

***TESTIMONY OF BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT MARTY MARKOWITZ BEFORE  
CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION  
DECEMBER 9, 2010***

I WANT TO BEGIN BY THANKING THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION, CHAIRMAN JAMES VACCA AND ITS MEMBERS FOR ALLOWING ME TO SPEAK TODAY.

I WANT TO MAKE IT CLEAR THAT ANYTHING I SAY TODAY IN NO WAY NEGATES MY OPINION THAT JANETTE SADIK-KHAN IS A CONSUMMATE PROFESSIONAL WHO CARES GREATLY ABOUT THE FUTURE OF TRANSPORTATION IN THIS CITY. IN ADDITION, TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES IS AN OUTSTANDING ORGANIZATION, AND I THANK THEM FOR THEIR LEADERSHIP IN BRINGING THE ISSUES OF TRANSPORTATION TO THE FOREFRONT.

I AM IN FAVOR OF INSTALLING BIKE LANES, PARTICULARLY IN THE NEIGHBORHOODS CLOSEST TO MANHATTAN. I HAVE BEEN A VOCAL SUPPORTER OF BIKE LANES ON 9TH STREET LEADING INTO PROSPECT PARK IN PARK SLOPE AND ON THE BROOKLYN WATERFRONT GREENWAY.

I TOO FEEL VERY STRONGLY ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF ROAD SAFETY. IN FACT, I HAVE COMPILED A ROAD SAFETY BROCHURE THAT PROMOTES CIVILITY, COMMON SENSE AND RESPECT FOR ALL ROAD USERS. AND WE HAVE COPIES AVAILABLE HERE FOR ANYONE WHO WOULD LIKE ONE.

BUT ALTHOUGH CYCLING IS A WONDERFUL WAY FOR PEOPLE TO TRAVERSE THE CITY, IT IS SIMPLY NOT A VIABLE OPTION FOR THE MAJORITY OF COMMUTERS. PARTICULARLY IN BROOKLYN, MANY RESIDENTS DEPEND ON CARS BECAUSE THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS ARE NOT WELL-SERVED BY PUBLIC TRANSIT. AND IN THIS AGE OF SEVERE M-T-A CUTS, THIS GROUP HAS GROWN CONSIDERABLY.

AS YOU ARE WELL AWARE, I HAVE BEEN VERY VOCAL IN MY OPPOSITION TO THE DRASTIC CHANGES MADE TO PROSPECT PARK WEST TO ACCOMMODATE A TWO-WAY BIKE LANE. HAD D.O.T. INSTALLED A TRADITIONAL BIKE LANE, I WOULD HAVE SUPPORTED IT, AND I AM SURE MANY LOCAL RESIDENTS WOULD HAVE AS WELL. HOWEVER, THIS RECONFIGURATION HAS BEEN A DISASTER.

IT INCREASES CONGESTION ON THE ROADWAY AND RUINS THE AESTHETICS OF ONE OF OUR CITY'S GRANDEST BOULEVARDS. IT TAKES AWAY PARKING SPACE IN PARK SLOPE, ONE OF THE MOST PARKING-STARVED NEIGHBORHOODS IN THE CITY. AND IT HAS NOT DECREASED THE PROPENSITY OF CYCLISTS TO FAIL TO YIELD TO PEDESTRIANS, ESPECIALLY SENIORS, PARENTS WITH SMALL CHILDREN AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WHO CAN'T SEE THE ONCOMING CYCLISTS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF PARKED CARS. IT IS GROSSLY UNFAIR—NOT

TO MENTION UNREALISTIC—TO ASK PEDESTRIANS TO BE HYPER-AWARE OF EVERY HAZARD JUST TO GET ACROSS THE STREET TO THEIR PARK.

THE POINT OF TODAY’S MEETING IS TO DISCUSS “OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES” TO OVERSIGHT, AND I HAVE SOME SUGGESTIONS.

THERE IS A LACK OF CLARITY IN HOW THE D.O.T. MAKES DECISIONS. RECENTLY, A BIKE LANE ON FATHER CAPODANNO BOULEVARD IN STATEN ISLAND WAS REMOVED AT THE REQUEST OF THE AREA’S RESIDENTS, CITY COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES ODDO AND MY COLLEAGUE, BOROUGH PRESIDENT JAMES MOLINARO. YET MY SIMILAR REQUEST REGARDING PROSPECT PARK WEST HAS FALLEN ON DEAF EARS.

I BELIEVE THAT THE BOROUGH PRESIDENT’S OFFICE IS WORTHY OF SOME DEFERENCE IN THIS MATTER, SINCE I’M THE ONLY ELECTED OFFICIAL THAT REPRESENTS THE ENTIRE BOROUGH OF BROOKLYN AND I HAVE A PERSPECTIVE ON THE IMPACTS IN THE IMMEDIATE AREA, THE NEIGHBORHOODS SURROUNDING THE PARK AND ALL OF BROOKLYN.

ON CENTRAL PARK WEST IN MANHATTAN, THE D.O.T. SOMEHOW FOUND A WAY TO INSTALL A TRADITIONAL BIKE LANE WITHOUT DRASTICALLY ALTERING THE STREET AND WITHOUT SHIFTING PARKING TO THE MIDDLE OF THE STREET. AND, OF COURSE, THERE IS NO BIKE LANE AT ALL ON 5TH AVENUE ALONG CENTRAL PARK OR ON THE AREA’S STREETS THAT LEAD DIRECTLY INTO THE PARK, LIKE EAST 59TH, EAST 72ND, AND EAST 79TH BETWEEN MADISON AND FIFTH AVENUES, ALL OF WHICH ARE JUST AS WIDE AS PROSPECT PARK WEST.

IT IS CRAZY TO BELIEVE THAT WITH ALL THE MUSEUMS AND TOURISTS, FIFTH AVENUE DOESN’T HAVE THE SAME PROBLEMS WITH SPEEDING AS PROSPECT PARK WEST. SO, WHY TREAT BROOKLYN DIFFERENT THAN THE UPPER EAST SIDE AND UPPER WEST SIDE OF MANHATTAN?

D.O.T. STATES THAT THE PROSPECT PARK WEST BIKE LANE WAS PUT IN TO CURTAIL SPEEDING. YOU WOULD THINK WE COULD HAVE INSTALLED A COUPLE OF EXTRA STOP SIGNS OR TRAFFIC LIGHTS. BUT NO. THE D.O.T. TOOK THIS REQUEST TO IMPROVE SAFETY AND SLOW DOWN TRAFFIC AND USED IT TO TURN PROSPECT PARK WEST INTO AN EXPERIMENT THAT FIT THEIR IDEOLOGY.

TO ME, ALLOCATING ROAD USE SHOULD BE ABOUT BALANCE. BUT WHAT THE D.O.T. HAS PUT ON PROSPECT PARK WEST IS NOT BALANCED, ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING THAT CYCLISTS ALREADY HAVE USE OF THE ROADS IN THE PARK, WHICH ARE CLOSED TO TRAFFIC 22 HOURS A DAY ON EACH SIDE DURING THE WEEK, AND ALL DAY ON WEEKENDS.

WE CAN ALL AGREE THAT OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS THE STREETS OF NEW YORK HAVE BEEN RADICALLY TRANSFORMED. AND THIS TRANSFORMATION IS

HAPPENING AT THE BEHEST OF A FEW POLICY MAKERS ACTING UNILATERALLY, BASED ON THEIR OWN PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEFS.

MAYOR BLOOMBERG'S PLAN NYC CALLS FOR THE INSTALLATION OF 1,800 BIKE LANES IN THE FIVE BOROUGHS BY 2030. D.O.T. HAS ALSO INSTITUTED PROGRAMS THAT HAVE CURBED DRIVING AND REDUCED PARKING SPACES, SUCH AS PEDESTRIAN REFUGE ISLANDS, "NECK DOWN THE STREET" SIDEWALK EXPANSIONS AND PROJECTS THAT TURN STREETS INTO PEDESTRIAN PLAZAS.

THIS KIND OF SIGNIFICANT CHANGE TO AN EXISTING CONDITION IN THIS CITY SHOULD NOT BE THE SOLE PURVIEW OF THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH OF CITY GOVERNMENT AND THE D.O.T. IF IT WERE TRADITIONAL LAND USE, SUCH CHANGE WOULD NEED TO GO THROUGH EXTENSIVE REVIEW. BUT STREET SPACE GETS A PASS BECAUSE IT FALLS INTO SOME SORT OF OVERSIGHT LOOPHOLE. LIKE OUR LAND USE REVIEW POLICIES, LARGE-SCALE CHANGES TO STREET USE SHOULD INVOLVE APPROVAL BY THE BOROUGH PRESIDENTS AND THE CITY COUNCIL, ESPECIALLY GIVEN THE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSIONER'S BELIEF, AS SHE TOLD THE *NEW YORK OBSERVER* IN 2008, THAT IN SOME WAYS SHE THINKS OF HERSELF AS THE LARGEST REAL ESTATE DEVELOPER IN NEW YORK.

THEREFORE, WHILE I COMMEND THIS COMMITTEE'S CURRENT OVERSIGHT EFFORTS, I BELIEVE THAT THE COUNCIL SHOULD INSTITUTE A NEW AND POTENT MECHANISM OF INDEPENDENT OVERSIGHT AND APPROVAL FOR ALL SIGNIFICANT D.O.T. INTERVENTIONS AND STREET CHANGES. ANY STUDIES DONE ON THE IMPACT OF BIKE LANES, PLAZAS, OR OTHER ROAD CHANGES MUST BE MADE BY AN IMPARTIAL AGENCY THAT IS INDEPENDENT OF THE D.O.T. AND NOT BASED ON UNSCIENTIFIC PUBLIC OPINION POLLS.

COMMUNITIES IMPACTED BY THESE PROPOSED ROAD CHANGES SHOULD BE INFORMED IN WRITING AND PUBLIC HEARINGS SHOULD BE REQUIRED SO THAT COMMUNITY BOARDS CAN MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS BASED ON THE RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES THEY REPRESENT. AND, OF COURSE, BOROUGH PRESIDENTS MUST BE PART OF THIS OVERSIGHT.

THE COUNCIL MUST CONFRONT SOME BASIC QUESTIONS. HOW DO WE SEE THE FUTURE OF NEW YORK CITY'S STREETS? DO WE WANT THE CITY'S LIMITED ROAD SPACE GIVEN OVER TO PLAZAS, ISLANDS AND BIKE LANES—SOME OF WHICH ARE BARELY USED—WHEN THERE ARE OTHER USES THAT MAKE MORE SENSE AND MOVE MORE PEOPLE? SHOULDN'T ANY REALLOCATION OF THIS VALUABLE ROAD SPACE BE MADE TO MOVE THE MOST PEOPLE AND FOR PROJECTS LIKE LIGHT RAIL OR TROLLEYS?

AND THERE ARE OTHER QUESTIONS THAT NEED ANSWERING.

IN THIS TIME OF BUDGET CUTS, WHERE IS THE MONEY COMING FROM FOR THESE PROJECTS? NOT JUST CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS BUT PERSONNEL AND CONTRACTORS STAFFED TO DESIGN BIKE LANES AND PLAZAS. AND WHAT ABOUT THE POTENTIAL FOR THESE ROAD CHANGES TO IMPEDE EMERGENCY VEHICLES? DO WE REALLY KNOW WHETHER D.O.T. CHANGES ARE NEGATIVELY IMPACTING POLICE AND FDNY? IS THERE EVEN A MECHANISM FOR THE FDNY—NOT TO MENTION THE NYPD, THE SANITATION DEPARTMENT AND PRIVATE AMBULANCE SERVICES—TO WEIGH IN ON PLANS BEFORE THEY ARE APPROVED?

THE D.O.T. CLAIMS THEIR POLICIES FOSTER PUBLIC SAFETY. BUT WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, THIS ISN'T ABOUT SAFETY—IT'S ABOUT IDEOLOGY. IT'S ABOUT AN IDEOLOGY WHOSE ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO FORCE PEOPLE OUT OF THEIR CARS.

WE MUST NOT TREAT DRIVING AND CARS AS THE ENEMY. EVERY DAY CARS BECOME CLEANER AND MORE EFFICIENT, AND IF WE STIGMATIZE CAR OWNERS, WE RISK ALIENATING THE CITY'S MIDDLE CLASS. IN FACT, MORE THAN HALF OF THE EMAILS I HAVE RECEIVED THAT OPPOSE MY POSITION HAVE BEEN WRITTEN BY CYCLISTS WHO ADMIT THEY OWN A CAR! QUITE SIMPLY, FOR MANY NEW YORKERS, OWNING A CAR IS A QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUE—ONE THAT OFFERS SECURITY, PRIVACY AND CONVENIENCE.

WE NEED TO DECIDE WHAT THE FUNDAMENTAL MISSION OF D.O.T IS. IS IT TO FACILITATE EFFICIENT MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE AND GOODS THROUGHOUT THIS CITY OR IS IT TO CREATE A TRAFFIC NIGHTMARE TO DISCOURAGE CAR USE AND IMPLEMENT NOTHING LESS THAN A BACKDOOR APPROACH TO THE FAILED CONGESTION PRICING PLAN? SINCE THE CURRENT LEADERSHIP OF D.O.T. ASSUMED THE JOB IN 2007, I BELIEVE THEY HAVE PAID SCANT ATTENTION TO THE GOAL OF MOVING GOODS AND SERVICES IN AND OUT OF NEW YORK CITY AS EFFICIENTLY AS POSSIBLE. OUR CITY ECONOMY DEPENDS ON THIS. BUT INSTEAD THE D.O.T. HAS APPARENTLY DECIDED THAT ITS PRIORITY IS USING THE GOVERNMENT TO FORCE PEOPLE OUT OF THEIR CARS.

WE NEED A RATIONAL, BALANCED TRANSPORTATION POLICY, ONE THAT RECOGNIZES APPROPRIATE AREAS FOR BICYCLE USAGE. AND THIS POLICY CANNOT BE DEVELOPED OR OVERSEEN BY THE D.O.T. ALONE, ESPECIALLY UNDER ITS CURRENT LEADERSHIP. WE MUST EMPOWER THE COUNCIL AND THE BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S OFFICE TO PLAY A LARGER ROLE IN THESE DECISIONS SO THAT ALL NEW YORKERS, WHETHER THEY WALK, BIKE, DRIVE, OR TAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION, CAN KEEP THIS CITY MOVING.