



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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LOWELL D. KERN
Chair

JESSE R. BODINE
District Manager

June 23, 2020

Hon. Bill de Blasio
Mayor, City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Hon. Corey Johnson
Speaker, New York City Council
250 Broadway, 18th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: Transportation Bureau

Dear Mayor de Blasio and Speaker Johnson,

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4), at its June 22nd Executive Committee meeting voted¹ to support the return of the Bureau of Transportation from the NYPD to the Department of Transportation (DOT) where it could be better integrated and aligned with the City's goals of calming vehicular traffic, achieving Vision Zero, and expanding the use of alternate modes of transportation. This would lighten the load of the NYPD by removing many civilian duties and allow it to refocus on its primary mission.

It was only fairly recently (1996) that the enforcement and traffic control elements of the City's Department of Transportation were merged into the NYPD. Today, the Bureau counts 4,248 employees or 8% of the total NYPD. Its proposed 2021 budget is \$233 million annually or 4% of the NYPD budget. According to NYPD, the Bureau has four divisions:

- The Highway District officers patrol the City's highways and maintain traffic safety. They respond to vehicular accidents on the highways and conduct investigations involving collisions that result in a death.
- Traffic Management Center monitors traffic conditions using closed-circuit televisions, radios, and the most advanced traffic technologies available.

¹ This letter is subject to ratification at Manhattan Community Board 4's July 22, 2020 Full Board meeting.

- Traffic Operations District designs, develops, and implements strategies to improve the flow of traffic, removes obstacles impeding traffic flow, and expedites vehicular traffic within the city.
- Traffic Enforcement District enforces laws and regulations involving moving and parked vehicles, including expediting the flow of traffic. It is staffed with approximately 3,300 civilian uniformed traffic enforcement agents.

Over the years, Manhattan Community Board 4 has pursued street safety with high urgency, more recently supported by the City’s Vision Zero policies. NYPD has been an unreliable partner in pursuing the shared goals of calming the traffic and reducing traffic injuries and fatalities.

In our experience, NYPD’s Collision Investigation Squad (CIS) under the Highway district has been falling short of its mandate. A prior letter dated October 18, 2018 regarding collision investigation captures many of our ongoing concerns: officers on the scene of collisions in our District have been reluctant or slow to notify CIS and have been prone to making victim-blaming comments prior to a full investigation. With the understanding that the CIS is simply too small a division to investigate all collisions, it was baffling to see that the NYPD recently refused additional funding to expand CIS staff and resources.

We have also long questioned the mis-allocation of personnel and duties between highways which are exclusively vehicular, and arterials, where most pedestrians/cyclist fatalities occur. For many years now, we have all but given up on getting fully integrated traffic data reports from the police precincts.

Radley Balko, author of the book *Rise of the Warrior Cop*, asserts that traffic should be separate from other law enforcement. As asserted by the author, vehicle stops are generally not criminal encounters, but have become pretexts for racial bias and overtime bilking that can quickly escalate, resulting in injury, death, and/or unwarranted incarceration. We support the proposal to “move primary crash-response to a new unit that includes the NYPD’s Collision Investigation Squad (CIS), the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the DOT.”²

Both the Traffic Management Center and Traffic Operations District are civilian functions with substantial engineering components. Under the DOT, they could change their practices from using obsolete tools to “improve the flow of traffic, remove obstacles impeding traffic flow, and expedites vehicular traffic” to calm the traffic and reduce conflicts with pedestrians and cyclists.

The Traffic Enforcement District includes 3,300 civilians—among the most diverse workforces in the City—and we are invested in protecting their salaries and benefits under the transition as proposed. Under the DOT, their focus would be on reducing potential conflicts, instead of exacting punitive measures which are largely ineffective. This would give the opportunity to expand the agents’ job responsibilities and embrace racially neutral enforcement techniques.

² Transportation Alternatives, “The Case for Self-Enforcing Streets” (report), June 2020

With a mission-aligned, restructured and technically supported operation, traffic management would evolve into street management and be consistent with the City's objective. We support this effort towards more equitable, functional, and fair streets and sidewalks for the people of our district and beyond.

Sincerely,



Lowell Kern
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4



Christine Berthet
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning
Committee



Dale Corvino
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning
Committee

Cc: Hon. Jerry Nadler, U.S. Congressman
Hon. Brad Hoylman, U.S. Senator
Hon. Richard Gottfried, NYS Assembly Member
Hon. Linda Rosenthal, NYS Assembly Member
Hon. Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Polly Trottenberg, Commissioner, DOT
Dermot Shae, Commissioner, NYPD