



**New York City
Department of Transportation**

Iris Weinshall, Commissioner

40 Worth Street
New York, New York 10013
Tel: 212/676-0868
Fax: 212/442-700

Web: www.nyc.gov/dot

November 22, 2005

Mr. Paul Steely White
Executive Director
Transportation Alternatives
115 West 30th Street, Suite 1207
New York, New York 10001-4010

Dear Mr. White,

Mayor Bloomberg asked that I respond to your letter of September 9, 2005 supporting a three-month trial closure of the Central Park Loop to cars. The Department of Transportation has examined this idea at length and our studies indicate that closing the Central Park Loop completely (for any period of time) would adversely affect congestion and pollution levels throughout Manhattan.

In the 1990's, the Department conducted a study of the thoroughfares in and around Central Park to determine the impact of reducing or eliminating access to vehicular traffic. This study required extensive data collection and modeling, in addition to vehicle capacity analysis. The study showed that closing the park drives entirely to motor vehicle traffic would not be feasible. It was determined that traffic congestion and resultant air pollution would increase significantly on the streets surrounding the park.

Over the past several years, the Department has received numerous requests from area residents and community groups advocating for increasing roadway closure hours, closing additional entrances and/or exits or banning motor vehicle traffic from the park drives, while other advocates have voiced interest in increasing the availability of the park drives to reduce congestion and improve traffic flow on the surrounding street network.

Since the Department's policies regarding vehicular use of park drives attempts to balance the needs of all users, in November 2004 we re-examined the issue. As a result, the Department implemented a series of measures to improve safety and expand opportunities for recreational users of the park. This included closing the Park Loop to vehicles entirely from 7pm to 7am, reducing the speed limit on the Loop to 25 mph from 30 mph, restricting the use of the Loop to vehicles with two or more occupants during morning rush hours, and closing several entrances and exits. These closures included: the West 90th Street entrance and exit; the West 77th Street entrance; the East 102nd Street entrance and exit; the East 90th Street entrance; and the West 72nd Street slip-off ramp at Strawberry Fields.

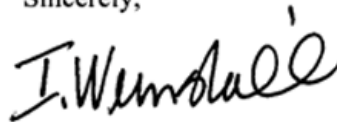
Prior to implementing these closures, the Department collected and analyzed data on traffic volumes on the Park Drive and on roadways adjacent to the park. The Department concluded that further closure of entrances and exits would result in substantial negative impacts to roadways such as Central Park West, which would need to accommodate the additional diverted vehicles.

In February 2005, setup and dismantling of *The Gates* required the full closure of the Central Park Loop, as well as partial closure of the Park Loop during the two-week exhibit. As a result of these temporary closures, there were significant traffic volume increases on most roadways in the vicinity of the Park. The impacts were more widespread during the full closure of the park drives and more concentrated on roadways adjacent to the park during the partial closure (i.e. peak period/off-peak direction). The full closure had a greater impact in the AM peak period (7-10 AM), while the partial closure had a greater impact in the PM peak period (4-7PM). This can be attributed to the full closure having more of an effect on commuting patterns (particularly with the West Drive being closed).

The Central Park Loop is currently open to cars only seven hours a day, between the weekday hours of 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. During three of these seven hours, the southbound portion of the Loop is open only to vehicles with 2 or more occupants. While we continue to investigate opportunities to limit traffic on the Central Park Loop, it remains a critical transportation link for commuters and we are unable to prohibit vehicles from using the Loop at this time.

Please be assured that the Department will continue to examine this issue and make adjustments whenever possible. Thank you for your input.

Sincerely,



Iris Weinshall
Commissioner

IW: ka
CCU Log # 05-6277