

Reversing The Brain Drain

Steve Bellone

Long Island is in the midst of historic change. For years, as other regions invested in areas like quality, affordable rental housing, mixed-use development, and public transit, LI was content with the status quo.

We sat silent as we watched droves of young people — educated in our outstanding public schools at significant expense — leave home and help create economic growth in other regions of our country.

The Regional Plan Association recently issued a report that called for a new approach to suburban growth, one that centers on transit-oriented development. It calls for better transit, more inclusive communities, more housing in downtowns — things that make our region more competitive for the young, high-knowledge, high-skill workers we need to grow our economy.

My administration has championed this approach for years through Suffolk County's Connect Long Island Plan. The plan champions innovation, collaboration, and smart- growth policies to make us a more attractive place to work, live, and raise a family.

Today, a new suburbia is on the horizon, and Suffolk County is leading the way.

In Wyandanch, we are close to completing the first phase of development for the \$600 million project near the Long Island Rail Road station. Governing magazine recently profiled the project as a national model for suburban revitalization.

Last November, we broke ground on the first phase of the \$650 million Ronkonkoma Hub mixed-use project. When this project is fully built out, it will deliver a true walkable downtown and create 18,000 jobs. And this is all happening right as the LIRR Double Track Project nears completion.

Recently, I joined Southampton Town Supervisor Jay Schneiderman to break ground on a \$30 million affordable housing project for middle-class families that is only 300 feet from the Speonk LIRR station.

These critical projects for our region are supported by the investment in transportation infrastructure by Gov. Andrew Cuomo. The Double Track and LIRR Expansion Project along the mainline, combined with East Side Access, will be game changers.

These projects collectively will significantly reduce commuting times to the city for thousands of Long Islanders. They also open up the Island for real reverse commuting that will make our region more attractive for businesses to locate here because they can now access the talent they need from the broader region. It will also open up the possibility for real intra-island commuting for the first time.

Our ambitious regional transportation and development plan, Connect Long Island, will spur economic growth while creating new north-south connections from one train line to another. And as the first suburban county in the state outside of New York City to embrace ride sharing, Suffolk residents are already enjoying additional transit options while providing the last mile connection to our train stations.

These are the types of projects that will reverse the brain drain and bring people back to LI. This is about protecting the suburban communities that we love by adapting to the transformative change happening in our world. As a parent of three young kids, I believe that this is about building a better future on LI for all our families.

Steve Bellone is the Suffolk County Executive.