

October 2, 1936

[Ground Breaking Ceremonies - Queen's Middtown Tunnel - NYC]

FDR Speech File

. 0932

INFORMAL EXTEMPORANEOUS REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
GROUND BREAKING CEREMONIES
QUEENS MIDTOWN TUNNEL, NEW YORK, N.Y.
October 2, 1936, 5:00 P.M.

(Hon. Alfred B. Jones, as Chairman of the New York City Tunnel Authority, presided. The speakers preceding the President were Jesse Jones, Senator Wagner, Secretary Ickes and Mayor LaGuardia. Mayor LaGuardia invited the President to attend the 1939 Worlds Fair. He also presented the President with a membership in the Operating Engineers Union.)

Mr. Mayor, Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen:

That card is a very essential part of this ceremony. They would not start that shovel to work without it.

I think the Mayor is right and I hope he is right about the capacity in which I am to come back here in 1939. (Applause) But even if I am a private citizen, I do want somebody to ask me to ride through the tunnel in the first procession that goes through. (Applause)

Now, I go back a long way - I go back four years more than half a century and that is why I am qualified to talk about the epic of Queens. It is one

of the most amazing stories in all of modern civilization, not only Queens but all these Boroughs of the City of New York. Half a century ago they were different cities and out here they were villages. In those days and here, within our own lifetime, we have seen a great Borough in the greatest city in the world grow until it has more than a million human beings living within its borders. Those human beings deserve good transportation.

When I was a small boy there was only the old Brooklyn Bridge and a lot of ferries. Sometimes, in the winter time, the ferries did not run because of the ice. If you wanted to get out into the country and see the green fields and the cows and the chickens, all you had to do was to take a ferry across to Queens. I believe there are still half a dozen farms in this Borough, but their days are numbered. So, in this half century of one generation, we have seen one of the greatest transitions that has ever occurred in the history of civilization.

I go back a few years to when I came back from Washington, after the World War, to practice law in New

York. At that time I attended a conference, I think it was in 1921 or 1922, to talk about a tunnel from Manhattan to Queens. It is true that it has taken fifteen years but, on the other hand, it has only taken, as the Mayor said, six or seven months since we put our shoulders to the wheel and got the bill through the Legislature at Albany and now here is the steam shovel.

I am very proud of what has been done. I am not only proud of the privilege that we have had in Washington in helping the City of New York in starting and completing a large number of very important public works, public works that will be useful, public works that are giving employment to thousands of men and women, but I want to say also that these public works which have been initiated would not have been possible had it not been for an intelligent, pushing, aggressive Administration in the City of New York.

(Applause)

Every once in a while our Mayor would slip down to Washington (Laughter) and when I heard he was coming in I would say to myself, "That is another five