

# THE BOND BUYER

## Design-build on bridge marks a breakthrough, says New York City transportation chief

By

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State authorization for design-build project delivery on a \$1.7 billion Brooklyn-Queens Expressway project marks a major breakthrough for New York City infrastructure projects, city transportation Commissioner Polly Trottenberg said,

"We are eager to demonstrate how the city can successfully implement design-build," she told members of the City Council's finance and transportation committees and the capital budgets subcommittee at Wednesday's joint City Hall meeting.

Under a design-build method, intended to save time and money, one entity works under a single contract.

Mayor Bill de Blasio's \$89.1 billion fiscal 2019 [executive budget](#) is before the council, which must vote on it by June 30. The plan includes \$1 billion for the city's Department of Transportation, whose proposed five-year capital plan is \$13.8 billion.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo in late March granted the city limited use of design-build. The authorization will "save time and taxpayer dollars" on the BQE triple-cantilever reconstruction project on Interstate 278 from Atlantic Avenue to Sands Street in Brooklyn, said Trottenberg.

"The benefits to this project are immense," said Bronx Councilwoman Vanessa Gibson, who chairs the capital markets subcommittee. Gibson said she and fellow council members would help Trottenberg and other city officials push for broader design-build use.

"This is a tool we would like to have in our toolbox," said Trottenberg. "It would not be for every project."

Chris Hamel, the retired head of RBC Capital Markets' municipal banking group, called design-build "low-hanging fruit" that could save 10% to 20% from traditional procurement methods.

"Design-bid procurement should be a national standard and applied wherever it creates value," Hamel said in a Bond Buyer [commentary](#).

Trottenberg said the city has been consulting with New York State, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and Port Authority of New York and New Jersey officials, all of which have design-build experience.

The method, she said, could apply to bridge repair along the Belt Parkway in Brooklyn.

The DOT's proposed capital plan includes \$7.5 billion for bridge reconstruction and rehabilitation; \$4.1 billion for street reconstruction and resurfacing; \$878 million for sidewalk and pedestrian ramp repair and reconstruction; \$417 million for the Staten Island ferry; \$508 million for streetlights and signals; and \$411 million for facilities and equipment.

Capital funding, said Trottenberg, includes projects related to Vision Zero, de Blasio's pedestrian safety plan. The expense budget also reflects pedestrian-oriented initiatives as well as de Blasio's congestion-mitigation initiative.

Trottenberg, also a Metropolitan Transportation Authority board member, said her department is working with MTA and police officials about contingencies to the L subway line Canarsie Tunnel shutdown between Manhattan and Brooklyn, to accommodate the MTA's repairs to damage from Hurricane Sandy.

The 15-month shutdown, which will begin next April, will affect about 225,000 daily commuters. Speaking later Wednesday at a town-hall session in Brooklyn, Trottenberg called challenges from the shutdown "unprecedented." During the morning rush hours, she said, L line serves as many people as six East River crossings.

"Buses, bikes and overall mobility" will be the emphasis, she said.

Trottenberg is also collaborating with Andy Byford, president of the MTA's New York City Transit division, to coordinate Byford's bus action plan to ease congestion.

According to Trottenberg, DOT found savings of \$12.6 million and \$9.2 million in FY2018 and 2019, respectively, including \$7.5 million in recurring annual savings.

"New obligations from the state and continued uncertainty at the federal level make it prudent for us to continue to find operational savings," said Trottenberg, a former federal undersecretary of transportation for policy.