

Adrian Benepe, Commissioner

City of New York Department of Parks & Recreation

The Arsenal, Central Park
830 5th Avenue
New York, NY 10021

June 25, 2008

Dear Commissioner Benepe:

With July soon upon us, it seems clear that closing Central and Prospect Parks to traffic for three months on a trial basis will not be happening this summer. But at a time when the city is closing Park Avenue to traffic and making other symbolic gestures for a "greener, greater New York," it is hard to believe that the thousands of park users who fervently want to recreate in a car-free space would be left with nothing this year.

To this end, I would like to suggest an alternative to a three-month trial closing that should meet very little, if any, political or community opposition: Car-Free Fridays in the parks. Many New Yorkers travel out of town on Fridays, especially in summer and early fall, so the traffic impact of a closing would be less than on any other day. At the same time, the concept importantly gives those remaining in the city a "three-day weekend" from cars. It also, for the first time, breaks the decades-long pattern that "weekdays are for cars, weekends are for recreational users." The creation of Car-Free Fridays would be another significant step in the direction of car-free parks, while retaining the drives for traffic on the four weekdays when traffic is heaviest.

As you may recall, after a New York Historical Society function in 2003 you made two predictions to me: that Mayor Bloomberg would win reelection and that in his second term you could see him making our parks car-free. "It will be politically much easier than the smoking ban," you observed.

So far, only one of those predictions has come true. Transportation Alternatives has done all it can to make the second one as easy a political lift for the mayor as possible, including gathering more than 100,000 petition signatures in support of a car-free Central Park. I urge you to seriously consider Car-Free Fridays as both a hugely symbolic and effective step toward the kind of parks that I believe you and I both want.

Kindest Regards,

Kenneth M. Coughlin

Chair, Transportation Alternatives' Car-Free Central Park Campaign