

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3214

May 26, 2021

Steve Dickson
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
National Engagement and Regional Administration
800 Independence Ave., SW Room 306W
Washington, D.C. 20591

Dear Administrator Dickson,

I am writing to share my concerns that planning for the proposed AirTrain from Willets Point to LaGuardia Airport is proceeding without the needs of travelers and the surrounding communities at the forefront. These concerns stem from recently revealed communications between the Port Authority of New York New Jersey (PANYNJ) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) following a Public Records Access request.¹

The released documents reveal that the FAA did not believe that PANYNJ thoroughly examined alternatives to AirTrain - such as a ferry (Comment 12, page 299) (Comment 30, pg 303) and other rail/subway lines, (Comment 39, page 305) (Comment 49, page 307). The FAA also did not believe that an objective view of the stated criteria would make the AirTrain the clear preference. In the outlined communications, the FAA specifically states, "...issues are made to be insurmountable for certain alternatives, yet the same issues for the preferred alternative (transitioning across major interchanges) seem to be glossed over" (Comment 2, page 297). The FAA also noted that PANYNJ did not appear to apply criteria uniformly across all options - most notably travel time (Comment 15, page 300), construction costs, and improving travel options (Comment 40, page 306).

This information is extremely concerning because on January 10, 2020, prior to the release of these communications, I sent a letter to the former Assistant Administrator for Government and Industry Affairs Philip Newman, requesting clarification as to why certain alternatives were eliminated from further consideration for improved access to LaGuardia. The response provided by FAA on February 10, 2020, reiterated the very rationale they took issue with in the Memorandum of Understanding with PANYNJ.

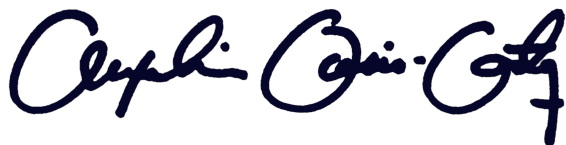
¹ PANYNJ, PRA #19796, Communications re: LGAAIP RFPs and/or NEPA review;
<https://www.riverkeeper.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Additional-Response-PRA-No.-19796-Redacted.pdf>

The released communications also bring into question the thoroughness of the environmental impact study (EIS). Specifically, the FAA noted that PANYNJ failed to include a likely future passenger parking lot and rental car facility in their official report of objectives and alternatives (Comment 9, page 298). Any EIS conducted by the FAA must assess the impacts of all future related projects.

This project would be built in the heart of one of the most heavily impacted communities by COVID-19, with many community members opposing the development. It is critical that this project be held to the highest ethical and efficacy standards - and it is clear that has not been the case to date. I understand Port Authority plans to request funding for the AirTrain through the Passenger Facility Charge program, subject to FAA approval. Due to the lack of transparency surrounding the FAA's Final EIS and the lack of the public's trust in the execution of this project, I ask that the FAA refrain from approving this project, thereby preventing PANYNJ from beginning construction.

I respectfully request a written response via email to my Deputy District Director, Naureen Akhter at naureen.akhter@mail.house.gov. Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alexia Ocasio-Cortez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Alexia" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Ocasio-Cortez".

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez