



Photos Courtesy Greater Jamaica Development Corporation

The Greater Jamaica Development Corporation is overseeing a transformation of the LIRR underpass in downtown Jamaica that will result in over 6,000-square-feet of retail space.

## Downtown Jamaica transformation set to begin

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Elected officials broke ground on a revitalization project that will transform a series of loading docks in downtown Jamaica into 6,400-square-feet of gleaming retail space.

The \$12 million project, initiated on Wednesday, November 19, is the first of a three-part \$98 million effort orchestrated by the Greater Jamaica Development Corporation (GJDC) to convert downtown Jamaica into a commercial hub or "airport village." The initial phase, which focuses on the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) underpass along Sutphin Boulevard between Archer and 94th Avenues, caters to over 300,000 daily commuters who access AirTrain, the LIRR and multiple subway lines in the area.

U.S. Congressman Gregory Meeks, who secured funding for the underpass project from the Federal Transit Administration, said in a statement that the jobs, housing, retail and office space created by the GJDC's project "will benefit citizens in my district and throughout New York as well as be an essential boost to our economy."

Additional funding for the project — which will add overhead lighting, install a new sidewalk and roadbed and improve city bus loading zones — was provided by the Federal Highway Administration through the New York City Economic Development Corporation and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey through Councilmember Thomas White. Assemblymember Vivian Cook secured funding for the LIRR's work on the project.

In the statement, Councilmember White said the project "highlights what is

possible when elected officials on levels of government work together and collaborate to bring much needed economic development to their communities."

Simone Price, Executive Director of the Sutphin Business Improvement District, thinks the project "will be a major turning point for downtown Jamaica."

Price, who noted that her organization has to give its approval for any development to occur along the Sutphin Boulevard corridor, said the altered underpass will transform the area from a mere transportation center into an actual destination.

"It will change perception," Price said.

The GJDC will award contracts in the next week or so, with construction beginning in January and lasting around 18 months. Subsequently, the GJDC will oversee all leasing activity with a stated goal of accommodating qualified local entrepreneurs.

In the statement, Deputy Mayor for Economic Development Robert C. Lieber underscored the city's 2007 approval of a rezoning of 368 blocks in Jamaica as the catalyst for change in the area.

"Jamaica, with its proximity to the airport and incredible transportation amenities serves as the gateway to our city, and the improvements to the Sutphin Underpass as well as those planned throughout the area, will help make Jamaica a more attractive place to live, work, and do business," Lieber said.

The latter two phases of the project, set to begin in 2010 and 2011, will improve access to the AirTrain/LIRR Station from the Van Wyck Expressway; create a small park; ease traffic and pedestrian conflicts; and enhance the streetscape environment. Each will take up to 18 months to complete.