station, most LIRR trains tunnel to Pennsylvania Station at 34 St. (1910) (The Queensborough Bridge to the north takes traffic to 59 St and three more subway tunnels connect to 53, 60 and 63 Sts. What trains go where?) LIC and midtown have evolved together. The Pulaski bridge to Brooklyn is reached by walking east on Borden Ave between the Expressway and the LIRR tracks. After a block and crossing some railroad spurs, use the stairs to the right taking you the bridge walkway.

Walk toward Brooklyn noting the parallel transportation afforded by the LIE, the LIRR and Newtown Creek. The Brooklyn side, though it has older industrial functions, never renewed like LIC as it lacked the railroad and road advantages. (List observations supporting this.) Use the balcony observation area in the middle of the bridge to contemplate Newtown Creek. A century ago this was mostly dirty heavy

industry. What is the land use along the Creek now? Looking east across the bridge note the heavy duty anti-pollution and recycling area in East Greenpoint and the Kosciuszko Bridge (BQE crossing Newtown Creek. Turn around and walk back toward LIC but do not use the stairs; continue on the ramp. At the end of the ramp, defy traffic and cross to Jackson/11 St in the direction of most traffic coming off the bridge; landmark is the old tall red fire alarm on the corner.

Continue north on 11 St one block turning left (west) on 48 Ave, parallel to the railroad right-of-way from Flushing in 1852. Much of this route is being reconstructed to serve the Queens West project on the waterfront which itself has been constructed mostly on former track. (Why build on railroad land?) At Vernon Blvd, turn left (south) and return to the Vernon/Jackson station on the side that is bound for Flushing. (\*)

(\*) If you have 20-30 extra minutes, you could spend it on a beautiful stretch of the LIC waterfront. Before returning to the subway, continue on 48 Ave. next to a sports park leading to the apartments of the Queens West project, under the NY/NJ Port Authority. At the shoreline you'll see the gantrys (black steel mechanisms that transferred goods from the railroad to barges until trucks transported stuff cheaper. The public waterfront area is called Gantry Park, Walk out on the south pier for the best views of East River bridges and the Manhattan skyline. On your return, use 50th Ave. At 5th St, is the huge building (for sale) that once housed a private power plant built by the Pennsylvania Railroad to meet the needs of Penn Station, the electrified LIRR and tunnels. Continue on 50th Ave. passing working class housing and small industrial buildings to Vernon Blvd and the Flushing bound #7 train entrance.

Board the eastbound #7 train. The V/J and Hunters Pt stops are in a tunnel built by William Steinway in the 1890's as a means of getting by trolley from Grand Central to his piano factory empire in the northeastern part of LIC. The venture was never completed but the IRT bought them and used them for the subway in 1914. As you emerge from the tunnel, stay on the LEFT side of the train and note the following from the windows.

Just outside the Hunters Point station, the train curves sharply to the north leaving the Steinway route to connect with Queensborough Plaza, a filled wetland that became the Queens terminus of the bridge (1908). A scarred "daylight factory building" (reinforced concrete with big windows) abounding in graffiti houses artists studios (NOT "live-in"). After this arrive at Courthouse Square station. On leaving the station note a huge cluster of "daylight factory buildings" that were built on a former creek bed, filled with the construction of the train.

The train then makes a sharp turn to the east into the Queensborough Plaza station to meet the (N,W) trains which were part of the rival BRT company. Get out and see how the trains converge in the Plaza near the bridge and diverge at the eastern end. Looking north from the platform see the renovated Brewster Building, built to assemble Rolls Royce cars, now offices for Met Life (with a new taller Met Life office building behind.)

Reboard an eastbound #7 train. As you leave the station, the Clocktower office building (the tiny brown structure you saw looking up Jackson Ave) is visible.

Then you cross the Sunnyside Yards at about their widest. The Pennsylvania Railroad built them to store and service trains (rather than in expensive Manhattan) and also as a well drained lower level, to the newly built up and rationalized Long Island City. You can get off at 33 St and reverse direction. (Or you can see the conversion of many nearby factory buildings to offices, museums and schools.)

### **St George: Hinge Connecting S Ferry to Staten Island**

In the nineteenth century Staten Island was even more rural and decentralized than the Bronx or Queens. Cornelius Vanderbilt made his first fortune operating the first regular ferry service from Stapleton (south of St. George) to the Battery beginning in 1810 and finished a connecting railroad to Eltingville (on the South Shore) in 1860, simultaneously gaining control of the disparate ferry services on the Island. But it was not until after 1886 when the B&O railroad connected New Jersey and the West Shore to Stapleton that St. George (at the closest approach to lower Manhattan) became the focus of transportation. After consolidation in 1898, major government buildings were erected in St. George. In addition to transporting you to Staten Island, the ferry is a vantage point for the geography of the harbor area.

Use (N,R Whitehall St) or (1,9 South Ferry) to reach the Staten Island Ferry Terminal. On the outbound ride sit on the right (west) side and identify Jersey City, the old Jersey City railroad and ferry terminal, Port Liberte (dense NJ condo community), Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. As you approach Staten Island, move to the front and see the Verazzano (left) and Bayonne (right) Bridges and the Staten Island Borough Hall and courthouse ahead in St. George with the steep glacial moraine in the background. Also to the right are the tank farms and working docks of Bayonne, NJ. Exit following signs for "ALL TRAINS" and view the lower level train connections but don't go through the turnstiles. Back up and leave via Exit Ramp E to street (Richmond Terrace).

Look back at the harbor and the Jersey City, Lower Manhattan and downtown Brooklyn skylines then continue west (away from St George) along Richmond

Terrace passing the new Staten Island Yankees minor league stadium and its new railroad station (Will trains go further west?) Across the street pass the Police precinct and Family Court. Continue along Richmond Terrace and note the large Victorian homes after Stuyvesant Pl. Note how Stuyvesant Pl. follows the contours of the hill while Nicholas St -where you turn left-- goes directly up the hill. (Which is more likely to get washed out during a storm?) The neighborhood becomes residential. Who lives here?

The massive building (under renovation) on St Marks, at the top of the hill is Curtis High School, another symbol of post-Consolidation largesse in the outer boroughs. Turn left (east) on St Marks and look up Hamilton St for another cluster of Victorian homes. But note parcels of vacant land on the steeper slopes. Continue back to the village of St George along St Marks, passing some apartment complexes (who were they built for?) and turn left (north) on Hyatt, following this street down to Stuyvesant Place behind Borough Hall. Descend the public stairway on the left side of Borough Hall and pass its garden, following the stairs back to Richmond Terrace. Cross to the ferry complex and use Ramp C which allows a view of the train connection underneath.

On the return ferry trip stay on the right side and identify the Brooklyn Army Terminal, the last industrial building before a little valley (where the Bay Ridge branch of the LIRR reaches the harbor) and the rise of the moraine at Bay Ridge to the south. Also look for the lonely Williamsburg Savings Bank building in the Atlantic Terminal area (Flatbush and Atlantic Aves) and Governor's Island.

If you have more time to invest in the Geography of NYC: Sailors' Snug Harbor and the surrounding mansion areas reached by bus or a two mile hike. New Dorp from Richmond Rd to Hylan Blvd (rather like a less dense version of Jamaica at the bottom of the glacial moraine) reached by train.

A followup website illustrating the decline of the Staten Island rail network:  
<http://www.forgotten-ny.com/SUBWAYS/SIRT/sirt.html>