

Transportation ALTERNATIVES

127 West 26th Street, Suite 1002 • New York, NY 10001 • (212) 629-8080 • Fax (212) 629-8334 • www.transalt.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PAGE 1 OF 2

December 22, 2005

Contact: Noah Budnick 212-629-8080
Mobile: 917 684 2912

During Strike, Bikes Kept Commuters Moving 5 Ways for NYC to Continue Reaping Benefits of Bicycling

On an average day, about 120,000 New Yorkers ride bicycles. During the transit strike, that number increased 500% as New Yorkers braved freezing temperatures and hopped on their bikes. The surge in cycling was in large part due to necessity, and in part due to the special provisions made for bicyclists in the City's contingency plan.

Says Noah Budnick of Transportation Alternatives, "Conditions during the transit strike show that if New York City streets had more protected bike lanes and buildings allowed tenants to bring their bikes inside, many more New Yorkers would regularly bicycle." Adds Budnick: "Each consecutive day of the strike saw increasing numbers of bicyclists on city streets and bridges."

While private cars, car services, commuter trains and private buses were quickly maxed out, bicycling continued to grow. The **estimated 600,000 daily cyclists during the strike** represent a significant share of the strike transportation load. For comparison, the Long Island Rail Road saw a 50% increase in ridership, serving an additional 50,000 commuters, while cycling's 500% increase yielded 480,000 new bikers.

The bike paths on the East River bridges saw a six to fourteen fold increase in bicycling over the three day strike. As many as 2,000 cyclists an hour traversed the Manhattan and Williamsburg Bridges combined, 900 an hour biked across the Brooklyn Bridge and 800 an hour crossed the Queensboro Bridge during peak commute times.

Once bike commuters reached Manhattan they found existing coned-off bike routes filled with fellow cyclists. However, cyclists also found the routes did not connect to key business districts. Many cyclists were also hard pressed to find places to safely lock or store their bicycles.

Post-Strike Biking: 5 Ways NYC Can Continue to Reap Benefits of Bicycling

Bicycling is a flexible and spatially efficient mode of transportation uniquely suited to New York's flat geography and high density. The space required to move one car can be used by fourteen people on bicycles. Twenty bicycles can be parked in one car parking space. When more New Yorkers bike, New York benefits—from less traffic, clean air and better health. Bicycling can and should continue to be an everyday option for New Yorkers—not just a plan B during those catastrophic events when subways and buses are down.

Over the next four weeks Transportation Alternatives will review the upshot of the contingency plan and make recommendations for how the City can make permanent the plan's successes to encourage bicycling and reduce traffic.

--MORE--

Transportation ALTERNATIVES

PAGE 2 OF 2

5 Ways for NYC to Continue Reaping Benefits of Bicycling

The City's contingency planned attempted to redress the main obstacles to everyday bicycling—unsafe streets and lack of secure bicycle parking.

The City should learn from its plan and implement measures that will encourage New Yorkers who began biking this week to continue riding:

- 1) Mandate bike access to buildings. During the strike, many bicyclists took advantage of special bike access rules recommended by the City's contingency plan. Many private buildings followed suit, allowing tenants to lock bicycles in makeshift bike rooms (often in building basements), or allowing tenants to bring their bikes into their offices where employers let people park their bicycles next to their desks. Many more did not, however. Transportation Alternatives has received many complaints from bicyclists who arrived at their office buildings on bikes and were denied access. Post strike, the City Council should pass pending legislation (Int. 155) that would require buildings to simply let their tenants bring their bicycles inside.
- 2) Create more and better protected bike lanes. Throughout the strike, the City coned-off Midtown bike lanes and banned parking next to them. These safe, wide bike lanes are a big reason why daily cycling during the strike increased 500%. They will continue to invite New Yorkers to bike as long as they are in place. Once the bike lanes are gone, people will be discouraged from biking. The 21 bicyclists killed in 2005 and bicycling firefighter, Matthew Long, who was critically injured this morning, underscore the need for safer bike routes.
- 3) Better enforcement to keep bike lanes clear and safe. During the strike, many heavily-used Manhattan bike lanes were protected with orange cones to prevent vehicle encroachment. While this helped make bicycling safe—particularly for the masses of newly-minted bike commuters—many bike lanes and the adjacent parking lanes (from which the City's Contingency Plan banned parking) were nevertheless clogged with cars, which forced bicyclists into dangerous competition for street space, squeezing them into the path of passing car and truck traffic.
- 4) Create safe routes to and from greenway paths and the East River bridge biking and walking paths. Traffic free cycling on greenways and across the East River bridges is enjoyed by New Yorkers of all ages and backgrounds. Most people, however, must ride on hectic, harrowing streets to access these safe paths. During the first two days of the strike, steady streams of bicyclists enjoyed safe passage up and down Fifth and Madison Avenues, which were closed to non-emergency traffic and, thus, essentially traffic-free. On the third day of the strike, the City reopened these avenues to automobiles. This effectively eliminated their use as safe bicycle routes and, in effect, transformed Fifth Ave and Madison Ave into parking lots. The dangerous traffic and lack of safe space discouraged cyclists from riding on the two avenues.
- 5) Erect more Bicycle Racks. During the strike, there was only one bicycle rack for every 175 bicyclists. While the ebbing number of bicyclists after the strike will free up some room, there will still be a major dearth of outdoor bicycle parking. In a situation where limited sidewalk space precludes the installation of bike racks, then vehicular parking space should be usurped to erect bike racks. *20 bicycles can be parked in the space required to park one vehicle.*

###