

New life sciences hub would change LI

Ronkonkoma plan would spur innovation and create thousands of high-paying jobs

BY MICHAEL DOWLING AND JAMES HAYWARD
Guest essay

Once in every generation there is an inflection point that fundamentally shapes the future of our hometown, Long Island.

Years ago, our leaders successfully pivoted the region away from the defense industry to life sciences and health care.

Strategic investments have resulted in a strong health care network and a research corridor stretching across Long Island. These were the fundamental building blocks to construct a strong life sciences sector.

The proposed Midway Crossing project in Ronkonkoma represents another inflection point to make strategic investments to benefit Long Island's future. Its mission dovetails with that of Northwell Health — improving community health with advanced medical care, top-flight research, and innovation bolstered by the collaborative efforts of industry partners.

Midway Crossing also aims to attract and unite scientific institutions in a new life sciences hub. Leading local biotech firms like Applied DNA Sciences would anchor the facilities, which would include a STEM educational center, research labs, biotech manufacturing facilities, health care offices, a hotel and convention center.

Developer Jones Lang LaSalle is poised to build Midway Crossing on 179 acres of public land around the Ronkonkoma train station, which would be newly connected to an improved MacArthur Airport.

The Suffolk County Legislature and the Islip Town council recently approved the project, which is seeking help on infrastructure costs from the state's Long Island Investment Fund program and other public funds.

At a construction cost of roughly \$2.55 billion (mostly private dollars), Midway Crossing will produce about 9,300 career-track jobs, including



A rendering of the proposed Midway Crossing development in Ronkonkoma.

4,300 science, technology, engineering and health care positions with annual salaries typically well over \$100,000, according to a University of Michigan economist's analysis.

At Midway Crossing, biotech firms, startup employees, and top health care practitioners could work with scientists from institutions like Brookhaven National Laboratory, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Northwell's Feinstein Institutes for Medical Research, and Stony Brook University.

Strong unions between health care providers and scientists can raise the stan-

dard of care locally and create powerful innovations like new mRNA vaccines, which saved countless lives during the pandemic, and targeted treatments based on patients' DNA.

Midway Crossing would inspire people to work on Long Island, not leave it, while pumping an estimated \$4.3 billion in taxes, tourist dollars, and salaries into the regional economy annually at full build-out, economists project.

Inaction is not an option — not when census data shows the number of Long Island residents under age 19 dropped 7.5% in the seven years before

2020. Recent polls, including one by the former Long Island Index, indicate that about two of three Long Islanders ages 18 to 34 intend to move out of the area in the next five years, largely due to a lack of good-paying jobs.

Imagine how dynamic Long Island's economy would become if we enticed more young people to move and stay here to work, shop, enjoy recreational opportunities, and travel via a new state-of-the-art MacArthur Airport terminal.

They would travel swiftly to Midway Crossing and the airport thanks to new Long Island Rail Road tracks and the railroad's new service to midtown Manhattan's East Side opening in December.

Now is the time to support a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity at Midway Crossing — the region's best chance to make this long-dreamed-of commercial, scientific, and health care hub a reality.

■ **THIS GUEST ESSAY** reflects the views of Michael Dowling, president and chief executive of Northwell Health, and James Hayward, president and chief executive of Applied DNA Sciences.

Let's act now to reduce pedestrian deaths

Walkers, drivers must obey traffic laws and police must enforce rules

BY CINDY BROWN
Guest essay

Earlier this month, four pedestrians in one week were struck by motor vehicles. It's not an unusual occurrence on Long Island's streets. It's a worsening epidemic.

The pandemic didn't help. During the height of the lockdown there were fewer vehicles on the roads, but those vehicles traveled at faster speeds simply because they could on our near-empty streets. And, at the same time, more people were out walking and biking. According to the Governors Highway Safety Association, the pedestrian fatality rate rose 22% in the first half of 2020 compared to the same period a year earlier.

Subsequent behavioral research by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that from March 2020 to June 2021 crashes due to speeding and traveling without a seat belt remained higher than before the pandemic. Such behavior continues.

The four latest victims — a brother and sister out walking, a 68-year old man crossing the street, and a cyclist — are now part of the grim statistics. Two died. Two were injured.

Of the 20 focus communities called out by New York State for high numbers of pedestrian crashes, eight are Long Island communities with the Village of Hempstead taking the unwanted top spot. The others are the towns of Brookhaven, Islip, Oyster Bay, North Hempstead,

Babylon, and Huntington, and Freeport Village.

New York's Pedestrian Safety Action Plan, when it debuted in 2016, offered \$110 million to improve safety for pedestrians through infrastructure improvements, public education efforts, and enforcement across upstate and Long Island. While improvements are underway, traffic laws intended to curb speeding and drunk and drugged driving need to be rigorously enforced. Pedestrians must start paying attention to traffic laws intended to help them safely cross the street, especially busy multilane streets.

Irresponsible pedestrian behavior does not usually end well. Nor does irresponsible driver behavior.

Laws meant to keep everyone safe can save lives now. The rules are simple. Walk facing traffic in the absence of a sidewalk. Bikers should ride in the

direction of traffic. Motorists must yield to pedestrians in crosswalks and be extra cautious when driving near children. If not crossing at a crosswalk, pedestrians must yield to vehicles.

All the laws and tips for pedestrians and drivers are found on the Governors Traffic Safety Committee website. Long Islanders can test their knowledge by taking a quick assessment found on the Walk Safe LI website, a campaign to raise awareness about pedestrian safety and laws.

It's not an exaggeration to call this an epidemic. The Institute for Traffic Safety Management and Research keeps track of pedestrian/cyclist injuries and deaths. The numbers increase each year — 1,008 pedestrian fatalities/injuries recorded in 2020 and 1,275 in 2021 for Nassau and Suffolk counties, more than a 20% increase.

The New York Coalition for Transportation Safety, one of the local organizations promoting law-based education, recorded 164 pedestrian/cyclist injuries/fatalities in news reports between Oct. 1, 2021 and Sept. 30, 2022. This group also surveys participants about their knowledge of laws before and after delivery of educational programs. Not surprisingly, it found for programs offered in 2022 that 83% of the respondents said they learned something new about New York State pedestrian/bike safety laws.

Education does work. Let's all commit to learning these safety laws and practicing them now.

■ **THIS GUEST ESSAY** reflects the views of Cindy Brown, executive director of the Westbury-based New York Coalition for Transportation Safety.

