



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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August 1, 2019

Hon. Corey Johnson
Speaker
New York City Council
224 W. 30th Street, Suite 1206
New York, NY 10001

Hon. Ydanis Rodriguez
New York City Council Member
250 Broadway, Suite 1763
New York, NY 10007

Hon. Helen Rosenthal
New York City Council Member
563 Columbus Avenue
New York, NY 10024

**Re: Intro No. 1557:
Legislation calling for five-year plans for city streets, sidewalks, and pedestrian spaces**

Dear Speaker Johnson and Council Members Rodriguez and Rosenthal,

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) applauds the creation of a Five-Year Transportation Plan for New York City (Master Plan). We want walking to have the same priority in this Master Plan as biking and transit. At its July 24th Full Board meeting, with a vote of 35 in favor, 0 against, 0 abstaining and 0 present but not eligible to vote, MCB4 recommends that the needs of the walking population and persons with disabilities be addressed with urgency and detailed recommendations. We cannot wait another five years to address their concerns.

MCB4 supports the ambitious goals of the legislation asking the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) to issue and implement every five years a Master Plan for the use of streets, sidewalks, and pedestrian spaces. The DOT's plan would have to prioritize and promote (i) the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists, (ii) access and use of mass transit, (iii) reduction of

congestion and emissions, and (iv) improving access to streets, sidewalks, public spaces, and mass transit for individuals with disabilities.

- Each Master Plan would include proposals for street designs, protected bus lanes, protected bike lanes, bike parking, pedestrian spaces, parking, loading, and truck routes in specific locations.
- Each Master Plan would include benchmarks as follows:
 - In the first Master Plan (2019- 2024): installation of 150 miles (30 miles a year) of protected bus lanes (on the median whenever possible); bus priority signals at 1000 intersections; 250 miles of protected bike lanes (50 miles a year); bus stop upgrades; assess parking regulations and amend them to prioritize pedestrian cyclists and deliveries; double the area of pedestrian plazas by 2021; and create at least 12 shared streets.
 - In the second Master Plan (2024-2029), extend the efforts above and complete a connected bike network; install accessible signals at all signalized intersections; and redesign all intersections to implement a safety checklist.
- Annually the DOT would publish updates to the plan, including past year's accomplishments, changes, and new projects for the coming year.

But the legislation needs to focus as well - and sooner than proposed - on persons with disabilities and the walking public.

Persons with Disabilities

MCB4 recommends that bus stop upgrades include level boarding¹ so that persons with disabilities can board easily and rapidly. This benefits them directly, and also accelerates the boarding process for all passengers. Bus stop upgrades should also include “boarders²” so that no vehicle illegally parked prevents access to the bus stop. Wherever this is not possible, a camera-enforced bus stop would dissuade parking at the stop.

Walking Master Plan

Everyone walks in New York: 11.4 million of us walk every day. This includes 1.1 million commuters arriving at the bus terminal, at Grand Central, and at Penn Station. Sixty million tourists visit New York annually and they walk. And we pay the highest price for that privilege: since 2014, 663 crash fatalities involved pedestrians – 50% of the total – and 55,000 pedestrians were injured.

1 A system that places boarding platforms on the same level as the floor of the bus, similarly to the subway

2 Plastic platforms placed in the traffic lane along the bus stop, to extend the sidewalk and allow buses to stop while remaining in their lane.

Yet in Manhattan our walking infrastructure has been overlooked: 60-story buildings have replaced six-story tenements or 12-story commercial buildings, without any changes to the sidewalk width. Sidewalks are crowded to the point of overflowing into traffic at great risk to walkers. A recent analysis of Eighth Avenue shows that at peak hour, 85% of street users walk on 30% of the street space; in contrast, 12% of street users are in a vehicle and occupy 70% of the space. There are at least five different rules for the minimum width of the pedestrian right-of-way, varying from 9'-6" to 3'-0". And whereas it takes just two days to fill a pothole, it takes six to eighteen months to repair dangerous sidewalk conditions. People with disabilities have to sue the City to obtain compliance with federal laws.

This inequity cannot be ignored any longer. It is time to address the pressing needs of the walking public – all of us – in this Master Plan. The City needs to re-envision the sidewalks not as peripheral spaces to the “side” of the far-more-prioritized vehicles, but as “Walk Lanes”, pedestrian rights-of-way, with the same status as traffic lanes, parking lanes, and bike lanes. Depending on volume and capacity, a Walk Lane could be located entirely on a sidewalk or a plaza, or both on a sidewalk and in the adjacent street, or entirely in the street.

DOT has started to address locations where this issue has reached crisis proportions: they extended the Walk Lane from the sidewalk to the street, on Eighth Avenue between West 42nd and West 43rd Streets; on Seventh Avenue between West 34th and West 42nd Streets and they recently proposed sidewalk extensions and protect bike lanes on Eighth Avenue between West 38th and West 45th Streets. This approach needs to be more systematic and urgent to ensure the safety of pedestrians in all neighborhoods and accommodate our growing population as well as the increase in commuters.

MCB4 recommends that, in the first Master Plan,

- DOT perform a city-wide assessment of 2,500 miles of Walk Lanes, 500 miles annually, out of the existing network of 12,700 miles. The assessment must address the capacity of Walk Lanes compared to the volume of users, the level of protection provided on the sidewalk and the crosswalks, and the quality of pavement. It must also address compliance with ADA rules. To support Vision Zero, we suggest that corridors feeding transportation hubs and high crash areas be prioritized. It behooves DOT to evaluate any corridor slated for a bike lane installation, to reserve sufficient space for all and avoid retrofitting costs.
- Starting in the second year, DOT should then perform upgrades to create “Protected Walk Lanes”³: remove obstacles and widen sidewalks; protect walkers from vehicles (i.e. raised pedestrian crossings, sidewalks and islands, split phases, split LPIs, pedestrian lighting, high visibility crossings); enforcement cameras for those blocking the box or not yielding to pedestrians; and repairs to the pavement. Priority should be given to most congested and most dangerous areas. No less than 100 miles of street length should be upgraded annually³.

³ Since there is one sidewalk on each side of the street, this is equivalent to 200 miles of Walk Lanes.

- In the second Master Plan period, DOT would continue the assessment and perform upgrades to achieve the same annual benchmarks.

As a prerequisite, DOT must establish standards for a minimum Walk Lane width adequate to each neighborhood or corridor. This is, after all, the pedestrian right-of-way. Current minimum widths used in various City rules vary from 3'-0" to 9'-6" and the definition of obstructions defies the laws of physics: for example, a tree is not considered an obstacle by the Department of Consumer Affairs.

- Within 12 months of the Master Plan start date, a task force including DOT and Community Board representatives should be convened to generate standards for Walking Lane boundaries and treatment of obstructions; minimal widths should be established by type of neighborhood, corridor or land use, as appropriate. Other agencies would be consulted for this effort.
- The following year, city regulations should be adjusted to the new standards, and a transition plan developed for existing non-compliant licenses and permits.

DOT must evaluate and undertake institutional changes for the effective maintenance and enforcement of the Walk Lanes. Today up to six agencies administer and enforce the sidewalk and – since 1983 - private owners perform some of the maintenance. As a result, it takes up to six complaints to 311 to clear up an obstructed Walk Lane. Most of the time, agencies have no bandwidth or training to address these issues. While everyone pays taxes to maintain car lanes and bike lanes although most of the population does not use these lanes, the Walk Lanes carry the vast majority of the city traffic, but are not maintained properly.

It is time to rethink how to maintain and enforce Walk Lanes, in a fashion similar to bike lanes and car lanes. The Walk Lanes carry the vast majority of tax payers:

- Within 24 months of the Master Plan start date, DOT should study peer cities for best practices, make a proposal and implement the most efficient organization and processes for maintenance and enforcement of the Walk Lanes in a similar fashion (or better) as bike lanes and car lanes.

This section of the Master plan would be subject to annual reporting as proposed in the legislation.

We appreciate your consideration of our suggestions and hope they will be incorporated in the legislation.

Sincerely,



Burt Lazarin
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4



Christine Berthet
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning Committee



Dale Corvino
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning Committee

Cc: Victor Calise, Commissioner, Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities
Polly Trottenberg, Commissioner, NYC Department of Transportation
Ed Pincar, Manhattan Borough Commissioner, NYC Department of Transportation