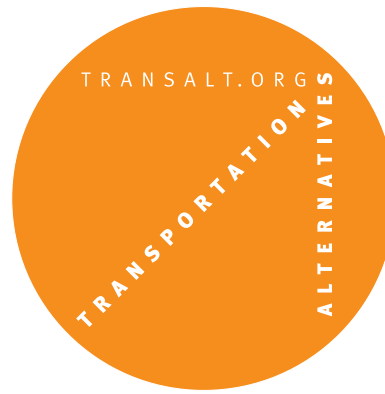


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Your advocate for bicycling,
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Harlem's Traffic Magnet

How Allowing Cars on Central Park's Loop Drive Exacerbates Traffic Congestion in Harlem

June 2008



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Executive Summary

Some have expressed the concern that closing Central Park's loop road to cars will only increase traffic congestion in Harlem, as drivers who previously entered the park's north end seek alternate routes. Others have argued that the availability of the drives is serving as a magnet for traffic, pulling travelers off the FDR and West Side Highway and onto Harlem's neighborhood streets.

This study was undertaken to help settle this controversy by determining the origin of traffic using Central Park's two Harlem entrances – Malcolm X Boulevard and Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard.

The study's findings confirm that a sizeable majority of the private vehicles entering the park during the morning rush hour are originating from beyond the neighborhoods adjacent to the park, supporting the hypothesis that the availability of the Central Park road is serving as a magnet for traffic. The park is drawing motorists off of the Harlem River Drive, the Henry Hudson Parkway, the FDR and other appropriate traffic arteries and pulling them through Harlem's neighborhood streets, worsening both air quality and congestion.

These results suggest that far from increasing traffic in Harlem¹, closing the Central Park loop to cars will ease congestion and its attendant ills there.

Methodology

During four mornings in March and April 2007, between 7:50 am and 9 am, Transportation Alternatives surveyors interviewed drivers of private passenger cars using the park's West Drive. Drivers were interviewed while stopped at the traffic light just north of the West 100th Street exit, which is the first possible exit for traffic traveling south from the two 110th Street entrances.

Drivers were asked: "In which borough or county did you begin your trip this morning?" If the answer was one of New York's five boroughs, a follow-up question was asked: "What is the closest intersection to the start of your trip?" In all, 230 drivers responded over the four mornings, Thursday, March 29; Friday, March 30; Thursday, April 19; and Tuesday, April 24.

A separate survey was conducted on two different mornings in April and May at the same intersection to determine the percentage of total vehicles entering the park from the north that are private as opposed to for-hire (black cars, taxis, etc.). A total of 444 vehicles were surveyed via license plate inspection.

Summary of Findings

60% of the private car drivers entering the park from Harlem begin their trips outside of Harlem

57% originate outside of Manhattan

33% are from the Bronx

10% are from New Jersey

¹ For the purposes of this study, "Harlem" was defined as running from 96th Street on the East Side and 110th Street on the West Side north to 155th Street.

6% are from Westchester

3% are from Queens

2% are from Nassau County

Private vehicles make up two-thirds of the traffic entering the park from the north. The remaining one-third are for-hire vehicles.

The study's results make clear that the existence of Central Park's loop road as an option for rush-hour traffic is needlessly drawing cars into Harlem neighborhoods. Based on traffic volumes recorded by the NYC Department of Transportation at the two Harlem entrances in September 2006, closing the park to traffic would likely remove at least 3,107 private vehicles from Harlem streets each week during the morning commute.² Closing the loop would eliminate the reason for drivers in the Bronx, northern Manhattan, New Jersey, Westchester, Queens and other outlying areas to enter Harlem neighborhoods at all on their trips south, instead inducing them to use more appropriate peripheral arteries such as the Harlem River Drive, the FDR Drive, the Henry Hudson Parkway, and the West Side Highway.

Raw Data

Of 230 total drivers surveyed:

93 began their trip in Harlem

75 began trip in the Bronx

23 began trip in New Jersey

13 began trip in Westchester

7 began trip in Queens

6 began trip elsewhere in Manhattan

5 began trip in other New York counties

4 began trip in Nassau County

2 began trip in Brooklyn

2 began trip in Connecticut

² See "Central Park/Prospect Park: Closure of Park Drives in Off-Peak Direction," Final Report, NYC DOT, February 2007.

Intersections of origin, Harlem

115 and 3rd
143 and Lexington
135 and 5th
142 and ACP Blvd.
136 and Lenox
139 and Lenox
110 and Lenox
133
110 and 7th
151 and Fred. Doug. Blvd.
125 and 2nd
135 and 7th
110 and 5th
125 and Lenox
110 and Lenox
129 and ACP Blvd.
117 and 7th
116 and 1st
117 and ACP Blvd.
145
110 and 5th
130 and Madison
116 and Lenox
117 and 5th
132 and 7th
130 and 5th
122 and Lex
116 and 7th
122 and Lenox
121 and Lenox
143 and 7th
119 and Park
145 and 8th
125 and ACP Blvd.
115
125 and 7th
132 and 8th
124 and 7th
125 and 7th
110
110 and St. Nich

116 and 1st
109 and 5th
139 bet. Lenox and 5th
129 and Convent
134 and 7th
115 and 5th
110 and ACP Blvd.
118
123
139
118 and Madison
112
138
137 and Lenox
108 and 5th
145
145 and 7th
155
116 and 2nd
112 and 5th
145 and 7th
116 and CPW
119 and Lenox
135 and Lenox
121 and 8th
130 and St. Nich.
129 and Madison
138 and 7th
141 and Lenox
128 and Lenox
155 and 8th
123 and 8th
116
134 and 8th
110 and Fred. Doug.
113 and ACP Blvd.