

Several parties may have a say on future of Aqueduct

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This artist's rendering provided by the Genting Group shows a \$4 billion convention center and casino planned for the Aqueduct Racetrack in the Queens borough of New York. The Malaysian company's plan for the outskirts of New York City could be the biggest shot fired yet in a tourism arms race that has seen a growing number of eastern states embrace gambling as a way to lure visitors and drum up revenue. (AP Photo/Genting Group)

New Jersey authorities, New York City officials and state boards may all have a say in the "international destination" complex Gov. Andrew Cuomo is touting for Queens. For instance, it is likely that gaming and tourism interests in the Garden State will express concerns about the Cuomo-negotiated Aqueduct Race Track development — an expansion of the massive racino, the creation of up to 3,000 new hotel rooms and construction of North America's biggest convention center. The proposed project could decimate Atlantic City casinos and cut into other business between Jersey City and the

shore, according to gaming representatives and development officials. Will the six New Jersey commissioners on the [Port Authority of New York and New Jersey](#) approve giving up 22 acres next to [JFK Airport](#) that the Malaysian gaming corporation Genting desires for its 3.8 million-square-foot convention center at the [Big A](#)? Will New Jersey Gov. [Chris Christie](#) go for it? Representatives of Christie and the Port Authority would not discuss the matter last week.

Genting likes to set up casinos at international gateways: Its giant casinos in Macau and Singapore came first. Now the Malaysian company targets Miami and New York City. Cuomo announced his agreement with Genting on Aqueduct in his State of the State speech, stunning several lawmakers. Last week, Cuomo began reaching out to them. His staff briefed top [Senate and Assembly](#) aides about the project, and Cuomo sent a letter to the legislative leaders saying he wants to work cooperatively on any deals involving Genting.

In the letter, Cuomo said the project is a hallmark of his drive to create jobs to help New York's economy and suggests he could make it happen without legislative support. The New York Racing Association controls most of the land around the site, except for the 22 acres the Port Authority controls which is in the path of the proposed development.

In a twist often found in the Capitol, Cuomo's father was behind the state's loss of control of those acres. In the early 1990s and dealing with budget problems, Gov. [Mario M. Cuomo](#) required NYRA to sell the land to the Port Authority. The authority board voted to buy it for \$50 million. NYRA turned the money over to the state treasury, as directed by the Cuomo administration; the parcel has never been used for much of anything other than excess NYRA parking. The authority transferred the land to New York City and leased it back for potential usage by JFK. A city official said the authority renews the lease every five years, and only for parking. Developers would have to bid on taking over control, an official said. Genting says it could adapt plans and just build a big convention center on the 67 acres it is leasing at Aqueduct under its racino deal.

But the state [Franchise Oversight Board](#) holds the responsibility under law for all real estate development at Belmont and Aqueduct, and for ensuring a competitive bidding for development rights. Lottery Director [Gordon Medenica](#), who is on the FOB, said he expects several interested parties will have a role eventually.

NYRA might also be brought in. A Genting associate said the company wants to take over the entire Aqueduct track and move winter racing to Belmont. Genting's [Stefan Friedman](#) denied that, adding "We're not going to get into a discussion about the future of racing."

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