

## Kings Avenue Development Going Up Fast



*Kings Avenue, near the city's Southbank, is the site of two future Hilton Hotels and a mixed-use development*

It seems like just yesterday that ground was broken for two new Hilton-brand hotels being built adjacent to JTA's Kings Avenue parking facility. In fact, it has now been over four months and the site has dramatically changed.

"Everything is moving along nicely," said Hank Fonde, Senior Vice President and Director of Hotel Development for Landcom Hospitality Management. "This time next year we hope to be moving furniture into the hotels."

The site will be home to two Hilton-brand hotels – a Homewood Suites and a Hilton Garden Inn. Combined, the hotels will offer 221 rooms on eight floors that feature flat screen TVs with high-definition programming, fitness center, meeting rooms, a restaurant and more. Adjacent to the hotels another development is planned featuring a residential component, restaurants and retail.

"Combining the benefits of public transit and private development is exactly what we are looking to do with our transportation plan," said Cleve Warren, JTA Board Chairman.

"Kings Avenue Station, along with the planned developments along Riverside Avenue, are all perfect examples of how JTA is working with private developers to ensure transit becomes a featured element in their overall design."

Meanwhile, JTA is continuing to work with the Kings Avenue development teams on possible further enhancements to the Kings Avenue site.

"We have been looking at several possible extensions of the Skyway from the Kings Avenue Station," said Scott Clem, JTA's Director of Strategic Planning and Research. "One concept would extend the Skyway southward under Interstate 95 down to the hotel site while another plan calls for expansion all the way to Atlantic Boulevard."

Clem says this concept would benefit many and falls directly in line with the Authority's goals as it pertains to transit-oriented development. "We haven't gone any further than a concept on this expansion, but I think you can look at it and see that there are benefits to a project like this," Clem said. "It certainly benefits the new Hilton Hotels currently under construction. Skyway expansion into San Marco would give both guests and employees quick and direct access to retail shops and restaurants they don't currently have. Of course that benefits those retailers as well."

Should this concept, or one similar to it, become reality, it also opens up new mobility options for residents in two vital areas – San Marco and Downtown. Residents from both areas could enjoy quick, efficient and inexpensive travel back and forth between those areas. This could also offer an economic benefit to business in both sectors of town.

Already part of the plan is to have a paved street between the two hotels and the existing parking garage to allow JTA buses (including future rapid transit vehicles) to serve the area in addition to any Skyway expansion. One underutilized area that will definitely benefit from the Kings Avenue Station project is the Kings Avenue parking garage. Despite lower than market rate parking, only a fraction of more than 1600 spaces are currently leased. But as part of the agreement with the Hilton developers, the first floor of the garage will be leased out for use by hotel guests, employees and other visitors, infusing additional income to the JTA. Factoring the additional build out of the site, including residences, restaurants and retail establishments, the under-used garage should fill up quickly.

"The Kings Avenue garage is what makes this site perfect for us," Fonde said. "It would have been cost prohibitive for us to build parking at this or any other location. Being able to lease space at an existing structure turned out to be a wonderful solution for us."



*Workers build the infrastructure of two Hilton Hotels*