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Your Advocate for Bicycling, Walking and Sensible Transportation

New York City Council Transportation Committee hearing on:

Introduction 567 in relation to requiring the department of transportation to conduct studies of traffic accident locations

City Hall, November 8, 2007

Testimony of
Brooke DuBose, Transportation Planner, Transportation Alternatives

Good afternoon, my name is Brooke DuBose and I am a staff planner at Transportation Alternatives, New York City's advocates for safer walking and bicycling.

Each year in New York City over 12,000 people are struck by motor vehicles and injured, often fatally. That breaks down to roughly 33 pedestrians and cyclists hit every day here. This staggering figure alone should make remedying this problem the most serious public health crusade of our time. With almost no exception these debilitating injuries and deaths are preventable through basic changes to the street. We not only know how to build and retrofit streets to make them safer, but we know which streets need to be changed first and which populations are the most vulnerable.

Each year the same handful of streets in each borough claim the majority of pedestrian and cyclist injuries and fatalities. In Manhattan, for example, it is almost always some variety of the 15 wide cross-town streets (14th, 23rd, 34th, etc.) intersecting the avenues. In Brooklyn, Eastern and Ocean Parkways are always on the list of worst corridors for crashes. Fordam Road and Gun Hill Road always make the list in the Bronx, for Queens it is Queens Boulevard and Roosevelt Avenue, and Hylan Boulevard is that most dangerous street on Staten Island. There, last Monday (October 29, 2007), 42-year-old Maria Alvarenga was struck and killed in a hit-and-run crash by a speeding driver.

Ten years ago, Queens Boulevard was known across the country as the "Boulevard of Death," and the primary reason Queens Boulevard has lost its place as the worst road for pedestrian injuries and fatalities for the entire city is because these basic engineering improvements are finally being implemented.

(Over please)

It is essential to immediately work on those streets that currently claim so many lives. And it is important that DOT work with the community boards and local elected officials and citizens on the plans for these streets. Then the number of injuries and fatalities will immediately decrease.

Similarly, we know that the same demographic groups of New Yorkers are involved in the majority of pedestrian crashes each year. It is the very young and the very old who need the most protected space and time to cross the street. Between 1995 and 2005, children ages 1-14 years made up 20% of the city's population and comprised 29% of all pedestrian crash hospitalizations, and seniors, age 65 and over, made up 12% of the population and 18% of all pedestrian hospitalizations. So, together, children and seniors make up one third of New York's population but account for one-half of all serious pedestrian casualties. This is why initiatives like the City's Safe Routes to School traffic safety program and Transportation Alternatives' Safe Routes for Seniors campaign are so important and need considerable funding. Transportation Alternatives believes that by making streets safe for the most vulnerable users, they will be safer for everyone.

We know that the Department of Transportation has programs like Safe Routes to Schools, Safe Routes to Transit, Bicycle Network Development and Traffic Calming that work on the citywide, neighborhood and street level to make safety improvements. We do not know how the Transportation and Police Departments and, increasingly, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene work together to review crash data quickly, reconcile high crash locations with existing projects and work interventions for these locations into their projects, nor do we know the agencies' policies for prioritizing locations that do not fall within existing projects.

Do we need to have more urgent and exhaustive investigations into crashes? Definitely. Does City Hall need to treat the current rate at which cyclists and pedestrians are struck and killed in New York City as an epidemic? Absolutely. Do agencies need to work with communities from day one to fix dangerous streets? Yes. Does it make sense to legislate the actions of several City agencies without their input? No.

More than ever, City Hall is making non-polluting, environmentally-friendly and healthy transportation the priority in New York City, so as agencies work hard to improve and promote walking, bicycling and transit, now is the opportunity for the Council to bring best practices from other world cities to New York, work with agencies to adapt to our streets and institutionalize them, so they are lasting programs that will work over many years to transform our streets and improve our city.

Thank you.

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New York City Council Transportation Committee hearing on:
Introduction 537

City Hall, November 8th, 2007

Testimony of
Noah Budnick, Deputy Director, Transportation Alternatives

Good afternoon. My name is Noah Budnick and I am the Deputy Director of Transportation Alternatives. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

In recent years, Transportation Alternatives has taken a keen interest in the impact parking on New York City's congestion crisis. Efforts to manage traffic, like Mayor Bloomberg's congestion pricing initiative, represent critical step in taking control New York City streets. But these efforts will be most successful if complimented by reforming the way we manage parking.

Poorly managed on-street parking encourages needless driving and can negatively impact everything from delivery schedules and air quality. Unfortunately, in our efforts to better understand New York City's parking problems, we have run into a dearth of information regarding the supply of parking, and the regulations governing that supply.

This incomplete picture makes it difficult for City officials to accurately answer elementary questions, such as whether New York is gaining or losing parking capacity. The relationship between the price of off-street spaces and those at parking meters, as well as how the supply of off-street and on-street parking interact, are also poorly understood.

As New York City considers long-overdo initiatives like implementing residential parking permits, developing market-based pricing for on-street parking and reigning in the rampant abuse of government-issued parking placards, information about parking supply and demand is critical.

The direct relationship between parking supply and drivers on the road has been well established. Under the 1979 State Implementation Plan of the Clean Air Act, the EPA required the City to complete a study of off-street parking facilities in New York City to monitor this relationship. This study has still not been completed by the Department of City Planning, leaving lawmakers unable properly regulate parking supply. Thankfully, DEC Commissioner Grannis has recently requested that the New York City Department of Environmental Protection complete this study. We urge the Department of City Planning to quickly follow through with this request to aid NYC lawmakers manage the congestion crisis.

We all bear witness to the cost of ignorance: millions of miles driven in search of an under-priced parking spots, rampant traffic congestion and streets too noisy and crowded with cars to support even the most basic street life. Legislation that begins an inventory of all New York City parking spaces, including metered and alternate-side spaces, as well as public and private parking facilities, is the first step towards making parking policy part of the solution to congestion, not a root cause of it. An inventory of all parking placards issued by the City is also essential. With these tools in hand, we can move forward with modernizing parking regulations and adjusting the price of on-street parking to reduce congestion.

As we go about the long-overdo business of managing our congestion crisis, lack of parking information looms large. Parking reform could be a key complimentary policy to congestion pricing and expansion of mass transit. We urge the Council to take up measures which will contribute to the better management of our streets.

Thank you.

Testimony of Manhattan Borough President

Scott M. Stringer

Before

Joint Meeting of Committees on Transportation and Technology in Government

Thursday, November 8, 2007

Good afternoon. Thank you Chairpersons Brewer and Liu for the opportunity to testify today in support of your proposal to improve the reporting and analysis of traffic accidents in New York City. I believe that pedestrian safety must be paramount in our city's transportation planning, and Intro 567 is an important step in the right direction.

Although pedestrians far outnumber drivers in New York City, our roads were designed for cars - with streets too wide and sidewalks too narrow to safely accommodate pedestrian traffic. For decades, the Department of Transportation (DOT) has focused one-sidedly on the rapid and efficient movement of vehicles through our city streets; recently, however, we have seen a much needed change, with the city spending more time and resources to ensure that New York develops in a healthy and sustainable way. The introduction of PlaNYC and the appointment of a pedestrian-friendly DOT Commissioner has been followed by plans for pedestrian plazas, hundreds of miles of new bike lanes, and congestion pricing, which would encourage alternative modes of transportation such as walking and biking.

I applaud Chairpersons Brewer and Liu for taking leadership to ensure that these changes are reflected in the administrative code. While the City has made great strides in reducing the number of pedestrians killed in recent years, the loss of a life due to traffic is both tragic and unacceptable. We must do more.

There is hard evidence to support bold measures for pedestrian safety. Thousands of pedestrians have been injured or killed by vehicles in the five boroughs. Half of these accidents occur in only 10% of the city's intersections and a significant percentage occur while pedestrians cross with signal right-of-way. As injuries and fatalities continue to occur on notoriously dangerous roads, I can't help but wonder why! Another injury or death should not be necessary to prompt safety measures.

I ask the DOT to take greater proactive steps in ensuring pedestrian safety: redesign dangerous streets; extend the curbs; add speed bumps; and introduce more sophisticated traffic signals. The new buffered bike lane that DOT built along 9th Avenue between 16th and 23rd Streets is an excellent model for what the 'new' DOT is capable of, and what I hope to see become standard practice. As traffic calming solutions are developed, I cannot underestimate the value of vetting these improvements through community process. While DOT has the expertise of engineers, data, and resources, local residents offer their daily experience in the neighborhoods they call home, and with that experience

comes invaluable information about the effectiveness of our street design and ideas for improvement.

New York is a walking city – that's what makes it so vibrant and accessible. Walking is what knits our diverse community together, introduces neighbors to each other, and promotes healthy living. We, the leadership of this city, must do everything within reach to ensure that New York streets remain walkable and safe for New Yorkers today and for generations to come. I applaud the sponsors of Intro 567 for helping make this happen. Thank you.

DAVID WOLOCH
DEPUTY COMMISSIONER
NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

HEARING BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEES ON TRANSPORTATION AND
TECHNOLOGY IN GOVERNMENT
NOVEMBER 8, 2007

Good afternoon, I am David Woloch, Deputy Commissioner for External Affairs at the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) and with me here today is Michael Primeggia DOT's Deputy Commissioner for Traffic Operations. Thank you for inviting us here today to testify on Intro 537 that relates to online access to parking restriction information and Proposed Intro 567-A that relates to studies of traffic accident locations.

Let me begin by discussing Intro 537. This bill would require DOT to make available on its website information on parking restrictions in the City that would be searchable by each City block. It would also require DOT to immediately update the website whenever there is a change in parking restrictions whether permanent or temporary. We are in full agreement with the Council that making such information available to the public is valuable and, in fact, we are already in the process of making this a reality.

DOT's existing computerized sign information database called STATUS is an old mainframe system that was brought on-line in the 1980s and requires its users to be specially trained on how to use it. This system was designed to assist DOT in maintaining records of traffic regulatory devices installed on City streets. It was not designed to allow a user to create their own queries or seek parking information for long stretches of roadway or geographical areas. Essentially, it is not usable by those who are not trained and only a small number of DOT personnel and Department of Finance Administrative Law Judges are able to use the system. Given all its limitations, it is not feasible to bring DOT's current STATUS system online for general use and therefore, it obviously would not meet the requirements of this legislation.

However, as I noted, a new procurement to modernize the system, correct its defects and make it more robust is funded and in the works. We have bid out a contract, reviewed the proposals and selected a consultant who will develop this new Sign Information Management System (SIMS). We anticipate the contract award process to be completed by February 15th and then it will take approximately 18 months from this date to get the new system fully developed and up and running.

Once it is completed, SIMS will allow DOT to better manage information and workflow regarding traffic control devices including signs and roadway markings. This new system will enable DOT to optimize our operations by keeping track of installation requests, generating work orders that provide direction regarding where and how the traffic control device should be installed, modified or removed. It will also manage inventory information for traffic control devices and materials needed for installation, and field crews will be able to access their assigned work orders in SIMS.

One of the benefits and adaptability of this new SIMS system is that it will allow for sign information to be made available to the public through DOT's website, so that members of the public will be able to run their own queries and obtain parking regulation information for large or small areas or by specific block as contemplated in Intro 537. SIMS will be a web-based application with mapping capabilities that will allow users to view locations in a map based format. They will be able to query any location and view the regulations at a specified location and by time of day or day of the week. We hope that this will help address any confusion as to the parking regulations on particular blocks.

In conclusion, while meeting its deadline is not feasible, DOT supports the intent of Intro 537 and we are moving towards making its provisions a reality.

Now let me turn to Proposed Intro 567-A. This bill would require DOT, within seven days of receiving an accident report, to begin a study at all traffic accident locations that involve a pedestrian injury or pedestrian fatality or where there is a pattern of motor vehicle accidents, defined as three or more traffic accidents involving motor vehicles, but not pedestrians, within a 60 day period. It would additionally require DOT to conduct the study within a 60 day period and forward a copy of the report

and any recommendations to the Police Department, and to the Council Member and Community Board in whose district the accident occurred.

First, let me start by noting that we share the Council's concerns for traffic safety, particularly for pedestrians. Our transportation network is complex and we are tasked with effectively balancing and prioritizing the needs of pedestrians, mass transit users, cyclists, and motorists. But while our street space is shared by many, New York is above all a walking City -- and safety is our top priority.

We have done a lot and come a long way in ensuring the safety of all our roadway users. Over the last ten years, total fatalities declined from 493 in 1997 to 321 in 2006 – a 35 percent drop. With regard to pedestrian fatalities in New York, over the past fifteen years such fatalities have declined at a rate more than three times faster than the national average. The number of pedestrians killed in the City dropped by 54 percent, from 366 in 1990 to 167 in 2006 and, to date, there have been 108 in 2007. Over the last six years, pedestrian fatalities have been at their lowest levels ever, since the City started keeping track in 1910. With regard to injuries there were 1,849 total Type A (serious) pedestrian injuries in 1997 and 1,357 such injuries in 2006 – representing a 27 percent drop.

It is important to note that when comparing New York City to the country's ten largest cities, New York City ranked number one in safety over the past ten years when fatalities are considered in relation to population. What is more noteworthy, however, is that New York City not only has consistently ranked at number one with the lowest fatality rate, but also showed the largest improvement over the past ten years. While our fatalities decreased by 34 percent, Chicago and Los Angeles both only went down by 17 percent.

Before I discuss DOT's approach to safety, let me first discuss the bill. As we have discussed at previous hearings, the best use of our resources is to focus on where the safety needs are the greatest. The apparent premise of the bill – that all accidents are the result of a roadway problem – is simply false. Many accidents, in fact, are attributable to other circumstances, such as red light running or driving while intoxicated. A single crash could happen at the City's safest intersection.

The bill would require DOT to conduct traffic studies for approximately 1,300 locations with three or more accidents within sixty days and for approximately 12,000 pedestrian injury locations – work that would be impossible to accomplish with existing staff and resources. The total of approximately 13,500 locations that would need to be studied each year would require an influx of additional staff – an additional 180, including field staff, analysts, engineers and supervisors at a yearly cost of approximately $9 million. In addition, vast amounts of data collection would probably be needed in order to conduct these detailed studies at a cost of over $30 million. Therefore, the total cost to implement this bill could be over $40 million annually. Even with these resources, it would be difficult to always meet the two month timetable the bill sets out for each analysis.

Most important, the preparation of traffic studies for this large universe of locations would not make good use of DOT's resources as a means to enhance safety, nor is it a good way of judging where to target improvements; in fact, it would draw much needed resources away from locations where we can make a greater impact. DOT takes a more focused approach as to where to target its safety efforts --- efforts that have been successful and which we have discussed at previous hearings.

Our focused approach includes much of the day-to-day work undertaken by the Department. Traffic safety, in fact, is an integral component of virtually all the work done by DOT's Bureau of Traffic Operations in the course of its regular work. For example, when roadway markings are re-installed following the resurfacing of a street, the markings are enhanced to bring them to current standards, which might mean installation of STOP lines and STOP word messages at crosswalks, or installation of "high-visibility" crosswalks. When signs need to be replaced the replacement signs utilize sheeting that has better retroreflective properties. Similarly, when bike lanes need to be refurbished, they are enhanced to provide greater width and protective buffers, whenever feasible.

During routine investigations to improve operations of an intersection or blockfront, the safety of motorists and pedestrians is given highest priority. This might result in reducing conflicts between turning vehicles and pedestrians by the installation of measures to improve visibility including Leading

Pedestrian Intervals (LPIs) or "daylighting" parking controls. Where illegal double parking is chronic creating dangerous movement of vehicles, truck loading zones or other changes to parking controls are considered.

Additionally, each year, DOT selects locations Citywide for traffic safety improvements. These locations are selected based on historical accident data and recommendations from the Police Department, local elected officials, the public and other governmental organizations. Where we focus our efforts, we conduct an extensive historical accident review at each location to identify those factors that contribute to accidents. We also concentrate our resources on conducting studies and making improvements to enhance pedestrian and vehicle safety along corridors. Recent examples include a portion of Atlantic Avenue and Vanderbilt Avenue both in Brooklyn, Shore Front Parkway in Queens, Lafayette Avenue in the Bronx, and Hylan Boulevard on Staten Island.

Our efforts in this regard are well documented. As you may recall, at the April hearing we handed out our publication "Safe Streets NYC: Traffic Safety Improvements in New York City" to the Transportation Committee Members which provides examples of our many traffic safety engineering initiatives. This document can also be found on DOT's website. Initiatives such as those mentioned in this document have helped drive down the fatality and injury numbers here in the City.

We are also in the midst of a sea change, when it comes to making permanent safety improvements in our streets. In particular, we are for the first time working with DDC to implement projects specifically for traffic calming work. Our Safe Routes to School Program which has already led to short term improvements around 135 schools, will include over 775 new neckdowns and 80 new pedestrian medians and refuge islands. Similarly the Downtown Brooklyn Traffic Calming work, with construction beginning in July, will include an additional 250 neckdowns. In addition, as part of our Safe Routes to Transit Program we improving access to bus stops through the installation of sidewalks, and improving the safety of waiting bus passengers at stops located under elevated subways by installing medians.

Whenever possible both in our short term work and in DDC's capital projects program we are pursuing the creation of "complete streets" – streets that take into account the provision of safe space for all users.

We are also piloting new treatments as a means of enhancing pedestrian safety. As many of you know, last year we also began testing pedestrian countdown signals to assess their impact on the behavior of pedestrians and motorists. We are now in the process of implementing a more extensive follow-up study where we will install a total of 180 pedestrian countdown units that will evaluate 24 signalized intersections along five commercial corridors, one in each borough.

In addition, we have begun a Reduced Speed Zones Pilot Study to evaluate the effectiveness of reducing speed limits around schools. The first phase tested ten locations in the Bronx, and phase two which is currently in progress, is testing ten additional Citywide locations.

Among our new initiatives, we are currently developing a Safe Routes for Seniors Program that will prioritize a number of senior safety districts around the City. We have already begun studying the Coney Island section of Brooklyn as part of a pilot and expect to have our full program developed by the end of the year.

Lastly, I would like to note that we have initiated a comprehensive study of all pedestrian fatalities and serious injuries in the City over the last five years to give us an even more thorough understanding of how we can better protect pedestrians on our streets. This follows our bicycle fatality report that we released last year with the Health Department. The goal of this new study is to identify priority locations for pedestrian safety engineering treatments and to identify priority treatments by location type. Through the University Transportation Research Center (UTRC), I am pleased to report that we have since selected the Rudin Center at New York University to undertake this study.

All this is not to say that we should be resting on our laurels. To the contrary, we must constantly be developing and implementing new and more aggressive strategies. As we move forward

with PlaNYC and preparing for the growth we will continue to face, Commissioner Sadik-Khan will be particularly focused on building on our traffic safety successes and expanding our safety programs. Accordingly as part of our development of a new agency strategic plan, we expect to have agency safety plans developed by early next year.

Thank you for inviting us to testify before you today and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.