

Driving in Queens

If you think Manhattan is just a mess of crowded streets, you'll be glad to know Queens has infinitely more crowded streets that are far more confusingly named and haphazardly crisscrossed with nearly a dozen jam-packed highways! Queens is home to both of the city's airports, more than two million of the city's residents, and all of the arteries that move people between their jobs in Manhattan and their homes on Long Island. So, yeah, it's busy.

Basic Rules:

- Never assume that the guy in front of you is in possession of a valid driver's license.
- The smattering of yellow cabs you find in Queens are desperately trying to get back to Manhattan and nothing will slow them down.
- Black cars (Lincoln town cars with T&LC plates) can be just as reckless as yellow cabs.
- Numbered *avenues, drives, and roads* run east and west.
- Numbered *streets, places, and lanes* run north and south.
- You've got to be crazy to try to navigate the surface streets if you aren't a local.
- Try not to run over any of the shadowy figures darting in front of you on Queens Boulevard.
- Take it easy, but take it.

East River Crossings

If you need the Long Island Expressway, the Queens-Midtown Tunnel is almost always worth the \$4.50 since it leads you directly onto the highway. Even if you need the surface streets, the tunnel is generally worth the toll just to avoid the jammed upper and lower roadways of the Queensboro-59th Street Bridge. The least traveled roadway of the Queensboro-59th Street Bridge is the outer roadway, accessible only from 59th Street off 1st Avenue or York Avenue; it's a great way to avoid traffic as long as you're not trying to get to Northern Boulevard. The Triborough, Bronx Whitestone, and Throgs Neck Bridges all get you into Queens from the Bronx for the low, low price of \$4.50. The Triborough offers the added attraction of options for Randall's Island and Manhattan.

Jamaica Bay Crossings

If you are crossing Jamaica Bay, that means you're on your way to Rockaway Beach—so you should be in a good enough mood not to mind the \$2.25 tolls on both bridges. The Marine Parkway Bridge, also called the Gil Hodges Memorial Bridge because half of it is in Brooklyn, will take you from The Belt Parkway and Flatbush Avenue directly into Jacob Riis Park. The Cross Bay Bridge can be reached by following Woodhaven Boulevard down through Howard Beach where it turns into Cross Bay Boulevard and following that across B road Channel, the only inhabited island in Jamaica Bay. You'll come out on sunny Beach 96th Street.

Newtown Creek Crossings

Contrary to popular belief, a large part of the border between Queens and Brooklyn is a waterway requiring pretty hefty bridges to traverse it. The Thaddeus Kosciuszko Bridge rises steeply above Newtown Creek, connecting the Brooklyn and Queens sections of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway at a snail's pace. Another great Pole of the American Revolution, Casimir Pulaski gives his name to the bridge that leads from McGuinness Boulevard in Brooklyn, over the mouth of the creek, and onto 11th Street in Queens, which will take you directly onto the upper level of the Queensboro-59th Street Bridge back into Manhattan. An additional crossing, the less historically named Greenpoint Avenue Bridge, leads from Greenpoint, Brooklyn to Sunnyside, Queens and the Long Island Expressway. Metropolitan Avenue crosses the creek where it has shrunken down to the fetid English Kills, and everything south of there is dry land until the shores of Jamaica Bay.

Queens Highways

As we said earlier, Queens is a mess. To simplify things, you can concern yourself with only the seven most important highways in Queens. Three of them run north and south: the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (BQE), the Van Wyck Expressway, and the Cross Island Expressway. Three of them run east and west: Grand Central Parkway, the Long Island Expressway (LIE), and the Belt/Southern Parkway. And one of them runs diagonally south west and north east between Brooklyn and Queens: the Jackie Robinson Parkway. Any or all of them can resemble long, skinny used car lots at any given time, so try not to let road rage get the best of you and let Howard Stern keep you company.

The Brooklyn-Queens Expressway

Like its G train counterpart, the BQE suffers because the city tends not to invest funds into infrastructure that doesn't involve Manhattan. As a result, extended, slow, "emergency" repairs bring traffic to a standstill for long stretches of highway. And traffic is almost always jammed between the point at which the Williamsburg Bridge feeds into the BQE and the point at which the Kosciuszko Bridge crests, because the structure was built too steeply and trucks can only crawl up the Brooklyn side of the span. The fact that it's also the junction with the LIE doesn't help either. A great alternative is to exit at McGuinness Boulevard, cross the Pulaski Bridge, turn left anywhere and then right onto Vernon Boulevard. Vernon skirts the East River for nearly the entire length of Queens and is almost devoid of traffic lights.

The Van Wyck Expressway

Since the Van Wyck feeds into JFK, both directions are often jammed with airport traffic. Repairs also tend to clog this highway on a regular basis. So if you aren't heading to the airport in the south or trying to get on the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge in the north, Woodhaven Boulevard is a very quick route north and south through the middle of Queens.

Jackie Robinson Parkway

This is probably the least useful highway in all of Queens. It runs between one neighborhood in Brooklyn you don't want to be in (East New York) and another neighborhood in Queens you don't want to be in (Jamaica). It used to be more aptly named the Interborough Parkway, but it was renamed Jackie Robinson Parkway because half of it is in Brooklyn. Still, if you find yourself lost in East New York, Bushwick Avenue, Jamaica Avenue, Pennsylvania Avenue, Fulton Street, and Highland Boulevard will all lead you to the mega-intersection at the mouth of the

Jackie Robinson—which will then lead you to the Van Wyck and the airport, which is probably where you're heading anyway.

Cross-Island Expressway

If you're on your way from the Throgs Neck Bridge to play the ponies at Belmont Park Race Track, the Cross-Island is your move. The Cross-Island, which skirts the Queens border with Nassau County, is not particularly infamous for traffic. But trust 1010 WINS if they tell you to avoid it (*always* trust 1010 WINS), and opt for the Clearview Expressway or Francis Lewis Boulevard.

Grand Central Parkway

Zigging and zagging past Queens' landmarks such as Creedmoor State Hospital, Flushing Meadows Corona Park, Shea Stadium, LaGuardia Airport, and eventually feeding onto the Triborough Bridge, Grand Central Parkway is one of the most useful of Queens' highways. It connects with the BQE, the LIE, the Van Wyck, the Clearview, and the Cross Island. If you're heading eastward from the East River to LaGuardia and the Grand Central is jammed, take Hoyt Avenue to Astoria Boulevard and then take a left on 94th Street into the airport. If you're coming off the Queensboro-59th Street Bridge, take Northern Boulevard, then take a left at Junction Boulevard, and then get 94th Street from there.

Long Island Expressway

Anywhere near rush hour, there is no way to avoid staggering delays on the LIE. If you are coming off the BQE, stay on the lower level and you may save yourself about ten minutes of traffic, but you'll be in the soup soon enough. Queens Boulevard is a relatively quick alternative if you are coming off the Queensboro-59th Street Bridge and don't have plans to go past Flushing Meadows. Otherwise, the LIE, which is Route 495 all the way out to Riverhead at the eastern end of Long Island, is many times your only choice.

Belt/Southern Parkway

After looping around the southern tip of Brooklyn, the Belt crosses into Queens and takes you right past JFK. It then becomes the Southern State Parkway and, if you're in it for the long haul, will lead you on Route 27 all the way to the easternmost tip of Long Island at Montauk Point. But if you're just heading to JFK, you can take the alternate route of Atlantic Avenue and veer right at the poorly marked Conduit, which will lead you directly into the airport. This route allows you to bypass the highways completely.