

The General
Contractors
Association
of New York
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GCA
The Future
Plan it.
Build it.

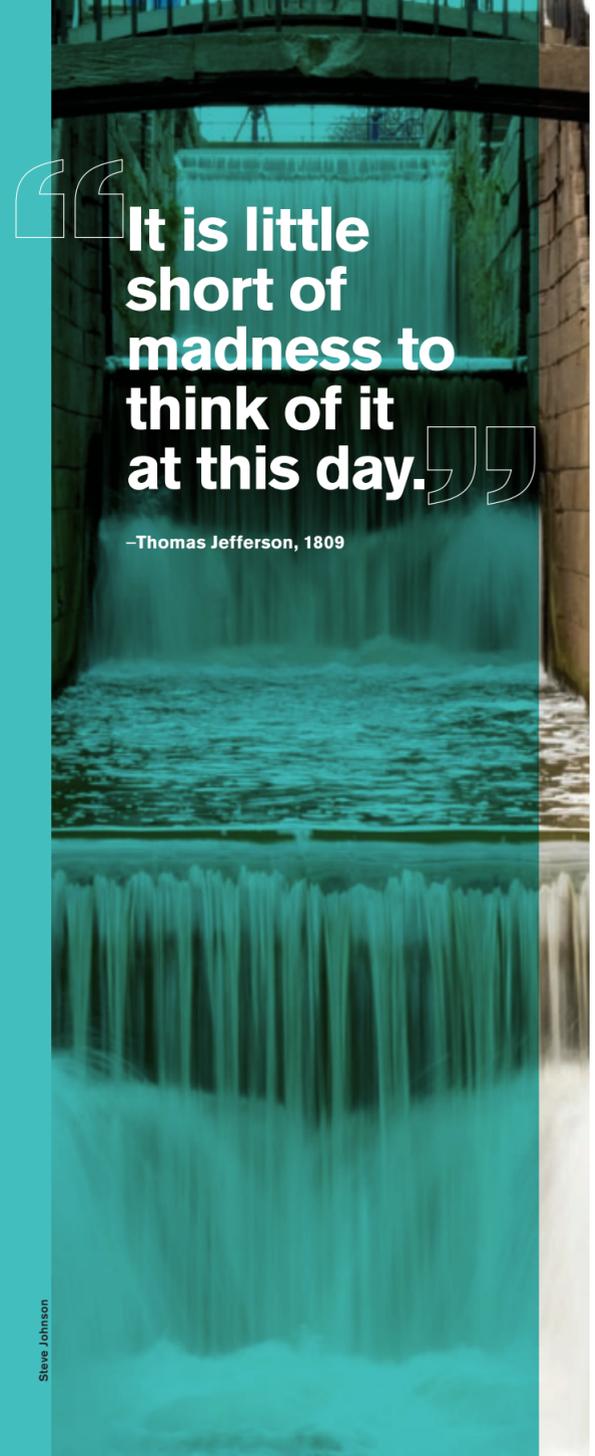
**They said
it shouldn't
be done—
aren't you
glad no one
listened?**

**Without infrastructure,
modern life would be
impossible. Building and
maintaining roads, tunnels,
bridges, and mass trans-
portation requires vision,
determination, and spirit.**

At one time New York's bold investments led the nation in transforming the way people lived and worked. Our economic leadership would have been unthinkable without the transportation and water resource networks to support it. But our bold vision has weakened, and we are losing the essence of what makes New York a center of the national economy. Look at these great projects, and ask yourself, where would New York be without them and many others?

**They said
it shouldn't
be done**

(a story of
infrastructure
in four parts)



Conception: 1807
Construction: 1817
Completion: 1825

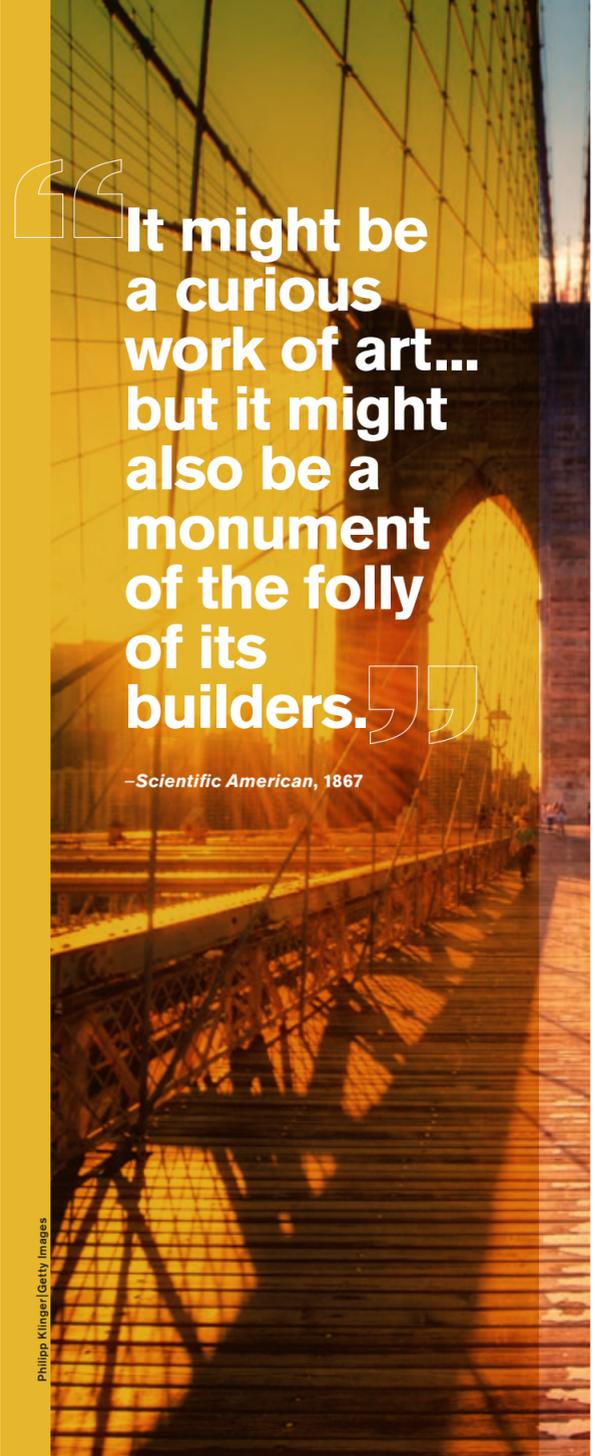
“It is little short of madness to think of it at this day.”

—Thomas Jefferson, 1809

Erie Canal

That's how President Jefferson dismissed a visiting New York State senator seeking federal support for a waterway across hundreds of miles of upstate wilderness to join the Great Lakes and the Hudson River. The president suggested revisiting the idea in a century.

The Erie Canal was completed just sixteen years later under the dynamic leadership of Governor DeWitt Clinton. “Clinton's Ditch” transformed New York into the Empire State and New York City into the center of global commerce. Near his deathbed, Jefferson reassessed: “This great work will immortalize the present authorities of New York... and prove to mankind the superior wisdom of employing the resources of industry in works of improvement rather than of destruction.” Today the Erie Canal is hailed as the first great piece of American Infrastructure.



Conception: 1857
Construction: 1870
Completion: 1883

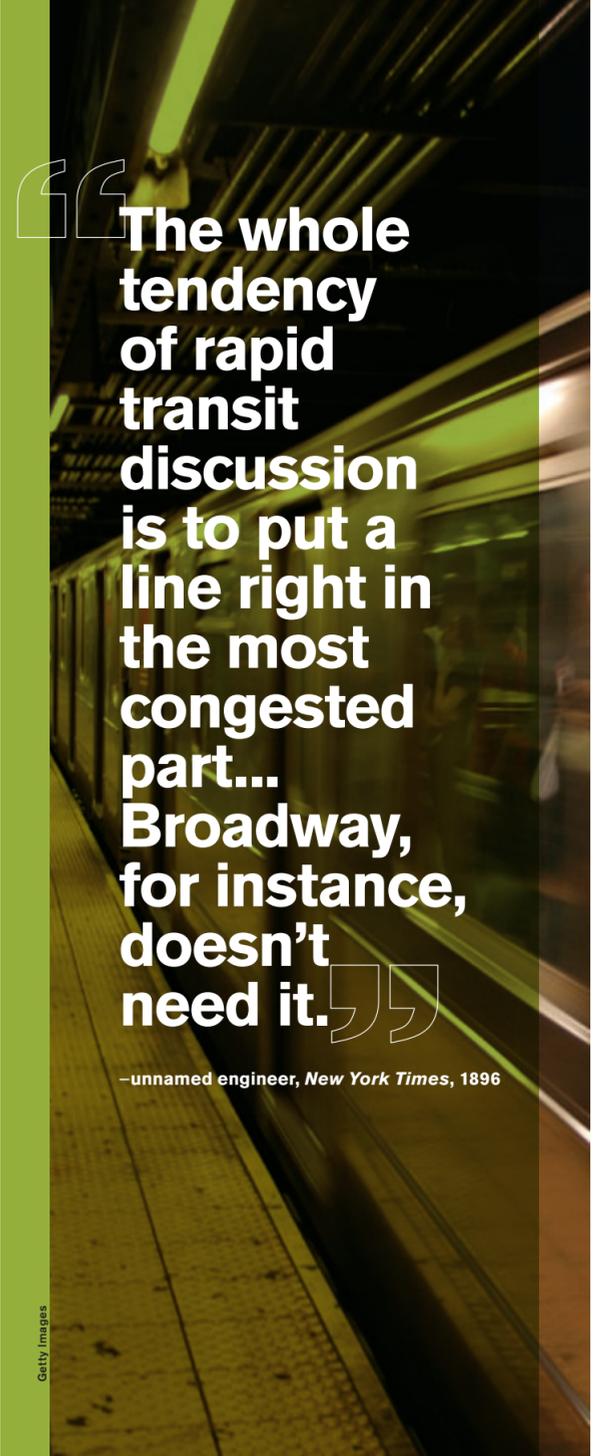
“It might be a curious work of art... but it might also be a monument of the folly of its builders.”

—*Scientific American*, 1867

Brooklyn Bridge

The country's leading science journal had a low opinion of John Roebling's fantastic plan for an East River Suspension Bridge connecting Brooklyn and Manhattan. *Scientific American* preferred iron tubes laid on the river bed: “it is very much cheaper, more feasible, and profitable to use the bed of the river as a roadway than to suspend such a structure as that proposed by Mr. Roebling one hundred and sixty feet above the water.”

Three years later, many other doubters remained but not *Scientific American*: “the rapidity with which the work has proceeded is evidence that it is conducted by a man who is fully competent to conduct this greatest engineering feat of modern times.” The Brooklyn Bridge, completed in 1883, immediately became and remains a powerful landmark of American ingenuity and engineering.



Conception: 1888
Construction: 1900
Completion: ongoing

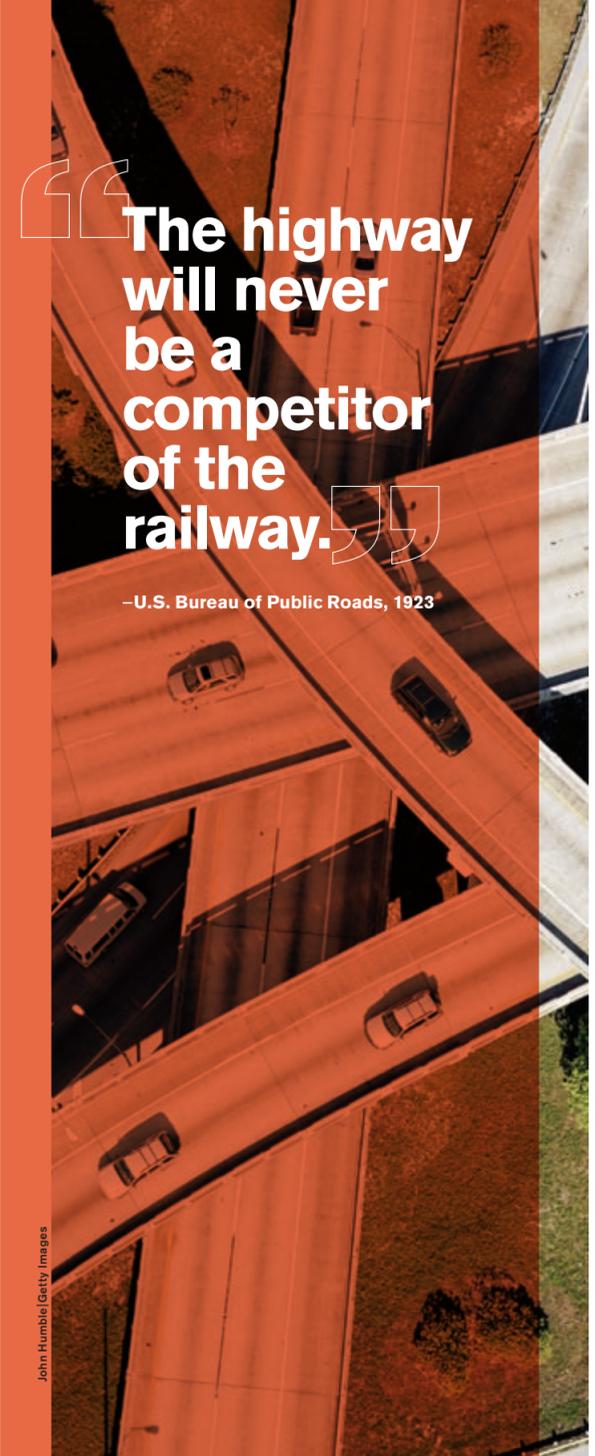
“The whole tendency of rapid transit discussion is to put a line right in the most congested part... Broadway, for instance, doesn't need it.”

—unnamed engineer, *New York Times*, 1896

New York City Subway System

Deep debate, some of it anonymous, about New York's rapid transit future gripped the city in the late 1800s. “The only practical solution of the rapid transit problem,” was double-decking the elevateds, insisted Russell Sage, who was heavily invested in them; in 1896 the powerful railroad financier considered “the proposed underground system... impracticable.”

The IRT subway opened eight years later. It ran below Broadway from City Hall to 145th Street and was immediately hailed as “one of the great engineering achievements of the age.” New Yorkers mobbed the trains. (Not Sage: “No, sir, no unventilated holes for me.”) By 1940, when New York City took over all private rapid transit lines, there were hundreds of miles of subway track. The last of Manhattan's els, long notorious for spreading darkness, noise, and grime to their neighborhoods, was taken down in 1956; construction of the long-anticipated Second Avenue Subway on Manhattan's congested East Side has finally begun.



Conception: 1935
Construction: 1956
Completion: ongoing

“The highway will never be a competitor of the railway.”

—U.S. Bureau of Public Roads, 1923

Interstate Highway System

The concept of federal highways was launched in the mid-1930s but efforts to create them stalled for two decades over where to build them, who should build them, and how to pay for them. In 1955 President Eisenhower promoted an interstate system funded by \$20 million in bonds. “Nothing has been proposed during my 22 years in the United States Senate,” said Virginia's Harry Byrd, Sr., “that would do more to wreck our fiscal budget system.”

A year later, the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways, funded mainly by a 50% increase in fuel taxes—from 2 to 3 cents a gallon, when a gallon of gas cost less than a quarter—found its way through Congress. Today, “the greatest public works project in history” comprises nearly 50,000 miles of highways in all fifty states plus Puerto Rico. New York has the most “Eisenhower Interstates”: 29 routes totaling nearly 1,700 miles.