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# Anger in East Harlem Over New Delays in 2nd Ave. Subway Plans

By EMMA G. FITZSIMMONS OCT. 29, 2015

When Robert J. Rodriguez learned on Wednesday that construction to bring the Second Avenue subway to his East Harlem neighborhood would be delayed until at least 2020, the New York State assemblyman was furious. The more affluent Upper East Side is expected to get three stations on the new line next year, while his district waits endlessly for its turn.

“For them not to bring this to an area that clearly demonstrates an economic need — as well as a transportation need to move people into other parts of Manhattan more efficiently — it is outrageous and screams of inequality,” Mr. Rodriguez said on Thursday.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority announced a new setback this week for the perennially delayed Second Avenue subway, which has advanced in fits and starts for nearly a century. The authority cut \$1 billion for the next phase of the subway line from its capital plan, arguing that officials would not be able to begin digging the tunnels for the extension during the 2015-19 plan, as had been expected.

The news that construction would be delayed by at least a year came as a surprise to many transit advocates and elected officials who were promised \$1.5 billion for plans to extend the line to 125th Street in an earlier version of the capital

plan. The authority's board approved a slimmer \$29 billion version of the plan, after \$3 billion in cuts, on Wednesday after Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio reached an agreement to increase funding for the plan this month.

The first part of the Second Avenue subway line is scheduled to open in December 2016, extending the Q line to 96th Street. The first three stations — at 72nd Street, 86th Street and 96th Street — and the extension to East Harlem will help relieve bursting-at-the-seams ridership on the Lexington Avenue line in Manhattan, said Thomas K. Wright, the president of the Regional Plan Association, a transportation advocacy group.

“This is a critical project,” Mr. Wright said. “We’re all seeing the effects of increased ridership, and we’re just barely trying to keep our heads above water with overcrowding.”

Mr. Wright criticized the authority's lack of transparency in making the cuts. The information was buried inside the revised 237-page capital proposal, and board members did not publicly discuss the funding reduction — to \$535 million — at any length before voting unanimously to approve the plan.

The authority scrambled on Thursday to explain the decision. Adam Lisberg, a spokesman for the authority, said that it became clear over the last year that the agency could not start digging the tunnels until the next five-year capital plan began. Substantial planning and design work had yet to be completed, he said, and the recent uncertainty over funding for the capital plan also pushed back the project's timeline.

“We are fully committed to extending the Second Avenue subway through East Harlem, and that's why we're spending half a billion dollars in this plan on work to get ready to tunnel,” Mr. Lisberg said.

Asked about the funding cuts on Thursday, Mr. de Blasio said it was an indication from the authority that the plans would take longer than expected.

“It's a complicated project,” Mr. de Blasio said. “We know the first phase has taken a long time, much more than any of us could have imagined. I think it was

bluntly an admission that the second phase will take quite a while.”

Mr. de Blasio, a Democrat, reiterated that he was proud of the city’s increased contribution to the capital plan after a contentious debate with Mr. Cuomo, also a Democrat, over whether the city should pay more toward the state-run authority. Mr. de Blasio has highlighted several other projects he asked the authority to prioritize, including a study to examine the possibility of a Utica Avenue subway line in Brooklyn.

Other leaders were less forgiving about the project’s delays. United States Representatives [Carolyn B. Maloney](#) and [Charles B. Rangel](#), both Democrats, released a joint statement on Thursday saying they were concerned about the cuts.

“This ‘go-slow’ approach to the Second Avenue subway is a huge mistake,” the statement said.

Once the Second Avenue subway reaches 125th Street, the authority would next like to extend the line south to the Lower East Side and to Hanover Square in Lower Manhattan. But those projects would happen many years in the future.

Mr. Rodriguez, a Democrat, said officials still had time to oppose the funding cuts because the capital plan needs approval by the state’s Capital Program Review Board. State legislators also plan to discuss the proposal during the next legislative session, which begins in January. Mr. Cuomo promised \$8.3 billion in state funding for the plan, but state lawmakers still have to work out the details.

**Mitchell L. Moss, director of the Rudin Center for Transportation at New York University, said the authority was right to have prioritized spending on repairs and improvements to the aging subway system in the capital plan.**

“Expanding the system is important,” he said, “but it’s far more important to make the existing system work well.”

Michael M. Grynbbaum contributed reporting.

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