

To: NYC Council - Committee on Technology
From: Noel Hidalgo, Executive Director of BetaNYC



Re: Link NYC Oversight Hearing

Wednesday, 18 April 2018

Chairman Koo & the Committee on Technology,

BetaNYC has fully supported Mayor Bloomberg's and Mayor de Blasio's reinvention of the municipal payphone. We are excited to see how Link NYC has transformed the urban landscape and helped bridge the digital divide. Five years into the deployment of Link NYC we have a few observations and concerns.

Link NYC positives:

- Devices bridge the digital divide and provide public internet access.
- Advertising has funded public housing connectivity.
- Links have become dynamic billboards of community information.
 - Links are frequently advertising community board meetings.
 - During this last participatory budgeting cycle, constituents could vote through the kiosks.
 - While subway service statuses are frequently available, we are super excited to support CM Lander's call for turning Links into BusTime countdown clocks.
 - Lastly, it is great to see that Links are used to provide updates on school closures and alternate side parking suspension.
- The desire to advertise community board websites on links has become a forcing factor to get community boards to have mobile friendly websites.
- Lastly, we heard from several community members that Links are helping run fiber across the city into areas that don't have fiber.

Link NYC concerns:

- This is a **lack of clarity around how the Links watch the streets**. We've heard conflicting stories about cameras, microphones, bluetooth beacons, and air quality sensors. To build the public's trust, it is paramount that CityBridge details exactly what is in the machine, how those tools are used to secure the machine, and where that data goes — all of this information needs to be on the Link NYC website.
- **Lack of transparency or public participation around updating the privacy policy.** We've already seen one privacy policy revision and echo Electronic Frontier Foundation's statement “[there are] no means for New Yorkers to participate in decisions about how data from Link kiosks will be used, with whom it will be shared, for how long it will be retained, or whether the parameters under which it is initially collected might conceivably expand in the future.”¹
- **Clarity and affordability for local businesses to advertise on Links.** Right now, there is very little transparency on who is advertising on Links and how much revenue is generated by municipal advertisements. On the LinkNYC website, advertising packages should be clear and affordable. Are they still cost prohibitive for local businesses?²

Council Opportunities:

Some BetaNYC community members have expressed the desire for Council to make LinkNYC focus their installations into underserved neighborhoods — every NYCHA development should be ringed with Links — there should be Links outside of every library, school, community board district office, council member district office, and senior center — any place that routinely hosts community meetings should have a link.

Fundamentally, Links bring more than wi-fi. These high speed internet connections provide BetaNYC the foundation to host our digital civics trainings. We need Links to be conveniently located so we can empower more New Yorkers with digital literacy.

Lastly, Links help cover the city in high-speed fiber. This provides opportunities for local businesses to tap and provide conduits for future expansion. As Council hosts future oversight hearings, conversations around fiber and public access to that fiber should be included.

Thank you.

¹ <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2017/09/linknyc-improves-privacy-policy-yet-problems-remain>

² <http://silicon.nyc/local-business-advertising-linknyc-wifi/>