

DOING BUSINESS ON LONG ISLAND

■ By **Nancy Rauch Douzinas**

The Long Island Index started capturing and disseminating data 10 years ago with the idea that a well-informed community could work together, and in new ways.

We're now seeing that collective reality achieve critical mass, with the prospects for doing business on the Island increasing dramatically along with it.

The challenge now is to continue to collaborate, connect and create – all with the goal of making Long Island part of the global economic leadership of the 21st century. That, too, is achievable.

The exciting prospects for doing business here stem especially from three key local assets: our renowned centers of innovation, our close proximity to New York City and our broader involvement in the dynamic economy of the metropolitan area. The greater New York City region is as well-positioned as any in the world to lead the 21st century global economy, and Long Island's challenge is to benefit as much as possible from that potential. That's where the three C's – collaborate, connect and create – become crucial. All three are underway on Long Island, but each must be pursued even more aggressively.

The best single example of effective collaboration has been Long Island's Regional Economic Development Council – initiated by Gov. Andrew Cuomo and led by regional council co-chairmen Kevin Law, president of the Long Island Association, and Stuart Rabinowitz, president of Hofstra University. What's remarkable is not only the collective vision that has emerged from the council but the inclusion of representatives from so many sectors: business and labor, research institutions and universities, civic and community development organizations, and local and state elected officials from across Long Island. It's the power of that collaboration that should be reproduced and widely distributed – along with the shared direction that the broad consensus around its recommendations provides.

The regional council is not alone in demonstrating the value of collaboration. Another example is Accelerate Long Island, which reflects the collective aspirations of many of Long Island's world-class centers of research and innovation, including, Brookhaven National Laboratory, CA Technologies, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Hofstra University, the North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System and Stony Brook University. Together, they offer a united voice for the resources of innovation that are so crucial to Long Island's potential in a global economy.

That leads to Long Island's second challenge – to better “connect” our extraordinary resources. A primary aspect of that challenge is to enhance public transit, thereby connecting more easily our resources for innovation on Long Island and linking them more closely to other potential innovators, business partners and employees in the region.

We must increasingly see Long Island as a pivotal component of the metropolitan area's



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economy. It's no longer a suburb; it's now a partner in innovation for the rest of the region. It must function seamlessly that way – without sacrificing our rightly celebrated lifestyle or becoming indistinguishable from other areas. Long Island must compete aggressively for the jobs on which our families and our lifestyle depend.

In that respect, we have fallen behind Westchester County and southern Connecticut in one crucial aspect: reverse commuting. White Plains, N.Y., and Greenwich and Stamford in Connecticut are all dramatically better connected to Manhattan than Long Island is, and their thriving economies show it. The Long Island Rail Road is one of our greatest and most underappreciated assets, but its reach and capacity have remained unchanged since it first connected to Manhattan's Penn Station in 1910.

We need to make it easier for people to commute by train to Long Island for work, just as Long Islanders have historically commuted to New York City. It's crucial for our employers – and prospective employers – to have access to the best talent for their jobs, no matter where that talent lives. If we don't provide that access, our competitors will, and the jobs will go to them.

Being better able to attract and grow businesses and innovative talent will better position Long Island to “create” the future that we want. To do so, we should focus on creating two things in particular: an environment in which entrepreneurship and start-up businesses are prized, and transit-related downtowns combining housing, businesses and

entertainment. Neither of these concepts is new to Long Island, but both need to be accelerated rapidly.

We need to expand Long Island's innovation ecosystem, building upon our reputation for creating entities that, in the words of the regional council's one-year progress report, “produced the aircraft that helped win a world war and first put men on the moon and ... cracked the genetic code.” We need to ensure that Long Island's expertise is shared through mentoring with aspiring entrepreneurs, is fostered through accessible facilities for startups and is commercialized through access to necessary resources.

We also need to ensure that Long Island provides the public transit-related downtown options for living and working that younger people seek – options that make it easy to get back and forth to centers of innovation on Long Island, in New York City and elsewhere in the region.

Such downtowns already exist on Long Island – Garden City, Huntington and Rockville Center, for instance – but we must make a higher priority of attractive development of multiuse downtown areas with easy rail access. Examples underway include Wyandanch Rising and the Ronkonkoma transit village project.

There has never been a more exciting time for doing business on Long Island. We have the potential for global economic leadership and innovation on a new scale. Our challenge is to collaborate, connect and create on a new scale as well. Together we can produce and sustain the jobs and the lifestyle that attracted us all to Long Island in the first place.

Douzinas is president of the Rauch Foundation, publisher of the Long Island Index.

Long Island's renowned centers of innovation and close proximity to New York City are key assets