

*Bay Ridge Community Council
Boerum Hill Association
Brooklyn Heights Association
Carlton Avenue Block Association
Cobble Hill Association
Develop Don't Destroy Brooklyn
Fort Greene Association
Gowanus Community Stakeholder Group
Neighbors Against Garbage
North Brooklyn Alliance
North Brooklyn Development Corp.
Pacific 400 Block Association
Park Slope Civic Council
Park Slope Neighbors
Polish Slavic Center Community Services
Pratt Center for Community Development*

*Prospect Heights Neighborhood
Development Council
Prospect Heights Parents Association
Prospect Lefferts United for Services
Save Our Streets (SOS) of Greenpoint
South Midwood Residents' Association
Tri-State Transportation Campaign
Union Street Block Association
United Jewish Organization of
Williamsburg
United Puerto Rican Organization of
Sunset Park (UPROSE)
The Vinegar Hill Neighborhood
Association
Vox Pop
Waterfront Preservation Alliance of
Williamsburg and Greenpoint
Williamsburg Watch*

July 13, 2006

Honorable Michael R. Bloomberg
Mayor
City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Re: Need for new transportation policies

Dear Mayor Bloomberg:

Our organizations write to call on your administration to formulate and implement a thorough, urgent traffic management and relief strategy for Brooklyn and the entire city.

Traffic and transportation have been significant quality of life, environmental and public safety problems throughout Brooklyn for many years. Now, booming development and city government's failure to link transportation infrastructure improvement and traffic management to ambitious development policies are blanketing our streets with cars and trucks.

Worsening traffic congestion and transportation capacity problems may indeed prove to be limiters to development. We want you to know that our organizations support well-planned growth in Brooklyn and all of New York City. But the city's traffic situation

dictates that development must be mass transit oriented, and be planned and implemented concurrently with significant transportation improvements. These improvements must effectuate policies designed to defend and enhance quality of life in our neighborhoods and leverage and enhance the huge investment New York has already made in mass transit and vibrant neighborhoods, such as people-first “traffic calming” plans for residential streets.

Your administration must articulate clear, goal-oriented transportation policies or priorities, such as San Francisco’s “transit first” policy, which also encompasses development projects. Because this administration has thus far failed to do so, worthy city transportation initiatives are few, and many drift along as studies, failing to deliver any public benefit. Consider for example:

- The rezoning of Downtown Brooklyn addressed transportation in a superficial fashion, creating the need for a remedial study by the city which has proceeded at a snail’s pace and shows no sign of reaching a conclusion or being translated into real improvements.
- An ambitious and widely supported “traffic calming” plan developed by the city for Downtown Brooklyn and surrounding neighborhoods – aiming to create better pedestrian conditions and deter excessive traffic – was unilaterally discarded by the traffic engineering-minded NYC Dept. of Transportation.
- The rezoning of Williamsburg and Greenpoint will fuel steep growth in the area’s population, but the city’s plan simply declined to address transportation issues. Subway overcrowding is already a problem there. The city’s transportation commissioner recently refused a request by elected officials to undertake a transportation plan for the district to address the traffic and mass transit pressure that rezoning-induced growth will create.
- City government has failed for decades to address the absence of any mass transit capacity increase for Brooklyn, the city’s most populous borough, most recently in the MTA’s 2005-2009 capital investment program.
- A joint city/MTA study of “bus rapid transit” options to get our buses moving through traffic congestion has taken years to reinvent a concept for redesigned bus stops and lanes recommended by NYC Transit in the early 1990s. This low-cost, high-yield transit capacity application is sweeping transportation planning around the globe but is being taken up in New York at the pace of the B63 bus. The schedule for implementation is unclear. If other NYC DOT initiatives are any guide, it is unlikely anything will ever be done.
- The city began a review of truck routes and the laws and rules that are supposed to govern them, with a view to reducing truck impacts on communities, during Mayor Giuliani’s administration. The study has recently been completed, but many of its common-sense recommendations could have been implemented years ago. Brooklyn neighborhoods have yet to see any tangible benefit from nearly a decade of work.

We urge you to take the bull by the horns and adopt new perspectives, priorities and projects with a sense of urgency regarding transportation in Brooklyn:

• **New perspectives:** city government should acknowledge that:

1. There are limits to the traffic impacts that city neighborhoods can bear.
2. Booming development requires improvements to mass transit and the street infrastructure.
3. There are tradeoffs that need to be made between moving as many cars as possible and streets that work well for communities, pedestrians, buses and bicyclists.
4. Neighborhoods need more protection from ever-increasing volumes of trucks.

• **New priorities:** Implement a people-first policy in our neighborhoods. Traffic calming should take precedence over traffic flow. The city should fully implement its Downtown Brooklyn traffic calming program and extend it to other neighborhoods. It is needed to protect residential areas from cut-through traffic, trucks on inappropriate routes and to maintain and improve the neighborhood qualities that make Brooklyn a great place to live. Traffic engineers should not be in charge of the character of our neighborhoods. City planners who understand place-making and know how to converse and work with residents should be.

• **New capacity:** the city should take the lead in developing a comprehensive look at Brooklyn's mass transit capacity in light of development and demographic trends and promote an official city government agenda for Brooklyn mass transit capacity expansion. We cannot begin too soon to promote ideas for the next MTA 5-year rebuilding program (2009-2014). We understand that NYC Transit is not a city-controlled agency but we nonetheless expect our Mayor to represent our interests when it comes to NYC Transit and the MTA. *Mr. Mayor, you can wield tremendous influence and leverage over these agencies if you exert it.* For example, you were able to win Transit's cooperation in the creation of the recently-released Staten Island transportation plan. We urge you to do this on an even more ambitious scale here in Brooklyn.

• **New policy:** the city must explicitly adopt transit and pedestrian-oriented development guidelines that include:

1. Zoning policy changes that eliminate parking requirements and impose Manhattan-like parking limits in built-up areas or areas zoned for high density.
2. Residential parking permits in areas beset with commuter, entertainment or other non-resident generated demands for non-residential parking.

3. Straightforward discussion of the transportation impacts of major developments. Current EIS practices of obfuscating or papering over impacts are counterproductive.
4. Street management priorities that include practical application of “bus rapid transit” systems on as many bus routes as possible, as soon as possible, not many more years of consultant studies.
5. Incentives for transit-oriented development, such as density or financial bonuses for large retailers that limit parking construction in areas near transit lines.

We would appreciate a reply from your office on these serious matters. We do not want another letter from the transportation department about why nothing can be done and how years of more study are required before any decisions can be made or anything concrete can be accomplished. The city must do a better job than that and test more innovations on a practical basis. If that requires changing institutional arrangements within city government to get more done, we encourage you to proceed in that direction.

Sincerely,

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