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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS TO CELEBRATE THE
EXTENSION OF THE ASTORIA FERRY LINE**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you. Claudia, thank you. I wanted to start with my thankfulness – I'm going to actually to take this off, because we're all distanced enough – I want to express my thankfulness to Claudia Coger for everything that she does for this community. Let's thank her. She is a blessing for all of us. Thank you.

[Applause]

So, Astoria Houses matters – this is not a forgotten community, this is a community that deserves opportunity and connection to everything the city has to offer. And the whole larger Astoria neighborhood, which is so amazing, so vibrant, so much of what we love about New York City right here in this neighborhood. The idea of this ferry service was to create a connection that wasn't there before. And when we got together a few years ago with the first ferry service coming here, I remember you told me what a difference it was making in your life, Claudia, and for so many other people who spent so much time just getting to the subway – 15, 20 minutes, just to get to the subway, to wait for the subway, to get on a train, to go into Manhattan, as opposed to getting on a ferry right here at your doorstep and being connected to the whole rest of the city.

And then, today, doing something that makes so much sense, connecting right across there. And, you know, when I'm at Gracie Mansion, I can see here, it's right across. It's just feels like you can almost touch it. And I have to say, I want to give credit where credit is due to you, Claudia, to the residence association, to the Old Astoria Neighborhood Association, to so many other community leaders, community groups, to the elected officials – you know what they said? They said, hey, guys, there's an obvious solution here, just connect that way – not just up and down, just go across. It's only a few minutes away and it would open up a world of possibilities for everyone. People from Queens going to Manhattan, people from Manhattan coming to Queens. So, guess what – sometimes the voices of the people are heard. It took us a little while, but we realized, in fact, hey, that's pretty obvious we can do this. And I want to thank everyone who was a part of this, everyone in the City government, the Economic Development Corporation, everyone at NYC Ferry, because people said, hey, we can fix this, and they did.

Now, I'll finish with this point, because it's so important to understand the history – the history that there was a ferry connection until 1936. And Robert Moses who did some good things, but also did a lot of things that were very troubling and divisive in the city, he is the person who apparently gave the order to cancel that ferry service, take it away. Well, we're righting that wrong. Most of a hundred years later, we're righting that wrong and restoring that connection. And again, so many people worked hard. You're going to hear from Congresswoman Maloney

who fights so hard on so many fronts. And I want to give her a special thank you, because not only does she fight for this community, she is leading the charge nationally to protect something that matters to all of us – the Postal Service. Let's thank her for that.

[Applause]

But the bottom line is, we now are just closing this gap, making it work, bringing you, just in a few minutes, to where so many other opportunities exist. And is it important to people? Here's how we know – the service started Saturday – this weekend, 3,300 people used the service in the first weekend of its existence. So, we know as more and more people hear about it, learn about it, more and more people will be a part of it. They said in a movie once, if you build it, they will come. I have no question people will come in droves to take advantage of this new opportunity to be connected to all of this great city.

And with that, with great thanks to everyone at EDC who turns these visions into reality, my honor, to bring to you the Executive Director of the Ferry Division of our City Economic Development Corporation James Wong.

Thank you, James.

Executive Director James Wong, NYC Ferry Division, Economic Development Corporation: Thank you Mr. Mayor. First, I'd like to reiterate my thanks and congratulations to Miss. Claudia Coger, of the Astoria Houses Tenants Association, Richard Khuzami of the Old Astoria Neighborhood Association, and Bishop Taylor of Urban Unbound. Also, I think Queens CB1, Manhattan CB8, Council Members Constantinidis and Kallos, and all others who advocated tirelessly for this great new connection. And, of course, thank you, Mr. Mayor, for your leadership and commitment to NYC Ferry throughout its existence and for being here to celebrate with us today.

I also want to give a big shout out to the ferry team at EDC. We have transit planners, we have maritime folks, a construction team, our many colleagues behind the scenes we're working on the ground with communities to drive our day to day work with NYC Ferry and things that we are doing every single day. Whether it's a new link like this or a whole new route, like our plant expansions, EDC'ers have been at the forefront to make it happen. We're excited to have extended the Astoria route to serve Upper Manhattan, a new link that, as the Mayor mentioned, will take just four minutes. And it adds a new connection, keeps the same travel time for existing riders, and it comes at no new cost to the city. It's cost neutral, which is a real win-win for us.

Our goal for NYC Ferry remains the same. We are focused on providing transit options and connections in waterfront neighborhoods where the subway is far and the bus rides are long. And when the water's geography allows us to really solve a gap in the transit system, it can be a real game-changer. And the Astoria-East 90th connection does just that. These quick crossings from Brooklyn and Queens to Manhattan are some of the most highly utilized segments. And now, we are making over 400 of them a day. As the Mayor mentioned, this has been a very popular connection just in its first week. And we are seeing our ridership come back from the very low levels we saw throughout COVID. And in fact, nearly half of our ridership is back with masks and we're happy to welcome everyone on board. And we're not done either – we're equally as excited to be working hard on expanding to Soundview – the Soundview route to Throggs Neck,

and launching service to Staten Island and Coney Island next year. Residents of Coney Island will be able to get some Pier 11 in less than 40 minutes, a time that was previously thought impossible.

And so, we're so pleased to continue to grow NYC Ferry as New York is coming back. And, with that, I'd like to bring up Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, who I know is going to be excited to have a new connection, bringing her district closer together.

[Applause]

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