

Population Boom; Transportation Bust



PAUL S. WHITE

City workers parking on sidewalks is no joke. Mayor Bloomberg needs to get serious about the future of NYC's transportation. Page 12

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THOUSANDS OF NEW YORKERS and hundreds of elected officials and top policy makers have seen T.A.'s new documentary film, *Contested Streets: Breaking NYC Gridlock*. The film features striking footage of London, Paris and Copenhagen streets that have been reshaped to have less traffic but more capacity to efficiently move people and goods.

The central theme in *Contested Streets* is that New York City would do well to follow these European examples because with the City expecting hundreds of thousands of new jobs and residents in the next decade, our streets are going to get a lot more, well, contested. Call it the "street crunch."

Like the worldwide "oil crunch," New York's street crunch is being caused by an over-reliance on automobiles. Car drivers, of course do not just hog oil, they also hog streets, eating up 10 times as much space per traveler as walkers, bikers or bus riders.

But unlike the rest of the country and many parts of the world, here in New York City drivers have alternatives: 80% of Manhattan bound drivers have a time-competitive transit option and 56% of driving trips city-wide are three miles or less in length.

Despite these facts, and despite the success that other big cities are having in reducing driving and freeing street space for more productive uses, the Mayor's response to the street crunch is looking a lot like President Bush's response to the oil crunch: ignore the facts, snub conservation and undercut efficient alternatives.

For proof that the Mayor is encouraging driving when he should be reducing it, look no further than the recent record of his agencies:

- The NYPD is trying to require onerous 'parade permits' for groups of walkers and bikers and threatening to arrest groups of two or more pedestrians or cyclists who do so much as jaywalk or ride without a bell.
- Tens of thousands of city employees representing virtually all city agencies are abusing their parking privileges, using their agency issued parking placards as an excuse to park their personal cars in 'no parking' zones and on sidewalks.

- The Department of City Planning continues to permit car-oriented developments that due to their excessive parking capacities and curb cuts, will discourage transit use, threaten pedestrians and generate unnecessary traffic.

- The DOT only added three miles of bike paths last year, and its 10-year old Bike Master Plan is only 15% complete. This summer the DOT's bike program director, Andrew Vesselinovich, in a well-publicized letter, cited the DOT's disregard for bicycling as the reason for his resignation.

- Due to its reluctance to take street space away from cars to create special bus stops and traffic-separated bus corridors, the DOT has eviscerated the MTA's "Bus Rapid Transit" project that sought to speed city buses.

It is not too late for the Mayor to change course. With a solid three years left in his term, this issue of

Car drivers do not just hog oil, they also hog streets

T.A. Magazine points out five worthwhile steps the Mayor can take to make our streets more efficient and productive.

By taking these steps, the Mayor will not just be averting the space crunch and preparing New York City to accommodate growth. He will also be reducing the city's greenhouse gas emissions, reducing our dependence on foreign oil and improving the health and quality of life of millions of New Yorkers beset by traffic danger, noise and pollution.

It certainly will not be easy as sitting down to a movie. While they are a definite minority, city drivers are adamant about protecting their parking and other privileges. But if London, Copenhagen and Paris are any indication, a citywide effort to give streets over to those who use them most efficiently will most certainly have a happy ending.

Sincerely,

Paul Steely White
Executive Director

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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