

Reclaiming the Streets

Blogging on the Block

FOR TRANSPORTATION JUNKIES WHO cannot wait for the bi-weekly Transportation Alternatives e-bulletin (transalt.org/ebulletin) there is a new way to get a daily fix. StreetsBlog (Streetsblog.org), a project of T.A.'s New York City Streets Renaissance Campaign, features breaking news, innovative transportation strategies from other cities and insightful pieces on topics ranging from observations about street conditions to in-depth interviews with key policy makers. StreetsBlog also features press round-ups of transportation news.

 Below are some recent posts from this burgeoning blog:

Streetsblog Interview: Ryan Russo

Ryan Russo is the New York City Department of Transportation's Director for Street Management and Safety, a newly-created job that he started in July. Previously, Russo worked as DOT's Downtown Brooklyn Transportation Coordinator where he was instrumental in designing and developing a number of improvements for pedestrians, cyclists and more livable streets over the last three years. Streetsblog caught up with Russo a few hours after the City's big bike safety announcement: **Streetsblog:** The City just released a major bicycle safety study and announced a plan for "unprecedented" bike infrastructure improvements. What does today's announcement mean for cyclists?

Ryan Russo: In the past, we were doing about twenty-five miles of bicycle facilities a year. Right now we are on pace to build forty miles in the current fiscal year (Editor: New York City's fiscal year starts July 1). Next year we're going to pick up the pace and build seventy miles. In 2009 we're going to build ninety miles. So, we are, essentially, quadrupling the output of our bike facilities. That is unprecedented and will create a dramatic change in the city's bicycle network.

SB: Do you see bike lanes as a critical safety feature on New York City streets? Do they really help make cyclists safer?

RR: I think bike lanes are very helpful. I'm a cyclist myself. I bike to work. I bike for my errands, I don't own a car and am very bike dependent...

Live-Blogging the Manhattan Transpo Policy Conference

I'm up at Columbia University covering Borough President Stringer's Transportation Policy Conference, live:

9:47 am:

DOT Commissioner Iris Weinshall just finished her introductory speech... **DOT has agreed to close the Times Square "bow tie"**

making way for big pedestrian space increases in Midtown's congested heart. The "bow tie" is the segment of roadway between 42nd and 47th Streets that allows traffic to merge between 7th Avenue and Broadway.

After the closure, cars traveling down 7th Avenue will be forced to continue down Broadway. Vehicles traveling down 7th Avenue will

have to continue down Broadway. This entire middle section of Times Square will be given over to pedestrians. Tim Tompkins, president of the Times Square Alliance has long sought this change. It will make traffic flow less complicated and creates a lot more pedestrian space within Times Square. **Only a year ago powerful people within DOT were stymieing the idea of closing the Times Square bow-tie. Today DOT's Commissioner is touting the change. The Times, they are a-changing.**



The Queensboro Meat Grinder

Every morning I walk past scenes like this near the Queensboro Bridge (QBB) on Second Avenue. Traffic blocks up on Second Avenue north of the two major crosstown exit routes at 60th and 57th Streets all the way to 70th Street and beyond. The problem is that the QBB creates a natural choke point for south

bound traffic on Second Avenue as hundreds of cars and trucks enter Manhattan at every change of the light. But instead of trying to discourage drivers from using Second Avenue

in that area or deter drivers from taking the QBB, the only attempt to manage this is to place some traffic agents at a few intersections, but it remains a state of perpetual gridlock and lawlessness...

StreetsBlog also has an "Eyes on the Street" feature that allows users to submit their own observations and tips on news stories. Get involved at: streetsblog.org/tips. □

Manhattan on the Move

On October 12th, 2006, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer convened "Manhattan On the Move - A Transportation Agenda for a Growing City," a conference to examine the implications of growth and discuss policy solutions for New York City's transportation infrastructure. Over 500 people from all five boroughs attended.

Enrique Peñalosa, transportation visionary and former Mayor of Bogotá, Colombia literally brought the crowd to their feet with his keynote address. New York City Department of Transportation Commissioner Iris Weinshall used her opening remarks to outline the City's bold new agenda to improve New York's pedestrian and bicycling environments, soften the quality of life impacts of heavy traffic and begin to reclaim the sheer urban acreage given over to automobiles. The Commissioner highlighted her agency's commitment to fast-tracking two of five pilot Bus Rapid Transit pilot routes, as well as beginning construction on the recommended improvements for the Safe Routes to Schools program (see page 16), both programs that Transportation Alternatives has advocated for strongly. She also announced a new pedestrian plaza at 20th Street and 1st Avenue in Man-



hattan, which had been called for by T.A.'s Safe Routes for Seniors program. Her remarks seem to reflect a new set of priorities for the DOT. The DOT should now adopt specific timelines for these improvements.

Afterwards, in breakout sessions led by moderators from Transportation Alternatives, NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign, Schaller Consulting, the American Planning Association NY Metro Chapter, Partnership for New York City and the Regional Plan Association, participants discussed the future of Manhattan's transportation systems. Borough President Stringer indicated that the feedback collected in the breakout sessions would help inform and shape his transportation agenda. □

Traffic's Human Toll

New T.A. Study Gets Wide Acclaim

ON OCTOBER 5TH, T.A. RELEASED its groundbreaking study *Traffic's Human Toll*. *Traffic's Human Toll* reveals that vehicular traffic has negative impacts on the lives and perceptions of residents in New York City. The results show that heavy traffic on a residential block worsens residents' images of their block; limits residents' abilities to develop local friendships; bothers residents when they are sleeping, eating a meal and having a normal conversation at home and causes them to spend more time in the back of their homes, avoid certain streets on their shopping trips

and even spend less time outdoors.

It is well-documented that New York's heavy traffic leads to injury and asthma and costs the City billions of dollars in revenue. However, until *Traffic's Human Toll*, the social impacts of traffic on New York City residents remained relatively unknown. The study provides quantifiable evidence that high traffic volumes impose significant negative impacts on New Yorkers' quality of life.

Twenty-one researchers worked for over a year canvassing thirteen streets in Astoria, Queens; Brooklyn Heights, Brooklyn; Chinatown, Manhattan and High Bridge, the Bronx and collected over 600 resident interviews. The residents live on three kinds of streets: "light" traffic streets (fewer than 1,000 vehicles per day); "medium" traffic (2,000-3,000 vehicles per day) and "heavy" traffic streets (over 5,000 vehicles per day).

The majority of the residents that T.A. interviewed for *Traffic's Human Toll* made it clear that their quality of life would improve if the City worked to mitigate the impact of traffic on their lives. The residents were strongly in favor of expanding traffic calming in their communities. Better sidewalks, bicycle lanes and lower vehicle speeds were

among the top requested quality of life improvements by residents of the various neighborhoods.

On behalf of these residents, and all the residents of New York City, this study calls upon the Mayor and the Commissioner of the Department of Transportation to set real goals for reducing traffic volumes in New York City by implementing proven strategies to switch driving trips to less intrusive modes. □

The New York Times

On the Road Not Taken, Happiness

New York Times
By Clyde Haberman

The group known as Transportation Alternatives believes in trying to "reclaim New York City's streets from the automobile." Not an unreasonable notion, many New Yorkers would say. Check the traffic outside your window. It may well be ugly and gnarled at this very moment.

...

It is the automobile that fouls the air, maims people in large numbers and, often enough, kills. Very few bikes, and even fewer pedestrians, do any of those things.

Now Transalt says that cars also do harm in more mundane ways.

The group's researchers interviewed about 600 people in four New York neighborhoods - Brooklyn Heights, Astoria, High Bridge and Chinatown - and found that the heavier the traffic, the less pleasant the life.



Study: Traffic Gets New Yorkers Angry

WCBS

The researchers recommend that the city make traffic reduction a top priority and set targets for reducing traffic volumes by 15 percent by 2009. The researchers suggest more mass transit, bicycling and walking -- and fewer cars.

It also recommends implementing "traffic calming measures," such as reducing speeds and expanding the use of speed bumps and adding bike lanes.

NEW YORK POST

Nervous-Wreck Traffic Zones Living on Bus Street Makes You Grouchy

New York Post
By Jeremy Olshan

Traffic may be bad for your social life, according to a study released yesterday.

New Yorkers who live on blocks with heavy traffic are less friendly toward their neighbors and more likely to stay indoors than those who live on quieter streets, according to the report by the advocacy group Transportation Alternatives.

They also get less sleep and have more trouble enjoying a television show or a family meal.

Dubbed "Traffic's Human Toll," the 14-month study zeroed in on a range of residential blocks in four neighborhoods in order to measure the effect all that honking and exhaust has on quality of life.

...

Part of the problem is that New Yorkers have grown resigned to the idea that traffic is simply an unavoidable fact of life in the big city, said Paul Steely White, director of Transportation Alternatives.

"We hope to raise expectations and make people aware that the traffic problem is in fact solvable," he said. "New Yorkers are not aware that many other cities are at least giving it a go."