

Carrots Are Not Enough



PAUL S. WHITE

After T.A.'s hard-hitting study, the NYPD is beginning to crack down on bogus parking permits. (Page 14)

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Transportation ALTERNATIVES

MISSION STATEMENT: Our mission is to reclaim New York City's streets from the automobile, and to advocate for bicycling, walking and public transit as the best transportation alternatives.

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One hundred years ago the City of New York began altering the streets to accommodate the auto. In Central Park, the winding and bucolic loop drive was reengineered as a short-cut to midtown. Streetcar lines were ripped up, sidewalks were cut in half and public streets turned into traffic arteries. Virtually everyone thought this was the hallmark of progress.

Then in 1973 a small group of New Yorkers—inspired by Jane Jacobs and others who had successfully beaten back “progress” in their own neighborhoods—founded an organization with a radical mission: To limit driving citywide and promote in its place walking, bicycling and transit. The organization was called Transportation Alternatives and what was radical then is today fast becoming the new transportation policy for the City of New York.

There has never been a shortage of reasons to make this policy shift. Climate change, oil scarcity, asthma, obesity, traffic deaths and traffic malaise just to name a few. But now with \$6.8 billion per year lost to traffic congestion, a rapidly booming population and real estate development increasingly limited by an inefficient car-based surface transportation network, powerful pro-business forces are now aligning with those who have for years been trying to effect the same end for environmental, health and social reasons.

These forces include Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff, who recently went on the record about his intent, “to shift travel...away from the automobile and onto transit.” Mayor Bloomberg’s new Office of Long-term Planning and Sustainability is rumored to be working on a 20-year plan that includes targets and strategies for doing just that.

In the shorter term, Commissioner Iris Weinshall’s Department of Transportation has recently announced bold new plans to transform streets to favor those traveling by foot, bike and bus. From the newly accelerated Bus Rapid Transit project to the new bike

plan, the City is now focused on improving alternatives to the private car.

But unless gas prices spike much higher and sooner than expected, these improvements will not shift a significant portion of city car trips. In addition to the carrot, we also need the stick. To discourage car use, street design and management must be altered just as drastically as it was in yesteryear to encourage it.

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As Enrique Peñalosa, the former Mayor of Bogotá, points out, “people don’t ride the bus because they love the environment.” They do not even ride the bus because the service is good. They do it when they are forced to.

New York City needs serious car-restriction measures. And with sea levels, buildings and congestion rising we cannot wait decades to put them in place. Here are three car-cutting measures that Mayor Bloomberg, City Council and our state government should put into place within the next three years:

- Parking Reform in 2007: end free and illegal parking, adopt market-rate curbside parking and convert select strips of parking spaces to delivery only, bus lanes, bike lanes, wider sidewalks and bike parking.
- People-Priority Streets in 2008: permanently restrict private cars on key streets during peak commute hours to speed up walkers, bus riders and deliveries; and during weekends to boost quality of life.
- Road Pricing in 2009: force private car users to pay a fee for driving in the most congested parts of the city and raise the fee during the most congested times.

Clearly we have reached the tipping point. But we do not have time to wait for gravity and good intentions to finish the job.

Sincerely,

Paul Steely White
Executive Director