

**DAVID WOLOCH
DEPUTY COMMISSIONER
NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
HEARING BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEES ON TRANSPORTATION & AGING
DECEMBER 3, 2009**

Good morning, I am David Woloch, Deputy Commissioner for External Affairs at the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT). With me here today is Gerard Soffian, Acting Deputy Commissioner for Traffic Operations, Ann Marie Doherty, Chief of Research Implementation and Safety and Caryn Resnick, Deputy Commissioner for External Affairs at the Department for the Aging (DFTA). Thank you for inviting us here to discuss DOT's Safe Streets for Seniors Program.

Ensuring the safety of our streets, throughout the neighborhoods of all five boroughs, is DOT's top priority. Safe Streets for Seniors, the largest program of its kind ever undertaken in the United States, targets the most vulnerable New Yorkers, senior citizens. Our safety work in recent years has yielded enormous dividends – traffic fatalities in New York City have decreased 30% since 2001 – and hit an all time low in 2007. However, individuals 65 and over, who make up a mere 12% of the City's population were involved in nearly 39% of the City's fatal pedestrian crashes. In 2008 New York City became the first major U.S. city to create a pedestrian safety program targeted specifically for seniors, aimed at lowering their overrepresentation in pedestrian fatalities and to improve their public health and mobility.

As part of Safe Streets for Seniors, DOT used Geospatial analysis to identify 25 senior pedestrian focus areas (SPFAs) that have a high density of senior pedestrian fatalities and severe injuries. Engineers have been and will continue to evaluate pedestrian conditions in these neighborhoods from a senior's perspective and make engineering changes such as extending the time pedestrians are allotted to cross the street and shortening crossing distances, altering curbs and sidewalks, restricting vehicle turns, and narrowing roadways.

Detailed crash data analysis reveals that a high percentage of pedestrian senior fatalities and severe injuries have occurred in crosswalks during the pedestrian phase, with driver failure to yield or driver error reported as contributing factors. These crash attributes indicate that senior pedestrians do not have enough time to cross the street, are not sufficiently visible to drivers, and that turning vehicles are a particular safety threat. Site visits also reveal broken or missing pedestrian ramps, faded markings, and poor drainage blocking crosswalks.

Accordingly, DOT has developed a toolbox to create safer, more accessible crossings by:

- installing LPIs (Leading Pedestrian Intervals) to provide conflict free crossing time;
- initiating longer flashing “don’t-walk” phases to accommodate slower walkers;
- adding crossing time where feasible;
- re-designing roadways to reduce crossing distances and slow turning vehicles;
- installing high visibility crosswalks;
- upgrading pedestrian infrastructure with new pedestrian ramps, curb extensions and green refuge islands;
- and initiating traffic calming measures such as narrowed roadways with left turn bays or buffered parking lanes.

With the help of transportation consultants, DOT designs SPFA improvements, presents them to local community boards for input, and constructs projects in house or in coordination with the Department of Design and Construction (DDC).

To date, improvements in six SPFAs have been implemented: Brighton Beach in Brooklyn, Lower East Side in Manhattan, Flushing in Queens, University Heights/Fordham and

Pelham Gardens in the Bronx, and Hylan-New Dorp in Staten Island. Our preliminary before and after crash analysis for our pilot areas shows the following improvements:

- Pedestrian injuries decreased by 49% on a portion of Ocean Parkway where pedestrian refuge islands were installed and the roadway was narrowed in the Brighton Beach SPFA,
- Pedestrian injuries decreased by 34% on Chrystie Street in the Lower East Side SPFA, where a 'road diet' including pedestrian refuge islands and bike lanes were installed.
- Pedestrian injuries decreased by 20% at the Main Street/Kissena Boulevard intersection in the Flushing SPFA where a pedestrian refuge island was installed and signal timing changes were implemented.

Not only have we seen improvements for seniors and other pedestrians, but bicyclist and vehicle occupant injuries have decreased subsequent to the completion of these projects. Despite successes at these locations, we will continue to monitor conditions and evaluate feedback from the community, to ensure safety levels are maintained.

In conjunction with physical improvements, working closely with DFTA, DOT's Safety Education program has scheduled presentations at senior centers in the vicinity of the six SPFAs to inform older adults about the changes to retimed lights, pedestrian signals, refurbished signage and other engineering changes, as well as to teach them how to best utilize the improvements we've made. Often teams make repeat visits, if requested, and remain available to answer questions as they arise. Our senior safety education program is not limited solely to the Safe Streets program – the program is available to all seniors, citywide. Our teams visit senior centers, health fairs and other events every year, throughout the five boroughs. In fact, last year approximately 11,500 seniors took part in our safety training programs.

All our engineering and education work is starting to pay dividends. In the past year to

date, the older adult population has gone from accounting for 39% of total pedestrian fatalities to 24%. Our work to improve pedestrian conditions for senior citizens must be ongoing and is becoming increasingly more important -- over the next 25 years, the number of New Yorkers over the age of 65 is going to nearly double. By 2030, 20% of the City's residents will be seniors - and we need to be prepared. We are working tirelessly to bring these results to more neighborhoods across the City. Improvements in nine additional areas are currently under review and ten new studies will begin in early January for the remaining areas. Safe Streets for Seniors is funded by federal, state, and local sources and the amount of long-term capital work we can do is largely determined by the funding we receive. Along with our Safe Routes to Schools program, we urge the Council to consider Safe Streets for Reso-A allocations and that you encourage your Borough President and colleagues in the State to devote their Reso-A and Multimodal funds so we may implement capital improvements quicker, and at more locations. Along with our Safe Routes for Schools initiative, this project represents the largest traffic calming project undertaken in this country, with your help we can take it even further.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today, we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



LINDA B. ROSENTHAL
Assemblymember 67th District

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**Statement by New York State Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal
New York City Council
Joint Hearing of the Committee on Transportation and Committee on Aging
December 3, 2009**

I am Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal, and I represent the Upper West Side and parts of Hell's Kitchen/Clinton in the New York State Assembly. I would like to thank Chairs Liu and del Carmen Arroyo for holding this important oversight hearing on senior pedestrian safety.

Shortly after I took office in 2006, I began hearing from seniors around my district about the perils they experienced navigating the streets of the Upper West Side. They were literally afraid of going out and conducting their lives because the streets of their neighborhoods presented too many challenges: inadequate crossing times, cars whose drivers disobeyed traffic laws, bicycles that appeared out of nowhere cutting off their paths, and many more issues. So in 2007, I launched the Safe Streets for Seniors campaign for the blocks in the West 60's and 70's. This campaign took shape as part of a larger policy initiative called Safe Routes for Seniors, developed by Transportation Alternatives, a non-profit advocacy group.

At the first meeting, over a hundred people gathered at the NCJW Council Senior Center on 72nd Street to compile a list of some of the most pressing problems facing seniors on the streets and some of the most dangerous intersections. The streets surrounding the Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center, which serves as a nexus for seniors in the area, were also of grave concern, and meetings there attracted many participants who cited traffic conditions on West End Avenue in the West 60's as dangerous.

One of most oft-repeated concerns was the fact that street crossing times in areas of high senior populations were too short. My constituents related to me that at many intersections, they were barely halfway across the street when the light would change. Studies conducted by Safe Routes for Seniors found that 95% of motorists fail to yield to pedestrians in New York City. This, by the way, obviously also affects areas where families live with small children in strollers or on foot. Other dangerous conditions cited were bicyclists on sidewalks, ponding conditions that develop at intersections and curb cuts as a result of poor drainage, speeding vehicles, general disrepair of several street corners and curb cuts, and a lack of enforcement and ticketing of drivers who fail to yield to pedestrians. To further drive this last point home, in 2006, Borough President Scott Stringer conducted a study which showed that more than 3,000 cars were caught "blocking the box" over 9 hours at 10 different intersections in Manhattan. Not one of those drivers got a ticket.

Many seniors in the neighborhood documented these problems using disposable cameras. With the help of urban planners from Transportation Alternatives, everyone learned about some basic street design features that can vastly improve conditions for senior pedestrian safety such as creating leading pedestrian intervals at all legs of every crossing, installing "street print" treatments at the intersections of wide intersections, and creating mid-block refuge areas and crossings. A report issued by my office with Transportation Alternatives and submitted to the Department of Transportation set forth a comprehensive plan to fix these problems. It has been more than two years since then, and people are becoming impatient with the lack of implementation of some of the most easily accomplished suggestions.

Seniors in my district and across the city are justified in being frightened about their safety as pedestrians. On August 18, 2009 a taxi plowed up Amsterdam Avenue and careened into a cast iron fence at the West 72nd Street landmarked head house train station. Last week, yet another car popped over the curb and onto the pedestrian mall in the same location.

The 72nd Street subway station sees a high volume of subway riders and vehicular traffic, making it a persistently dangerous area. My office has pushed the Department of Transportation to examine traffic calming measures for this area—whether it be a change in signage, signal configurations, or even speed bumps.

The Safe Streets for Seniors campaign found that the best way to make this area safe for pedestrians is by adding additional space to the current medians on either side of Broadway, thereby reducing the width of the asphalt used by motor vehicles. This would slow down motorists by narrowing their passage through this intersection and allowing pedestrians a greater area to wait between crossings.

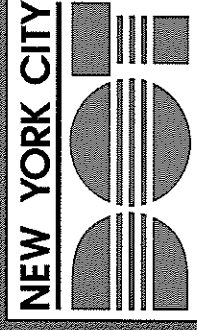
This is just the story of one area of New York City but I know the problems seniors encounter in my district are mirrored in each of your districts as well. We are a city of pedestrians; however, car has been king for too long. The city must find ways to transform priorities so that residents are comfortable and confident when using city streets instead of feeling challenged by vehicles at every turn. Mechanisms exist to vastly improve conditions, at minimal cost, and they can be implemented right away. Changing signal timing, improving signage, targeting traffic enforcement all have immediate effects without presenting major monetary hurdles.

At some point our priorities must reflect a philosophy that puts people before cars. Solutions to the pressing issue of senior pedestrian safety do not necessarily mean bankrupting the city or state. I thank you for holding this hearing today and for your consideration of my testimony.

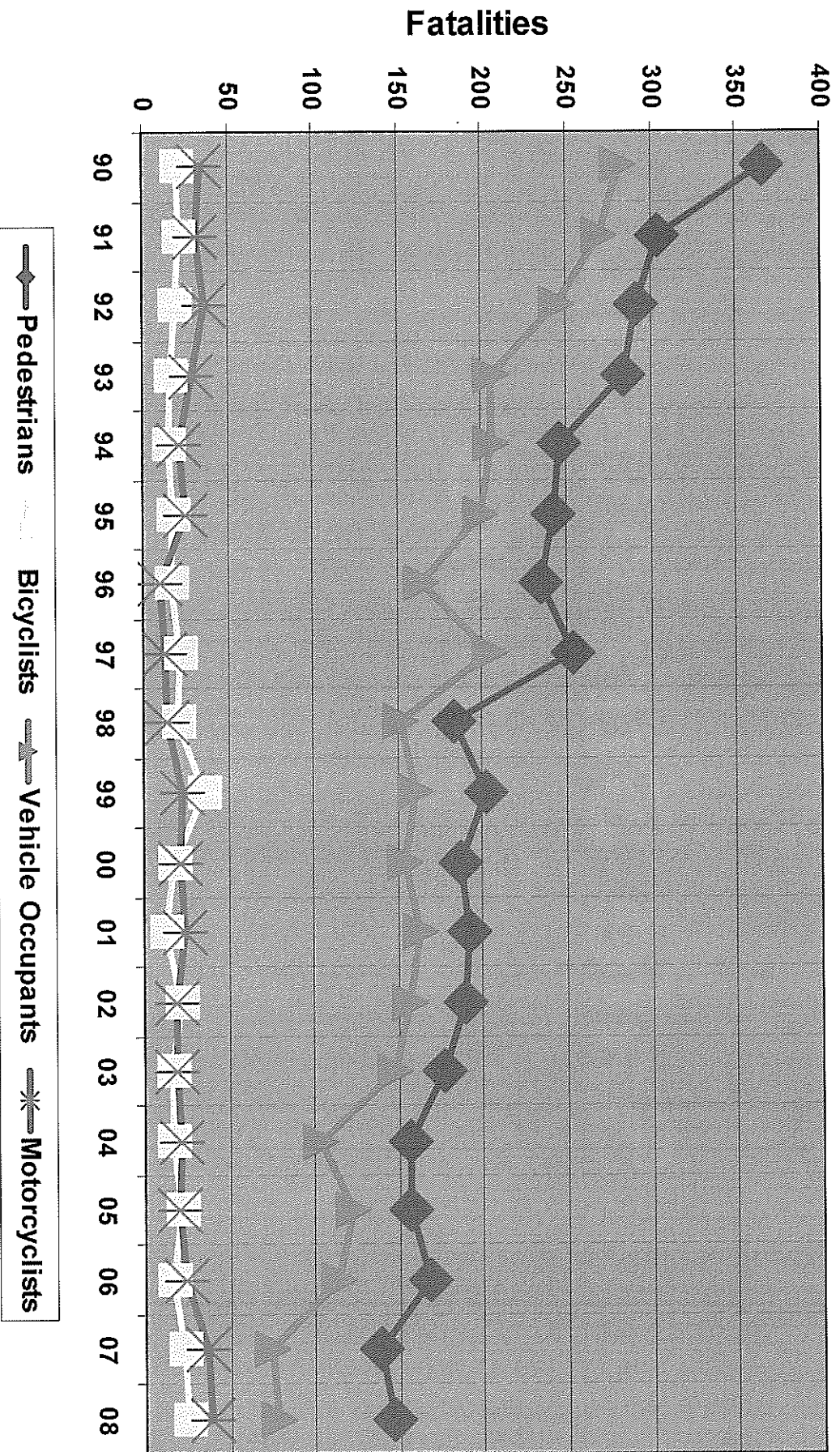
Safe Streets for Seniors

Addressing Senior Pedestrian Focus
Areas in New York City

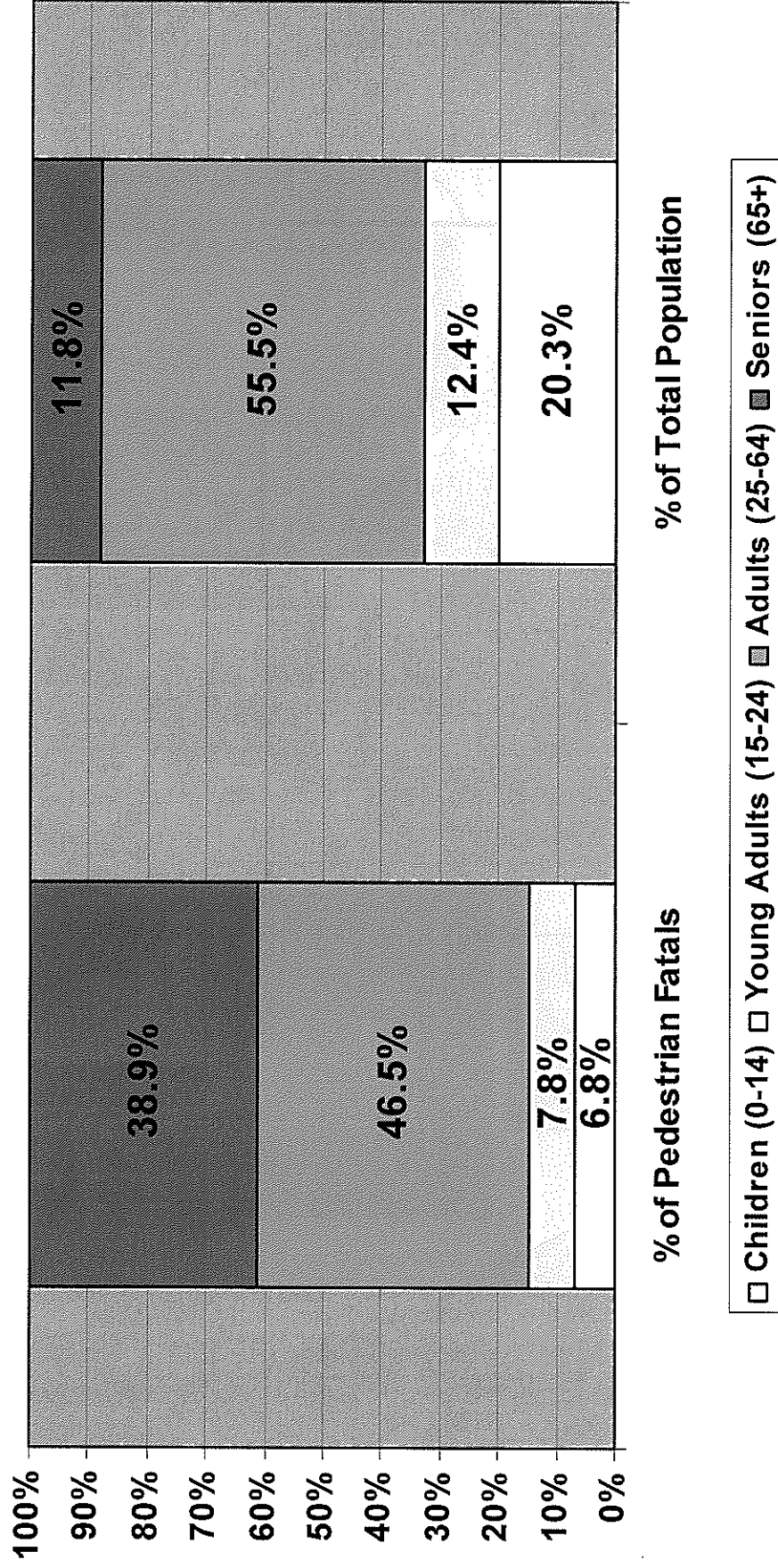
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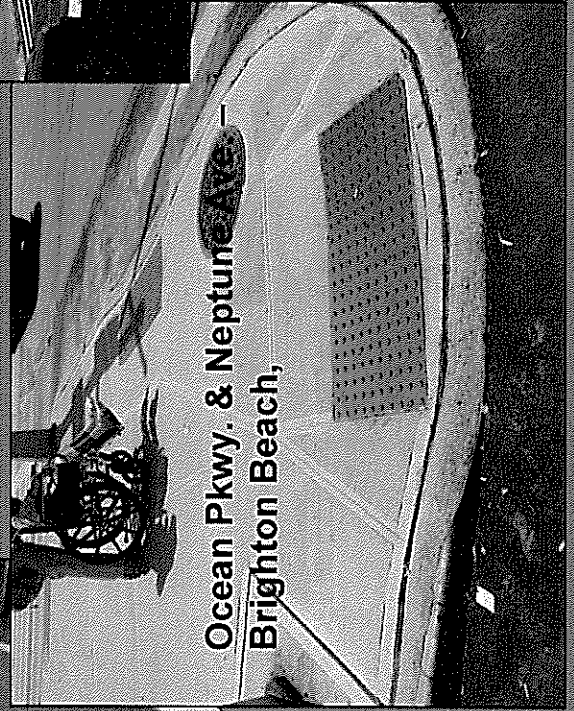
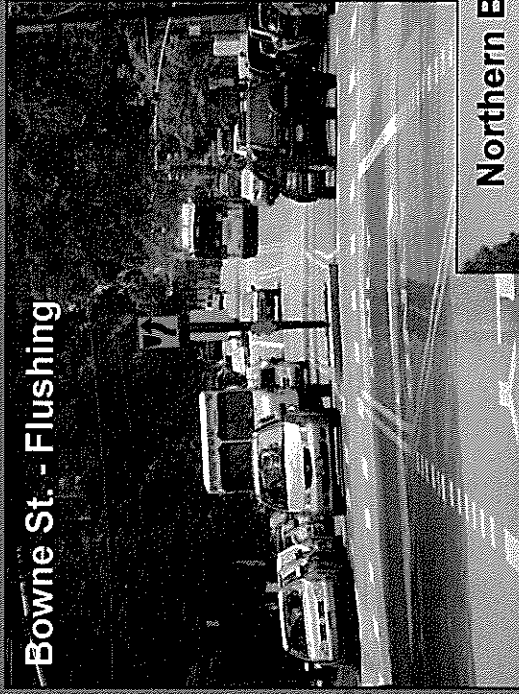
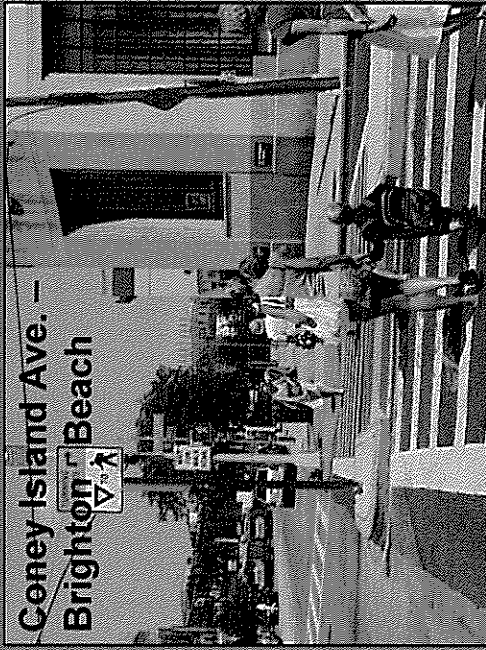


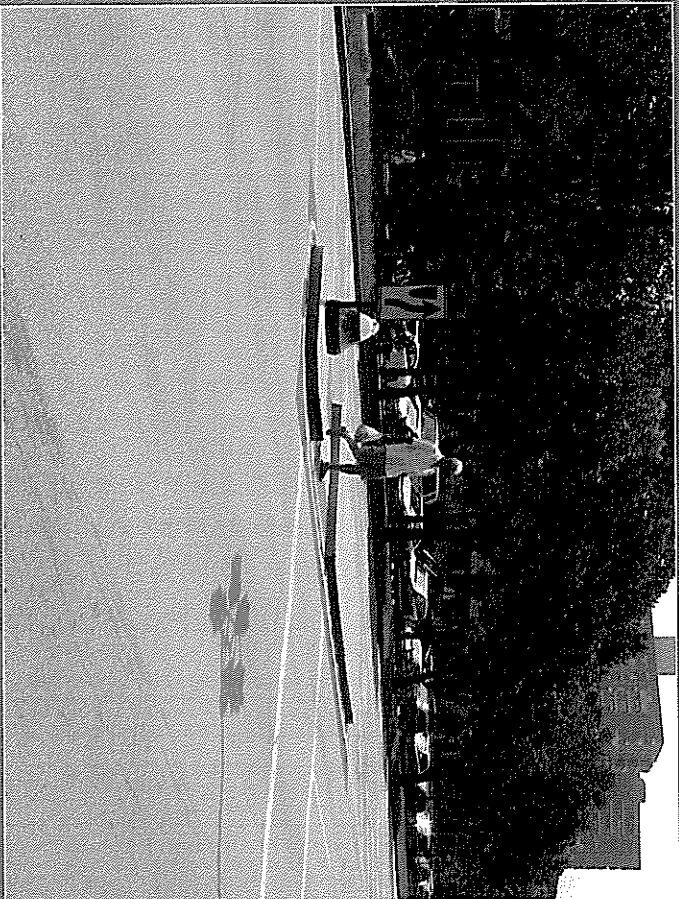
Total Fatalities By Mode: 1990 - 2008



Age Groups: Share of Population and Fatalities 2002-2008







Brighton Beach Senior Focus Area

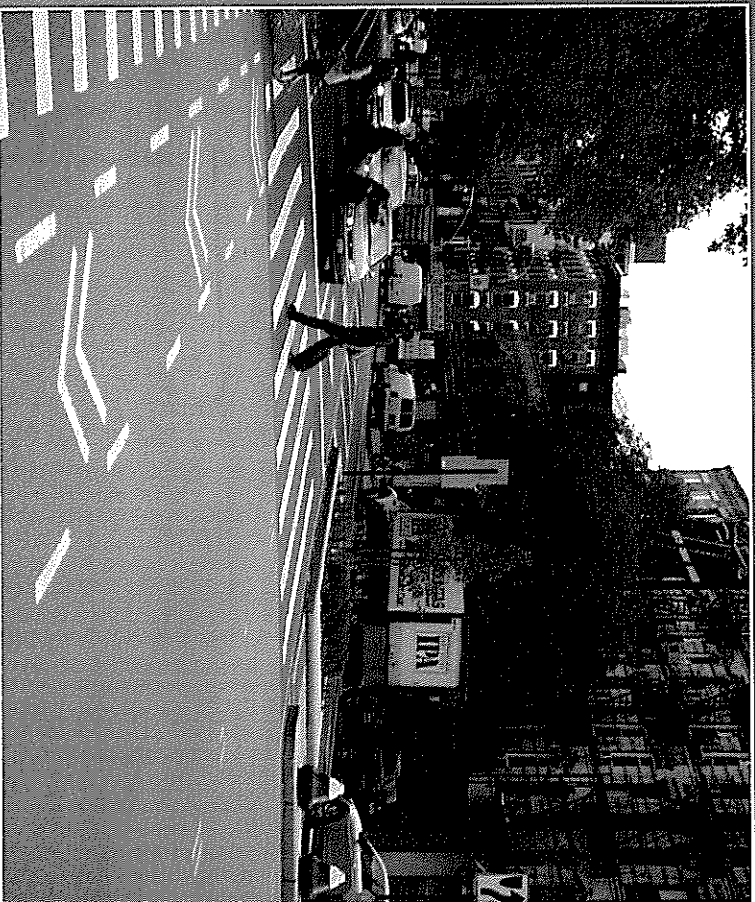
Ocean Parkway & Neptune Avenue

Brooklyn, 2008



Lower East Side Senior Focus Area

Chrystie St. and Delancey St.
Manhattan, 2008

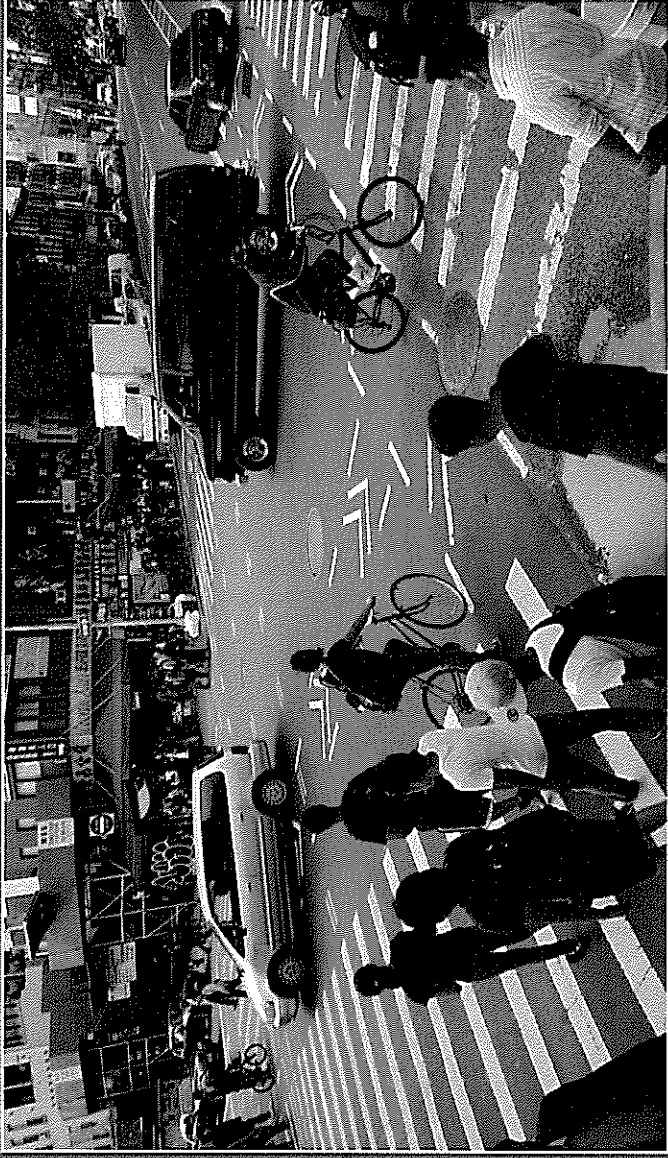


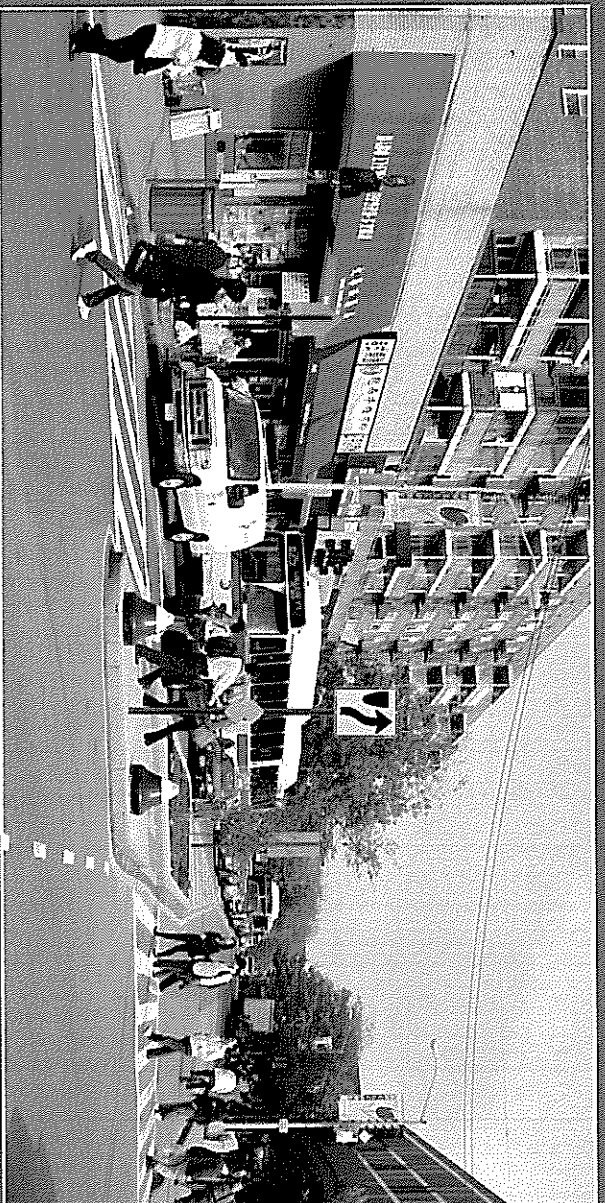
Lower East Side Senior Focus Area

Chrystie St. and Delancey St.

Manhattan, 2008

Lower East Side
Senior Focus Area
Chrystie St. and Grand St.
Manhattan, 2008

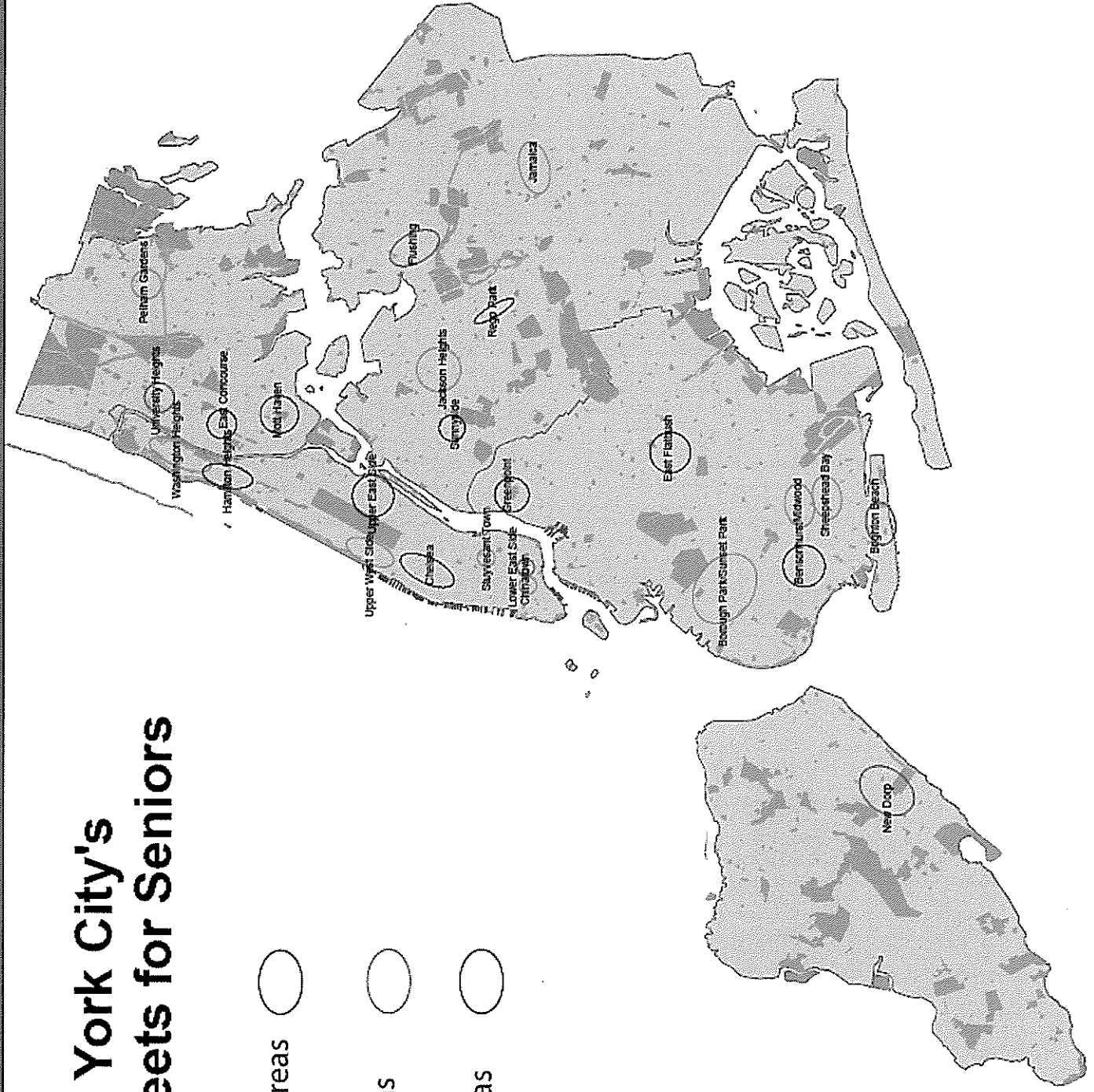




Flushing Senior Focus Area

Main Street & Kissena Boulevard
Queens, 2008

Phase II Areas





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Testimony of Noah Budnick, Senior Policy Advisor, Transportation Alternatives to the Transportation and Aging Committees of the New York City Council's Joint Hearing on "Oversight - What is New York City doing to make the streets safer for seniors?"

December 3, 2009

Good morning Chairman Liu and Chairman Jackson and members of the Transportation and Aging Committees. My name is Noah Budnick and I am the Senior Policy Advisor for Transportation Alternatives. Transportation Alternatives' 8,000 dues paying members and 25,000 activist subscribers support our campaigns to promote and increase bicycling, walking and public transit and make New York City's streets safe and livable. In 2003, Transportation Alternatives started a Safe Routes for Seniors program with funding from the New York State Department of Health's "Healthy Heart" program. Since walking is the primary way older New Yorkers exercise, the purpose of this grant was to enhance senior cardiovascular health by improving walking conditions, removing barriers to walking and encouraging more physical activity. Through our research, we found that little things—like the amount of time we have to cross the street, the height of a curb or the smoothness of the sidewalk—make a big difference to older walkers.

In the past two years the City has taken important strides to address the transportation needs of NYC senior residents. In the January 2008 State of the City Address, Mayor Bloomberg announced the City's Safe Streets for Seniors project, and the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) has begun analysis in 25 pilot neighborhoods and implementing traffic safety street design improvements in 5. Transportation Alternatives applauds this initiative.

I want to take today's hearing as an opportunity to highlight the fact that this is just the beginning. NYC streets are still deadly for seniors. Existing programs must be expanded upon to prevent more deaths and have greater impact on NYC's rapidly growing senior population.

To quickly review some facts:

- There are an estimated 1.25 million senior citizens living in New York City, 400,000 of whom live in concentrated neighborhoods. Projections indicate that the population of people aged 60 and older living in New York City will increase by approximately 20% and will represent approximately 18% of the City's population by 2015 and 20% by 2030 (a population larger than the city's current 1.1 million school age children). Along with this population shift, projections indicate a corresponding shift from driving to walking will occur, as senior citizens give up their licenses to drive.
- Seniors are disproportionately impacted by crashes with vehicles and are more prone to suffer a fatality if involved in a crash compared to the general population. Though people aged 65 years and older only make up 12% of the population, they comprised 39% of New York City's pedestrian injuries and fatalities between 2002 and 2006.

- The number of pedestrian fatalities struck by cars in NYC is too high. One fatality is too many, and a pedestrian is killed by a vehicle almost every 36 hours in our city. The New York metro area ranked number one for metro areas (larger than 1 million residents) with the highest share of pedestrian fatalities according to a 2009 Transportation for America report, *Dangerous by Design*.

How can we build on the momentum of existing senior traffic safety initiatives to expand and sustain the impact?

- We believe the NYC DOT's laudable Safe Streets for Seniors program could create greater mobility for more seniors if it targeted areas where seniors live, not just where fatal crashes occur. For example, out of 10 high-density senior census block groups in the Lower East Side, only one was included by the DOT in a Safe Streets for Seniors district. While the City's program is a promising start, we shouldn't wait for crashes to mount before making improvements. We know where seniors live and walk in large numbers and should target those parts of the city.
- To this end, City Council and City Hall should codify Safe Streets for Seniors into law. Since 2006, T.A. has called for the creation of "Elder Districts," neighborhood zones with a high number of senior citizens, similar to school zones or historic districts. These areas would be prioritized for traffic calming and street improvements that make walking safer for senior residents, such as ADA curb cuts, longer crossing times and pedestrian refuges. The legislation could set criteria based on senior centers, senior population, density, travel patterns, casualties and other factors to create the districts. By creating a definition for senior rich areas and a menu of appropriate safety interventions, you could continue this good work far into the future, well beyond the current Council and Administration to when our children are seniors.
- To help provide future funding for this work, I urge you to speak with the New York Congressional Delegation and help convince them to create a Safe Routes for Seniors program in the federal transportation bill being debated in Washington DC right now. Transportation Alternatives has talked with members of Congress and USDOT Secretary Ray LaHood about including Safe Routes for Seniors in the new federal transportation bill, and they have expressed keen interest. Similarly, Safe Routes to Schools started in New York City, was adopted by the NYC DOT and then became a federal program in the last surface transportation bill, where New York State received \$32 million in funding and the entire country gained from an innovation pioneered in the Big Apple.

Finally, improving street design is only one aspect of making the streets safer for seniors and others. Strong enforcement, adjudication and prosecution must be used to hold drivers accountable for their actions. This was proven all too tragically on Thanksgiving eve when 78 year-old Peter Sabados and his 77 year-old wife, Lillian, were run down on Staten Island. Driver, Allmir Lekperic, had a suspended license and has had his license suspended at least 29 times in the past three years. No street design could keep this man off the road, which is why engineering improvements must be paired with rigorous legal and public awareness campaigns aimed at changing behavior.

Transportation Alternatives continues to call on Mayor Bloomberg to create a Mayoral Office on Road Safety, charged with taking a multi-agency approach to improving safety on NYC streets. This would create a centralized location for managing traffic safety issues. We ask the City Council to support the creation and appropriate funding for this new office for 2010.

Despite the risks seniors face on NYC streets, they are walkers. Walking and public transit are the most common modes of transportation for older people in New York Cityⁱⁱⁱ. This is a good thing. Walking to the park, running errands and visiting friends are all things that allow seniors to be independent and stay in New York City. We want seniors to continue walking. When seniors walk more, they often are healthier, so making streets safer for senior pedestrians positively contributes to their public health and quality of life^{iv}. This improves our safety as well as our quality of life, as we do not need to constantly worry about how our elderly relatives and friends will stay active.

All of these initiatives are wise investments because when our streets are safer for the most vulnerable citizens, they are safer for everyone. Thank you very much for your time.

Attached

- *Discriminatory by Design: A senior citizen focused study of streets and intersections on New York City's Upper East Side*, Transportation Alternatives, December 2007
- *Walk the Walk: Connecting Senior Pedestrian Safety to Seniors in New York City*, Transportation Alternatives, March 2009
- *Safe Routes for Seniors* memo from Transportation Alternatives to USDOT Secretary Ray LaHood, October 2009

Transportation Alternatives' Safe Routes for Seniors publications

- *Street Design Recommendations: Washington Heights*, Transportation Alternatives, November 2004
- *Street Design Recommendations: Nagle Avenue, Inwood*, Transportation Alternatives, February 2005
- *Upper West Side Senior Pedestrian Safety Plan*, Transportation Alternatives, Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal, November 2007
- *Discriminatory by Design: A senior citizen focused study of streets and intersections on New York City's Upper East Side*, Transportation Alternatives, December 2007
- *Street Design Recommendations: 135th Street & 145th Street, Harlem*, Transportation Alternatives, August 2008
- *Walk the Walk: Connecting Senior Pedestrian Safety to Seniors in New York City*, Transportation Alternatives, March 2009

See transalt.org and transalt.org/campaigns/pedestrian/safeseniors to download full reports.

Over for notes.

Notes

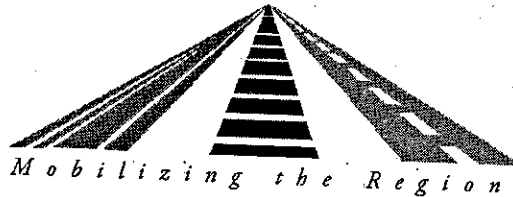
ⁱ Transportation Alternatives' Safe Routes for Seniors program worked with hundreds of seniors in neighborhoods throughout the city, ranging from Inwood to the Lower East Side. In focus groups, meetings at senior centers and walking tours, seniors shared where they walk and the impediments they face walking and crossing streets. Transportation Alternatives advocated with these seniors for street improvements. In response the NYC Department of Transportation (DOT) installed 65 physical street enhancements across the city. These changes positively impact hundreds of thousands of seniors living nearby.

ⁱⁱ Seniors walk at an average rate of 2.5 feet per second. Most of the traffic lights for New York City streets are timed for a rate of 4 feet per second. On our wide streets and avenues it is almost impossible for seniors to cross the street comfortably during the pedestrian phase. In addition, studies have shown that seniors on average take 2 to 4 additional seconds to ascend the curb when the pedestrian phase starts. This is due to cognitive changes inherent in aging as well as a decreased ability to perceive the crossing distance and the fear of falling.

ⁱⁱⁱ A 2006 survey of older AARP members in the metropolitan area found that 52 percent of city-dwelling respondents often walk to get where they want to go and 52 percent regularly use public transportation.

^{iv} Evidence of increased pedestrian planning as a strategy to improve public health can be found in many public health journal articles. In urban areas, the perception that streets are unsafe due to speeding traffic (as opposed to crime) has led many seniors to stay at home and not go outside (Loukaitou-Sideris, p, 221). More walkable streets also correlate to decreases in elderly depression (Journal of the American Geriatrics Association, Protective Association Between Neighborhood Walkability and Depression in Older Men, Vol. 55, No. 4, February 2007).

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Testimony of Ya-Ting Liu

**New York City Council Committee on Aging and Transportation's Joint Oversight
Hearing on Status of Pedestrian Safety for Seniors**

December 3, 2009

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Ya-Ting Liu, federal advocate of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a regional policy watchdog organization working for a more balanced and equitable regional transportation network. I am here today to share with you our analysis of senior pedestrian safety in New York City and our recommendations on how we can make our streets even safer for pedestrians of all ages.

In New York City, one in three traffic deaths are pedestrians and seniors make up a disproportionately large percentage of these pedestrian fatalities. People aged 65 or older make up 11.5% of the population in New York City but 31.9% of pedestrian fatalities. The pedestrian fatality rate for seniors in the New York City metro area is 4 times higher than everyone else and is far higher than the rest of the country. Below are pedestrian fatality rates for people aged 65 years or older by borough:

- a. Manhattan, 8.27 per 100,000 residents.
- b. Nassau County, 6.65 per 100,000 residents
- c. Staten Island, 6.47 per 100,000 residents
- d. Brooklyn, 6.22 per 100,000 residents

Why are seniors who walk on our city streets more at risk? The higher fatality rate for older pedestrians can probably be attributed to four factors: 1) older pedestrians are less likely to survive a collision with a car or truck; 2) higher proportion of older residents may have "retired" their car keys and are walking instead; 3) older pedestrians are less able to get out of the way of oncoming vehicles in their path; 4) existing pedestrian infrastructure, such as the duration of crosswalk signals, ignores the needs of older walkers.

Tri-State applauds New York City Department of Transportation for its innovative *Safe Streets for Seniors* program which identifies locations with high numbers of older pedestrian fatalities and makes necessary improvements to improve safety conditions such as:

- Extending pedestrian crossing times at crosswalks

350 West 31st Street
Suite 802
New York, NY 10001

212.268.7474 (p)
212.268.7333 (f)
tstc.org

- Shortening crossing distances
- Altering curbs and sidewalks to make them easier for older pedestrians to navigate
- Restricting vehicle turns (e.g. no right turn on red)
- Narrowing roadways to slow traffic and shorten crossing distances

In order to improve senior pedestrian safety, we urge City Council members to support:

- A homerule message on a complete streets policy to push forward pending state legislation (A.8587/S.5711) that would require engineers design roads to accommodate the needs of all users any time a new road is built or an existing road is retrofitted.
- Require that New York State DOT designate a higher share of available federal dollars to programs that aim to make biking and walking safer, in particular the federal Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP). Currently, New York State is grossly underutilizing this program, leaving \$70 million available federal transportation dollars on the table.

We need New York City Council's support to encourage Governor Paterson and state legislators to make pedestrian safety a priority. We need a statewide complete streets policy and we need New York State to better leverage available federal transportation dollars to programs that make biking and walking safer in our city and state.

Ya-Ting Liu
Federal Advocate
Tri-State Transportation Campaign

STATEMENT

Patricia Dolan
Director, Queens Connection Para transportation
Queens Community House

Joint Oversight Hearing of the Aging and Transportation Committees

Making Streets Safer for Seniors

December 3, 2009

Good Morning. I am Patricia Dolan, director of Queens Connection, a program of the Queens Community House that works for safer, more affordable and accessible transportation for seniors.

Mobility is key to seniors' living independently in the community. Whether they are walking to a local store or senior center, or taking a bus or subway out of their immediate neighborhood, most seniors are acutely aware of the challenges of getting around the city and most of them are careful of the streets they travel.

Over the past decade, NYCTransit has taken huge steps in making public transit more user friendly for seniors—with newly accessible subway stations and an improving bus fleet.

The Safe Streets for Seniors program is making a difference for all pedestrians—young and old—in neighborhoods where the Department of Transportation has implemented it. In Flushing, for instance, which I live near, is now a model of how the city's most congested streets can be designed to be safer and more pedestrian friendly. Reconfigured intersections on Main Street at Northern and Kissena Boulevards, for example, make crossing those challenging streets measurably safer for pedestrians and drivers alike. While there is no hard data available demonstrating the effects of the improvements, anecdotal evidence from local residents attests to the efficacy of this progress.

The Department for the Aging has made critical contributions in making city streets safer for seniors.

Unfortunately, many of the streets in areas like Jamaica Hill, identified in the Safe Streets for Seniors program for improvements, remain hazardous for seniors who continue to be more likely to be involved in serious or fatal traffic accidents than younger New Yorkers.

At a time when the city is facing unprecedented fiscal challenges, it will be up to the City Council to find funding to improve safety on all the city's streets.

At the same time, we urge the Aging Committee to be mindful of any changes in DFTA's transportation programs when it issues its RFP for senior centers next year.

This may be the last Transportation Committee hearing that I have the privilege to address under Councilman Liu's chairmanship. On behalf of Queens seniors, I want to thank the Committee and Chairman Liu for making the city a safer and easier place for seniors to live in. You have been a steadfast ally for seniors whether it was finding funds to operate the hundreds of vans that seniors depend upon or advocating for more and better Access A Ride or resisting cost-cutting plans to eliminate bus routes around the city, you have been on the line for all of us.

Thank you.

Stephanie Pinder
Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center, Inc.
250 West 65th Street
New York, New York 1023
212-874-0860
Stpinder_lsnc@yahoo.com

Hello, my name is Stephanie Pinder, and I am the Executive Director of the Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center.

For older adults living on their own, unsafe environments come in many forms—a busy street without a crosswalk, an inoperable elevator, a broken door lock or a dimly lit hallway. Fortunately for the 600 seniors living in the Amsterdam Houses and Amsterdam Addition, a public housing development on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and the 175 who call Lincoln Amsterdam House home, they have the resources and opportunities offered through our NORC~SSP. With such a large percentage of the population over the age of 60, the Lincoln Square community qualified as a NORC. A NORC or “Naturally Occurring Retirement Community” is a natural condition in which a large number of older adults are concentrated in one area because they have all stayed in their homes and in their communities throughout the years.

We formed a NORC Advisory Council in July 2000 which includes representatives from law enforcement, building management, local government, service agencies our community board and funders and together have been dedicated to ensuring a, safe and supportive environment.

Located in the busy Upper West Side neighborhood of Manhattan, the buildings are just steps from the Lincoln Center for Performing Arts, a world-renowned epicenter for arts and culture, as well as restaurants, shops and luxury apartments. However, directly behind Lincoln Center is a housing complex, which few who come to see or hear world renowned cultural icons know. Administered by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) these apartments are home to more than 600 adults over 60 years of age, most of whom are African-American or Latino. Almost two-thirds of

these residents are poor and would be unable to afford other apartments in the neighborhood. More than 90% have lived in the complex for at least half their lives; many were born and raised there.

Over the years, our program has grown in scope and size, and we are proud to offer comprehensive on-site and in home services, which include community health care, social services support, congregate meals, recreation and educational options as well.

Not only do we believe that the mission of NORC~SSPs is to enable healthy individuals and healthy families, but should also strive to enable healthy communities. To that end, the NORC Advisory Council has taken on issues such as hunger, safety and security and insuring the availability of mental health care for older adults.

In order for our seniors to take advantage of our programming, they often need to walk to our center, as well as throughout the neighborhood to participate in community life. Through their participation in the NORC Advisory Council, and the death of two of our seniors in fatal car accidents, the seniors identified transportation as an issue: traffic lights that change too quickly, lack of sufficient bus stops, speeding cars and insufficient curb cuts. Back in late 2006, the Lincoln Square NORC teamed up with Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal and Transportation Alternatives to study our area and to produce a report about street safety. This report, entitled *Upper West Side Senior Pedestrian Safety Plan*, was produced in November 2007 and calls for commonsense improvements to our streets and sidewalks that would not only reduce death and injury due to automobile crashes but would also make walking an enjoyable and healthy activity for our seniors. Many of the changes that we asked for in this report focused on making small changes to our built environment to promote safety, a sense of belonging, and increased levels of overall public health.

To date, we have been told that the Department of Transportation has changed signal timing at many intersections between 60th and 81st Streets to accommodate slower crossers. In conversations with our elders, however, they do not feel any safer crossing our streets. The automobile traffic surrounding our center moves incredibly quickly and motor vehicle drivers clearly feel that they have the "right of way," especially along our extra-wide avenues such as West End and Amsterdam. Our seniors, and all walkers in our area, should be given a head-start to cross these wide

Avenues, a signal to the drivers that pedestrians actually have the right of way. We also need better sightlines, so that our seniors can see oncoming traffic better and so that automobiles can see our seniors. Finally, we would love to see improvements that encourage our seniors to walk, such as pedestrian islands on the extra-wide avenues; more benches, especially near bus stops and mid-block; and anything that would calm the traffic and make walking a more pleasant activity.

We have been working hard to improve conditions in our area since 2000. We plan to continue our advocacy work surrounding this issue and look to the Department of Transportation for concrete designs and a timeline. The area has been extensively studied; suggestions for improvement have been made, let's get to work to make these streets safer for all users. Thank you.



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**New York City Council Committees on Aging & Transportation
Hearing on 'Oversight: What is New York doing to make the streets safer for seniors?'**

December 3, 2009

Testimony of Carolyn Stem

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the importance of safe streets for seniors. My name is Carolyn Stem, and I work with The New York Academy of Medicine on its Age-friendly New York City project. The New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM) has been advancing the health of people in cities since 1847. An independent organization, NYAM addresses the health challenges facing the world's urban populations through interdisciplinary approaches to innovative research, education, community engagement, and policy leadership. Our current priorities include creating environments that support healthy aging; strengthening systems that prevent disease and promote the public's health; and working to eliminate health disparities.

In partnership with the Mayor's Office and the City Council, NYAM has been working on improving New York City's age-friendliness. As part of that project, we conducted a yearlong assessment, talking to more than 1500 older adults and experts about their concerns and vision for an age-friendly New York. Safe streets and walkability emerged as key themes. Safe streets have been recognized internationally as a key determinant of successful and active aging,¹ and pedestrian traffic safety is indeed a major concern for seniors in New York. Today, however, we would like to highlight sidewalks as another essential element of safe streets and a core predictor of walkability for seniors.

Walkability refers to the extent to which an area is conducive to people walking around, spending time in an area, and interacting with one another. Walkability is important for all residents but is especially important to older adults. In New York City walking and public transit are the most common modes of transportation for older residents²; a recent survey of AARP members in the metropolitan area found that 52% often walk to get where they want to go³. One of New York's great strengths for the aging population is the proximity to stores, services, cultural opportunities, and parks. However, unless our streets are safe and our sidewalks are passable, older New Yorkers cannot take full advantage of all that the City has to offer. An age-friendly city is a walkable city - one where streets and sidewalks are clean, accessible, and safe.

Safe streets and sidewalks have tremendous public health advantages. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, moderate exercise, like walking, maintains the ability of older adults to live independently; reduces risk of falling; decreases risk of heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes; reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression; helps control joint swelling and pain associated with arthritis;

¹ World Health Organization. (2007). *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide*. Available at: http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Global_age_friendly_cities_Guide_English.pdf

² New York Academy of Medicine. (2008). *Toward an Age-friendly New York City: A Findings Report*. Available at: <http://www.agefriendlynyc.org/>

³ AARP (2006). *Good to Go: Assessing the Transit Needs of New York Metro and Western New York AARP Members*. Available at: http://www.aarp.org/research/surveys/stats/surveys/members/articles/ny_transit_06.html

and improves social support from friends and families health⁴. Smooth and accessible sidewalks and streets are also important for the prevention of falls. In 2007, there were more than 50,000 hospitalizations statewide due to falls among older adults, and between 2001 and 2007, the rate of falls-related deaths in New York State increased 13% and falls-related hospitalizations increased 14%⁵. Research has demonstrated that most outdoor falls (73%) among older adults are the result of environmental factors, such as uneven surfaces and tripping or slipping on objects⁶.

Our Age-friendly New York City research is equally clear about the importance of streets and sidewalks to the health and safety of seniors. New Yorkers across the 5 boroughs reported on their need for clean, safe, accessible streets and sidewalks. People from many communities, including many of our immigrant neighborhoods, described sidewalks as hazardous places that were poorly lit, poorly maintained, over crowded with people, dogs, litter, bicycles and construction, and slippery or full of puddles after a heavy snow or rain. In Brooklyn forums, people mentioned cars parked on the sidewalks, and one Bronx resident said, "There are zero sidewalks in the Bronx." These obstacles make it difficult for older people with low vision, poor balance, or who use wheelchairs or walkers to get around. The lack of benches along public walkways was also mentioned frequently. One focus group participant said, "There used to be a place where we could just rest and sit together." Another reported, "We need more benches people can grab onto as they walk down the street. You can see people gripping the storefronts for stability."

The good news is that the dangers of our sidewalks and streets can be diminished, and the public health benefits of them enhanced. The City is already taking important steps to make changes to the built environment that will make our streets and sidewalks more age-friendly. We applaud the work of the Department of Transportation in implementing its Safe Streets for Seniors Program, which is evaluating pedestrian conditions in the city from the perspective of older residents and making engineering changes, such as extending pedestrian crossing times at crosswalks and shortening crossing distances, altering curbs and sidewalks, restricting vehicle turns, and narrowing roadways. The City's Coordinated Street Furniture Franchise is addressing seniors' need for bus shelters and public toilets. Current efforts to build plazas and increase open spaces around roadways are also good for older adults as they provide important resting places and offer an additional safe refuge from busy and dangerous streets. Each of these initiatives, which are highlighted in the City's recent report, *Age-friendly NYC: Enhancing our City's Livability for Older New Yorkers*, will improve the lives of older New Yorkers.

To fully address the problem of city sidewalks will take a cross-sectoral effort as well as creativity. Most of the 12,750 miles of sidewalk in NYC are the responsibility of landowners to repair. In fact, only 4% of sidewalks are on city property, and DOT repairs less than 1% of all NYC sidewalks. Under Section 19-152 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, property owners are responsible for installing, repairing and maintaining sidewalks adjoining their properties. If timely repairs are not made by the property owner, the City may hire private construction firms to make the repairs and bill the property owner for the costs of the repairs. We are pleased that DOT has initiated an Expedited Sidewalk Repair Pilot Program that allows the City to repair sidewalks and charge landlords if repairs are not made within 45 days. If this program is successful, it should be expanded and perhaps targeted to those neighborhoods with a large number of elderly residents.

In addition to supporting the Expedited Sidewalk Repair Pilot Program and expansion of the City's Coordinated Street Furniture Franchise, we offer the following suggestions for enhancing sidewalk safety in New York City:

- Continued support for Business Improvement Districts and their efforts to make business districts safe, clean, and passable.
- Increase sidewalk maintenance efforts – snow and leaf removal, cleaning, litter, lighting, and repair.

⁴ A Report of the Surgeon General: Physical Activity and Health Older Adults. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/NCCDPHP/sgr/pdf/sgraag.pdf>

⁵ New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH). Available at:

http://www.health.state.ny.us/prevention/injury_prevention/docs/falls_in_older_adults_nys.pdf

⁶ Li, W., et al. (2006). Outdoor Falls Among Middle-Aged and Older Adults: A Neglected Public Health Problem. *American Journal of Public Health*, 96, 1192- 1200.

- Enhance enforcement of existing regulations – parking, curb cuts, trash and snow removal, dog poop, bicycles, etc.
- Improve the standards for sidewalk smoothness.
- Promote a design competition for ‘perches’ (resting posts) that can be installed across the city.
- Both the state and federal governments are considering ‘Complete Streets’ Legislation (Bill No. S5711; A08587) which is aimed at making streets more useable and safe for all travelers (bicyclists, public transportation vehicles and passengers, motorists and pedestrians) regardless of age or ability. New York City could proactively adopt these standards.

We understand that implementing all of these recommendations citywide is daunting and encourage starting in specific neighborhoods to assess the feasibility and impact of making these changes. With support from the City Councilwoman Viverito, NYAM is implementing an Aging Improvement District pilot in East Harlem. Aging Improvement Districts are local efforts to improve the age-friendliness of a specific neighborhood. As part of the Aging Improvement District program, communities could also become pilot sites for concentrated efforts to improve the safety and accessibility of streets and sidewalks. Working with local residents and business, the City could increase enforcement of existing regulations, expedite sidewalk repair, install perches and public toilets, and assess intersections for pedestrian safety.

Making our streets and sidewalks safe and accessible will require all of us working together -- both in local neighborhoods and citywide. In conjunction with the Mayor’s Office and the City Council, NYAM will be staffing a Commission for an Age-friendly New York City that includes leaders from multiple sectors of the City. The Commission will provide critical leadership on this and other issues affecting older New Yorkers. Together, city government, the private sector, and residents can make simple but important changes to our streets and sidewalks that will improve the health of older New Yorkers; allow them to connect with friends, families and critical services; and support them in continuing to be a vital part of the life of the City. We look forward to working with the Age-friendly New York City Commission and all of you to make New York City streets and sidewalks safe and accessible for New Yorkers of all ages.

##

For more information, please contact Julie Netherland at jnetherland@nyam.org or 212-419-3560.

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