Greenways for America

gan working on a series of guides—pamphlets financed under the Department of Environmental Management's administrative budget which could provide maps of the local byways, trails, and canoe routes in various sectors of the circuit. This, plus some signage, will, they believe, maintain and maybe even build regional interest in the project until new funding appears.

End of story? Maybe not. As Leslie Luchonok points out, the basic elements of the circuit are largely in place—the astonishing quantity of preserved open-space land within the corridor, thanks to the Eliots and others. Local conservation commissions and land trusts located on the circuit have been assiduously acquiring natural areas off their own bat all along. Putting it all together, as the Trustees of Reservations proposed in 1937, is even more sensible now than it was then. And there is a historic imperative operating here, too, as Bob Yaro understood so well—an innovative park-planning tradition that stretches back one hundred years.

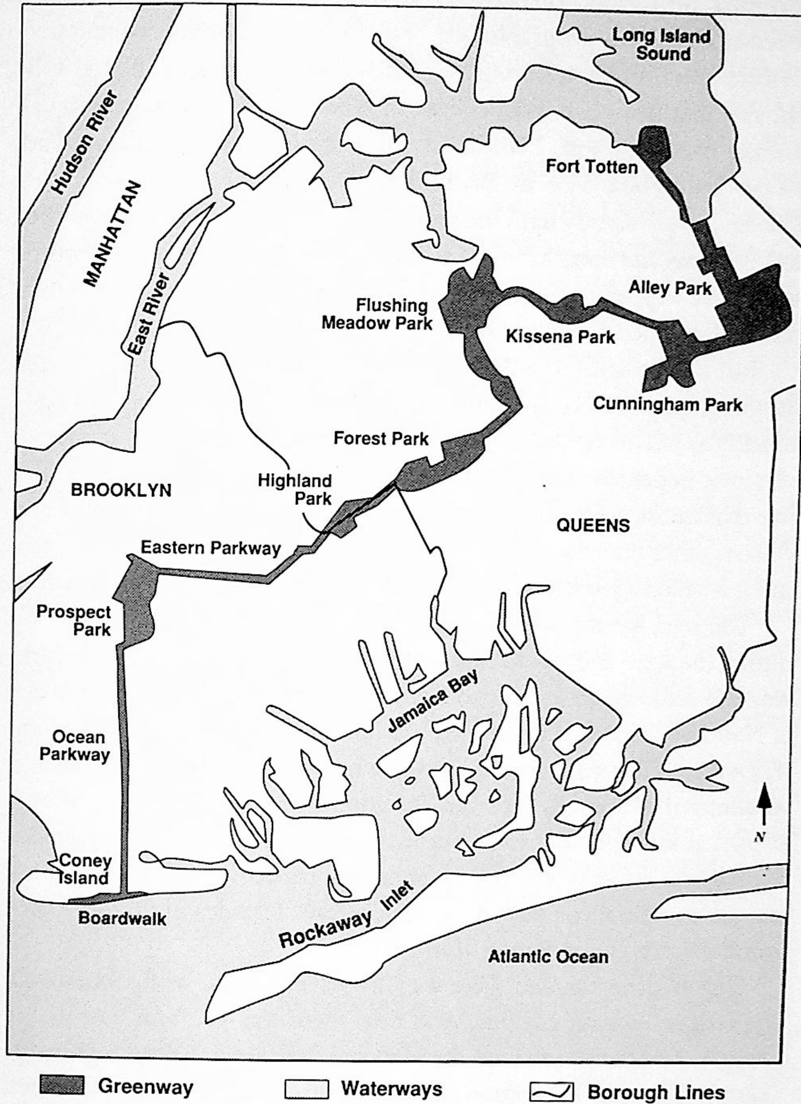
Despite more adversity than would seem believable, the Bay Circuit concept hangs on, insisting on implementation. Clearly, the strength and logic of it could not have been more thoroughly tested. If the politicians of Massachusetts fail to understand that, some conservationists believe it may be time for nongovernmental auspices to take over—to do finally what Charles Eliot, Jr., Charles Eliot II, Bob Yaro, Susan Ziegler, and Leslie Luchonok have devoted a substantial part of their careers to doing—connecting up the gems of the outer necklace so that the Boston area will have its two garlands of green at last.

FROM OLMSTED TO MOSES TO FOX

The Brooklyn–Queens Greenway, Coney Island to Fort Totten, New York

New York City. The Big Apple. Times Square. Broadway. If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere. But *that* New York isn't the half of it. In fact, it is a good deal less than half of it. The biggest chunk of the Big Apple, in both area and population, is in just two of the city's five boroughs, Brooklyn and Queens.

BROOKLYN - QUEENS GREENWAY



Although they share highways, power grids, sewer systems, and subway lines, the connection between these two boroughs has always been a tenuous one, both geographically and culturally. Queens people rarely venture into Brooklyn, fearing they will get lost in the maze-streets of the old city that was once independent of New York and is peopled by all manner of strange folk, Hasidic Jews in Borough Park, yuppies on Park Slope, boom-box kids in Bedford-Stuyvesant. To the Brooklynites, Queens is equivalently terra incognita. Anyone who lives in Queens, they will tell you, has somehow got to be kidding. It is a *parvenu* borough, with noisy airports surrounded by brick tract houses, as opposed to their tradition-steeped Brooklyn Bridge and old neighborhoods.

But now, thanks to a Brooklyn native, Tom Fox, a linkage between the geography and culture of the two boroughs is finally being created—actually as well as symbolically. The linkage may be described, at once, as a historic imperative and as just about the niftiest idea for a long time in a city that needs such ideas desperately. Can *anything* link Brooklyn and Queens other than the ordinary kinds of urban infrastructure? Yes it can, and it is called a *greenway*—the Brooklyn-Queens Greenway, to be exact.

The seed for this idea was planted in Flatbush, where Fox grew up during the 1950s and would ride his balloon-tired bike down Ocean Parkway. He could go all the way to Coney Island if he wanted. Buy a red hot at Nathan's Famous if he wanted. Or he could ride the other way along this wide boulevard, with the auto-free pathway alongside it, all the way to Olmsted's Prospect Park and the zoo, if he wanted. This is what is known as kids' heaven: to lace up your magic Keds and pedal your Columbia bike as fast as you can, the handlebar tassels fluttering in the wind, and get to a place you have never seen before. The idea of it made a profound impression on young Tom Fox.

But he grew up, and there was Brooklyn College with its beautiful Ivy League-looking campus. And then there was Vietnam, not so Ivy League. And then a job with the National Park Service, working for the Gateway National Recreation Area, an aggregation of various waterfront sites around New York's lower bay.

The great problem, then and now, with the Gateway National Recre-

ation Area was that its constituent units—Sandy Hook in New Jersey, Breezy Point and Floyd Bennett Field on Long Island, the Great Kills Park and South Beach on Staten Island—were widely separated. To get people from one park of the GNRA to another remains the great unsolved problem for this 1970s addition to the national park system. Connections were much on the mind of those who, like Tom Fox, were charged with the responsibility of making our nation's gateway park comprehensively meaningful to its users. Even after he left the National Park Service to work for a nonprofit community-organizing group in Washington, D.C., linking people and places seemed to Fox what any city needs. So, in the early 1980s, he went back in New York to organize the Neighborhood Open Space Coalition on the basis of just such sentiments. He would pull the groups together, link them, and therefore give them a larger impact than any simple addition of their good works could provide.

One day in 1985, Fox was, as he says, "just looking at a map of New York City," thinking open-space thoughts, when he noticed how many parks there were in Queens and how they sort of ran together. His mind drifted back to the days of the Keds and the Columbia bike and exploring the wonders of Ocean Parkway, and he let his finger trace a route from Coney Island northward along the parkway to Prospect Park and. . . . Hey, wait a minute! You can also ride *out* of Prospect Park, along Eastern Parkway toward Queens. Like Ocean Parkway, this thoroughfare comes equipped with a pathway separated from the automobile traffic. What's more, with a couple of jogs and a stretch along residential streets, you can actually get to Highland Park in the borough of Queens. *Queens?* Look here, another little jog to Forest Park, then another six blocks to Flushing Meadow Park, where the two world's fairs had been located. Then, after a string of parks through the center of the borough, you take a hard right into Kissena Park, to Cunningham Park, to Alley Pond Park, and finally to Fort Totten *on the Long Island shore!* There you are: forty bike-miles (fourteen crow-miles) from deepest Brooklyn to farthest Queens! Talk about your linkage!

As Tom Fox and his associate Anne McClellan have since written in

an infectious feasibility study of the route, the greenway could "link thirteen parks, two botanic gardens, the New York Aquarium, the Brooklyn Museum, the New York Hall of Science, the Queens Museum, Shea Stadium, the National Tennis Center, the site for 1939 and 1964 world's fairs, two environmental education centers, three lakes and a reservoir—with a bicycle/pedestrian path running from the Atlantic Ocean to the Long Island Sound." And here is the beauty part: by virtue of these parks, parkways, and cultural sites, the greenway's landbase is 90 percent in place already, thanks to Frederick Law Olmsted and Robert Moses, the great park-makers of the middle of the nineteenth century and the middle of the twentieth, respectively.

On the Brooklyn side, Olmsted had conceived of great avenues leading into and out of Prospect Park in 1866. They would not be simple roads but instead broad carriageway boulevards with wide, planted margins. He called them *park ways,* the first use of that term. And they still are parkways, functioning as Olmsted wished them to. His original idea was to have Ocean Parkway approach Prospect Park from the South Shore, pass through it, and head north toward Manhattan, eventually to connect with the great parks of that city. The plan was too visionary for the politicians and bureaucrats to approve, even then. Instead, the boulevard out of the park was later rerouted and became Eastern Parkway, extending into the countryside toward Queens. But the general objective remained the same: to provide approaches to the park which were as grand as the park itself—to prepare the mind and spirit properly for the park experience. And the park was worth it. The 526-acre Prospect Park was, Olmsted believed, his finest achievement.

On the other side of the Kings County line, where Eastern Parkway was headed, lay Queens. In those days, Queens was mainly farmland and marsh, not really part of the metropolis. But that was to change. By the 1920s it had become solidly suburban but not so built up that a new generation of park- and parkway-makers could not plan their projects boldly. And no one was bolder than Robert Moses. Although one of Moses's parkways broke a link in Tom Fox's greenway that must now be reconnected, his hunks of parkland, including those associated with the world's fairs and the skein of parkways he built to deliver the visitors to them,

provide the crucial lands than can now deliver a walker or cyclist through much of Queens away from vehicular traffic.

Although all of the land is already in the public domain, this does not mean that creating the Brooklyn-Queens Greenway is easy. The cost of development and of reforging the missing links needed to make a continuous trailway is steep. To determine how steep, Fox and his Neighborhood Open Space Coalition colleagues developed a fine-grained greenway development plan—right down to the signage, reflectors, and the cost of paint. Their estimate for development of the greenway (not including some $160 million worth of park, road, and public works improvements to be applied along the route that were otherwise scheduled by the city) ranges from $3 million for a bare-bones trailway to $18 million for a deluxe model greenway.

Despite items included in the budget such as a veloway bridge to get bikers across Northern Boulevard ($2.2 million) and the construction of a new trail through the Coney Island section ($3 million) and widening and rebuilding the bikeway strip along Eastern Parkway ($4.6 million), New York City, broke as it is, has taken this project to its heart.

Actually, such a price tag is not much for a city whose total budget is greater than that of most nations. Indeed, many see the greenway as an investment that multiplies the utility of the parks and cultural facilities that are linked along the route's forty-mile length. Because the importance of Coney Island, Prospect Park, and Flushing Meadow to the city is so great, an increase in accessibility could justify the cost of the greenway many times over. And such a humane calculus is not at all beyond the reach of New York's politicians. The NOSC plan was accepted by the Parks Department and the Department of Transportation almost as quickly as it was completed. Within a year, the first section of the new greenway, from Coney Island to Prospect Park, had been opened for use, and work on other sections begun. At the reopening of the bikepath on Ocean Parkway, Henry Stern, New York's parks commissioner, observed, "I can't think of any project that has produced so much enthusiasm." Transportation Department head Ross Sandler, mindful of the Olmsted heritage, called the completion of the greenway a historic imperative. Former Mayor Koch mounted a ten-speed, grinned for the photogra-

phers, and for once did not put his foot in his mouth. Given such a send-off, Tom Fox figures the greenway will be completed, although perhaps not fully developed, by 1995.

And so it is that at last some long-divided parts of the city are being brought together—courtesy of Frederick Law Olmsted's Brooklyn parks and parkways, Robert Moses's manifold projects in Queens, and the concept of linking them together provided by Tom Fox and the Neighborhood Open Space Coalition. In the neighborhoods of both boroughs, the parks are called *pawks*. Lord knows how the local youngsters are going to pronounce the word *greenway*. But you had better believe they're soon going be using it, as in "Hey, ma, I goin' out on the greenway."

And before she can yell something about not being late, a kid on a bike will be riding away, tassels streaming from the handlebars, pedaling off to somewhere he's never been before.

LESSONS IN RIVER-MAKING AT SHOEMAKER U.

The Platte River Greenway, Denver, Colorado

Joe Shoemaker, a tough-talking, abrasive state legislator, now retired, literally founded a river. Unless you are God, that is a tricky piece of business. But that's what Shoemaker did. He started with a miserable, pestiferous, flood-ridden sewerway fouled by 250 drainage pipes carrying the unspeakable fluids of a city into it; a channelized dump, filled with piles of broken concrete, rubber tires, waste oil, stoves, refrigerators, and, in one particularly nasty section, rejected chicken feathers from a bedding factory. And he made of it the most important park and recreation facility in the city of Denver. From a river that had from the earliest days divided rich from poor, Shoemaker found a way to connect a city that had once been wedged apart. The vehicle for this miracle was the Platte River Greenway, a project that has been the model for a dozen or more urban river greenways in cities throughout the United States.

The story begins in 1965, when the Platte escaped its banks and flooded the city of Denver. This had happened many times before, but