

**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TESTIMONY  
HEARING BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL  
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION  
December 4, 2013**

Good morning Chairman Vacca and members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Kate Slevin and I am the Assistant Commissioner of Intergovernmental Affairs for the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT). Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Introduction 1114 regarding DOT's street design manual. We strongly support this bill and look forward to its timely passage.

Intro 1114 would require DOT to publish a manual of policies and design guidelines for the improvements of roads and sidewalks every four years. DOT could fulfill this requirement by updating our Street Design Manual, New York City's comprehensive resource on street design guidelines, policies, and processes. First published in 2009, the Manual builds on current thinking about street design, materials, lighting, and project implementation around the world to promote a great public realm. It advocates high-quality, sustainable design and encourages greater mode choice.

The Manual's first edition has been a tremendous success, with rapid integration into the city's DNA. City agencies and private developers now work from a common, comprehensive playbook. A standard reference text for DOT staff, the Manual has been incorporated into the agency's internal design review processes and is required reading for all design and engineering consultants. The Manual is also cited in the Mayor's recent Executive Order encouraging active design strategies for streets and buildings. A second edition of the Street Design Manual was released in October 2013, and includes updates and new content based on feedback from users and comprehensive inter- and intra-agency review. It also includes an additional section on community participation and review of DOT projects.

DOT would like to see the passage of Intro 1114, as we believe the Street Design Manual is, by its nature, a work in progress and should be periodically updated. Its information and guidance will be refined based on evolving best practices and real-world experience with its usage in New York City. Specific treatments may be added, updated or removed, as appropriate, over time.

As stated in the Manual, even small changes to a street's design can have a large impact for the people using it. Thank you again for your interest in this bill, I would be happy to answer questions at this time.



Testimony of New York League of Conservation Voters  
New York City Council  
Committee on Transportation  
December 4, 2013

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Good afternoon. I'm Ya-Ting Liu with the New York League of Conservation Voters, a statewide environmental advocacy organization with a New York City Chapter.

I would like to extend our thanks to the Committee on Transportation for providing the opportunity to comment on Int. 1114.A-2013 in relation to the codification of the New York City Street Design Manual.

As a comprehensive resource for street design standards, guidelines and policies, the New York City Street Design Manual is the first document of its kind in the country with an eye toward safety and sustainability. The Street Design Manual not only delivers world-class streets New Yorkers have come to expect but provides guidance on how we can use our streets to improve the overall environmental health of the city.

For example, the most recent edition of the Street Design Manual includes a new chapter on landscape improvements that factors in the need to design our streets for future storms and other extreme weather events. This chapter highlights best practices to green our street infrastructure, including minimizing the amount of impermeable surfaces and maximizing site-appropriate vegetation and plantings in tree beds, roadways, sidewalks and plazas to capture storm water runoff.

The Street Design Manual provides design-build principles that minimize the overall lifecycle energy use and pollution associated with projects while encouraging collaboration across city agencies to ensure our streets are constructed in an environmentally sound way.

To ensure that New York City continues to deliver world-class streets for all, the Street Design Manual should be updated every four years to reflect evolving practices. The Street Design Manual is an invaluable resource for the array of public agencies and private entities that shape our city streets. It's a one-stop-shop for best practices, policies and guidelines that will result in better, safer and more sustainable streets for all New Yorkers.

For these reasons, NYLCV supports Int. No.1114.A-2013.

Thank you.



## **Statement of Steve Vaccaro to City council Transportation Committee Dec. 4, 2013**

My name is Steve Vaccaro. I'm a community activist who has worked with Community Boards and Transportation Alternatives to improve street safety since 2006, and a lawyer in a firm that primarily represents pedestrians and cyclists injured in traffic. Thank you Chairman Vacca for the opportunity to speak in support of these two important bills.

The bill to keep the DoT street manual current is an important step to locking in the safety gains of the last 7 years, which have seen measurable decreases in serious and fatal crashes. Whereas too many in government once believed that "accidents happen," in the last 7 years our DoT has proven that accidents can be prevented — and lives saved — with traffic calming measures such as bulb-outs, daylighting of intersections, pedestrian islands, bicycle lanes and paths, sidewalk widening, traffic lane channelization and "road diets."

These measures are new, and those unfamiliar with them often claim, without any apparent empirical basis, that they cause traffic nightmares. But DoT has proven with cautious and carefully studied trials that these measures save lives without an unacceptably slowing traffic. Under the DoT manual, we now enjoy an age of enlightened, data-driven urban design, and have left behind the Dark Ages of urban planning when the unfounded traffic concerns of a few blocked desperately-needed safety measures. I urge you to carry this age of enlightenment forward into the next mayoral Administration by passing Intro Eleven-Fourteen A.

The amendment of Section 14-153 is a critical first step to meaningful reform of NYPD handling of hit and run crashes. My partner Adam White and I have represented more than 50 hit and run victims, and fielded inquiries from probably another hundred more. In the course of this work, two problems in NYPD's handling of hit and run crashes have come up repeatedly:

- First, NYPD officers flatly refusing to investigate or even take a report in hit-and-run crash unless the victim agrees to go to the hospital in an ambulance, no matter how seriously and obviously the victim is injured. It might seem odd that a seriously injured person would refuse an ambulance, but to a person without personal health insurance, who is unaware of the insurance fund for hit-and-run victims known as MVAIC, often fear the cost of an ambulance trip. And remember, crash victims' judgment is often impaired by the trauma. They are easily persuaded to forego a crash report, and that is exactly what some police officers do. When these victims later find they are seriously injured, they have no insurance and no recourse because they failed to get a police report at the scene.
- Second, when NYPD does investigate a hit-and-run crash, officers sometimes insist that the crash victim agree not to press charges against the driver in return for receiving the driver's information. This forces the victim to choose between health coverage and compensation for their injuries, versus bringing the driver to justice. Understandably, most victims choose the information, and so the hit-and-run is never reported and the driver faces no consequences.

Just to be clear, these are not consistent problems; in many cases, and certainly in most fatality cases, NYPD do a reasonable job of investigating hit and run crashes. But there is too much variability across precincts, and in cases where the victim is ambulatory, the problems are widespread.

While the bill is a good first step, I'd urge the Committee to shorten the reporting period to semi-annual or annual reports, rather than biannual reports as proposed. Under a biannual reporting regime, the first report will not come until 2016. That is far too long to wait when scores of hit-and-run victims each year are being denied insurance coverage, medical care, and justice by the current NYPD practices.



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## Testimony on Hit & Runs and Street Design Manual Updates

Held by New York City Council Committee on Transportation  
Wednesday, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2013  
250 Broadway, New York, NY

**Int. 1055-2013:** NYPD to report information concerning vehicle collisions in which a driver left the scene of the collision.

**Int. 1114-2013:** A street design manual and to repeal subdivision d of section 19-180 of the administrative code of the city of New York as added by local law number 23 of 2008.

Good morning. Thank you Chair Vacca and members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify. My name is Juan Martinez and I'm Transportation Alternatives' General Counsel. We are a 40-year old non-profit, with over 100,000 activists in our network, dedicated to improving the safety of New York City's streets.

These bills, like much of the other legislation that has been supported by this committee, will advance safety by improving the design of our city streets and targeting our enforcement resources with safety in mind. Accordingly, I am here today to voice Transportation Alternatives' strong support for both bills.

### Hit and Run Reporting

Drivers who cause serious injuries or kill, and then flee the scene, commit a low and callous act. Not only do they fail to exercise their duty to responsibly manage their one-ton of piece of machinery, but they also leave their victim lying, exposed, in the street, and likely delay the provision of life-saving help by fleeing. Their absence further compounds the injury by leaving victims severely under-compensated, because the State programs for hit and run victims are woefully insufficient.

The most effective method to eliminate the hit and run scourge is to increase enforcement, which increases the likelihood that a perpetrator will be caught, and thereby deters drivers from fleeing the scene. And of course, the best method to encourage the Department to prioritize these investigations is through Council oversight and public pressure – methods which will be made far more effective by Int. 1055.

As a data-driven traffic safety organization, we have found that government can only manage what it can measure, and real-time data on hit-and-runs is hard to find. Currently our best data comes from state agencies, which take nearly a full calendar year to process and compile the data that they collect from the NYPD. Indeed, it's only because the Department responded to a question posed at an oversight hearing earlier this year that we know that in 2012, the Collision Investigation Squad responded to 58

hit and run fatal and critical injury crashes, and arrested 15 suspects in connection with those investigations. Whether that 1 in 4 conversion rate goes up, or goes down, is again a function of the Council's continued oversight and public engagement, which is enabled through this important legislation.

## **Street Design Manual**

New York is home to the most densely populated urban streets in the country—46 of the 50 nation's most dense zip codes are within the five boroughs. More pedestrians call New York City home than anywhere else in the country. We are a walking city. Yet until our NYC DOT published the first Street Design Manual in 2009, our traffic engineers were obligated to design streets using decades-old national guidelines, designed to work equally well in Cheyenne and Juneau, and not optimized for New York. To deviate from the accepted national guidelines was strongly discouraged, and each attempt to do something that wasn't "by the book" took herculean effort and pressure from Council Members and community members.

This is particularly important because the national guidelines prioritize motor vehicle throughput over safety, and encourage pedestrian-unfriendly designs such as wide travel lanes. The Manual's focus on safety has led to the widespread adoption of safety innovations, including bulb-outs and neckdowns, protected bike lanes and pedestrian plazas. We know that were it not for these designs, our streets would be less safe; and without the Manual, we would never have the widespread implementation of these street designs.

The Manual made streets designed for New York City, by New York City, the rule and not the exception. The release of the Manual sparked dramatic changes in our street redesign, and put us on the cutting edge. By requiring the Manual to be periodically updated, the Council will ensure that we will maintain our leadership role for years to come.

**Testimony to the Transportation Committee in support Intro No 1114-A  
4 December 2013**

**Noel Hidalgo  
Co-Founder of BetaNYC, a Code for America Brigade**

Good morning Chairman and Transportation Committee,

It is a great honor to address you and represent New York City's technology community. Particularly, a rather active group of technologists - the civic technologist and a civic hacker.

I am Noel Hidalgo and the co-founder of BetaNYC, we envision a city government that works for the people, by the people, in the 21st Century.

Every week, my community gathers around tables, computers, and data. We are comprised of hackers, mappers, and yackers.

For the last six months, we have hosted a community hacknight at NYU Rudin's Center for Transportation Policy. For the last six months, we have explicitly explored bicycle and public safety related data. In October, we testified about our frustrations with Crash Stat and the NYPD's public safety data. All in All, we hacking for good. We take the City's open data and put it to good use.

We have two concerns with Intro 1114-A.

First, the codification of bad information sharing practices.

Second, a unique opportunity to empower all New Yorkers to make safer streets.

With Section 19-180 and Section 19-182, we thank you for asking that these reports to be posted to the web. We love it when reports are posted to the web. We love it MORE when

the underlying data of these reports are posted to the web.

With the passage of Local Law 11 of 2012, the City's Open Data Law, all of the City's data should be in machine readable formats. To this day, Agencies are able to circumvent the Open Data Law by writing that data into reports.

From our experience, we need Section 19-180 and Section 19-182 to liberate the underlying data into raw and machine readable data. If you want anyone besides the Department of Transportation to use this data, we need section to liberate the underlying data.

Second, I commend you for asking for the publication of comprehensive guidelines. We wish every agency produced such work.

We agree that all New Yorkers need access to a *comprehensive guideline for the improvements of roads and sidewalks.*

We have a concern with the language "*disseminated by electronic mail*" and "*posted on the department's official website.*" In essence, you are asking for this report to be posted as a PDF. Shared as a PDF and printed out on paper.

In my community, PDF are where information and data goes to die.

It would be better if Section 19-182.1 asked for this information "*to be published in a referenceable and searchable website, accessible to all regardless of interface.*"

As this manual is written for a 21st Century City, imagine if this manual was produced for the 21st Century. Imagine if you were able to stand on a street corner and quickly look up how the street could be safer.



Imagine a community board member researching safer street options and having to pore through hundreds of PDF pages.

Now, imagine the same community board member using search feature to find the right page, and print out the exact street feature they wanted. Better yet, imagine them being able to take the current intersection and remix it with their desired street features. This is possible with current free and open source tools.

Here you have the opportunity to turn a collection schematics, photos, and stories from paper into an actionable tool to improve public safety. Using the DOT's pre-existing videos and pilot project content, we can easily imagine a collection of interactive guidelines that truly empowered people to understand the street.

In this bill, you have the power to change how people use this information and use it for good. This can be done only if you ask for the underlying data and something better than *"disseminated by electronic mail"* and *"posted on the department's official website."*

Noel Hidalgo

BetaNYC, a Code for America Brigade for New York City

Co-Founder and Executive Director

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