



Assemblymember **DAN QUART**

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Using Surplus Funds for Second Avenue Subway

New York State is in the enviable position of deciding what to do with a projected \$5.1 billion surplus in next year's budget. Unsurprisingly, there is no shortage of ideas for exactly how to spend this money—many issue advocates see this as an opportunity to call for more funding for their pet cause. However, even in this time of plenty, it's important to be fiscally responsible and to use the surplus in the way that will be most effective. Best budget practices demand that these funds are not used to plug a hole in an operating budget, nor to kick start a new program that will incur further costs down the road. Instead, this one-time windfall should be used for one-time spending that will generate both revenue and economic development in future years.

There's a project in Manhattan that fits the bill—Phase 2 of the Second Avenue Subway.

The Second Avenue Subway is the most important transportation project in New York City right now. It brings a subway line to the Far East Side of Manhattan, which is currently severely underserved by public transit. The Lexington line, the only subway line spanning the 8 avenue blocks of the East Side, is chronically overcrowded. More than 1.3 million people ride this line each day—that's more than any other entire transit system in the United States!

When the first phase of the Second Avenue Subway finishes construction next year, it is predicted to begin relieving these problems. However, that first phase will only extend the Q line from 57th Street to 96th Street. To bring true transit equity to the East Side, it's essential to continue building the Second Avenue Subway from Hanover Square to 125th Street.

The MTA has begun planning the transition to Phase 2 of Second Avenue Subway construction, proposing just over \$1.5 billion of spending in the 2015-2019 Capital Plan. By continuing construction, we can ensure that we are not left with a three-stop subway, instead building the first expansion of the subway system since the 1940's.

Using surplus funds to pay for this piece of the MTA's Capital Plan will allow the MTA to focus their efforts on funding the rest of the plan, which is still short some \$15 billion. The Capital Plan includes a number of high-profile projects, like East Side Access, as well as regular maintenance needed to keep the system in a state of good repair. It will also disencumber the MTA's debt load, preventing an increase in debt service payments that would be likely to lead to a fare increase.

As subway service becomes accessible to more residents of the Far East Side, fare revenues will increase, since many New Yorkers who do not regularly use the system will, once it's right outside their door. It will also drive economic development in the new construction area; we've seen increased economic activity already on the Second Avenue corridor as construction has approached an end. Increasing the reach of the Second Avenue Subway will multiply these effects, generating revenue that will pay back the initial \$1.5 billion investment.

Most state budget processes are an exercise in what essential services will have to be cut because the money simply isn't there. This year, we in the state legislature are fortunate to have the opportunity to be able to choose how to spend a surplus. We should do so responsibly and fully fund the Second Avenue Subway.



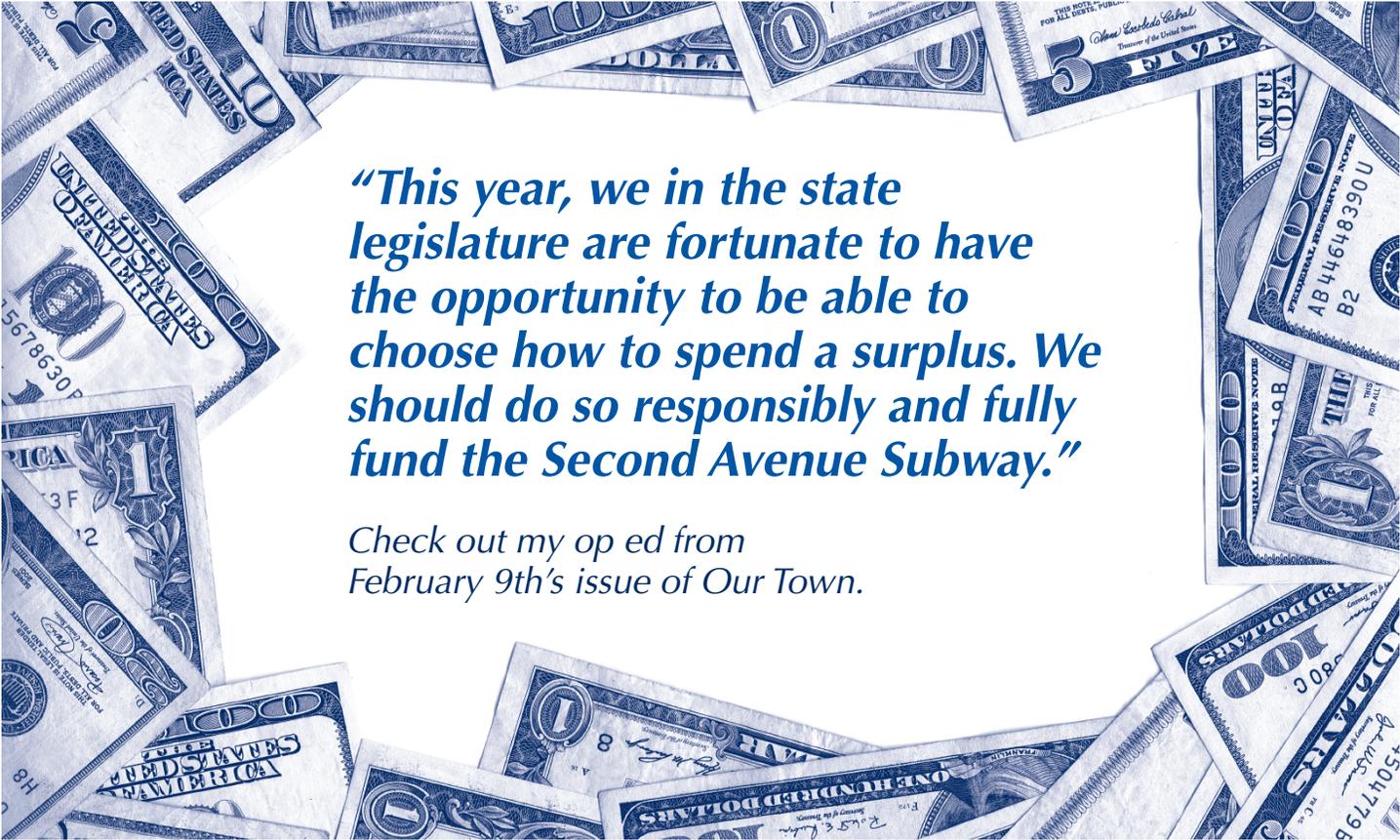
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A background image consisting of several US dollar bills of various denominations (one, five, ten, and hundred dollars) scattered across the page. The bills are slightly overlapping and appear to be floating or falling, creating a sense of movement and abundance.

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Check out my op ed from February 9th’s issue of Our Town.