

Eyes on the Prize

More car-free hours in both parks, and a car-free summer in '08

IN 2006, THE CASE FOR A CAR-FREE summer in New York's crown jewel parks reached a crescendo. A strong majority of City Council members surrounding Central Park and Prospect Park supported a car-free summer and 100,000 New Yorkers had signed T.A.'s petition for a car-free Central Park. With legislative pressure building at City Hall, Mayor Bloomberg preempted a car-free parks bill with his own plan to incrementally increase car-free hours. Mayor Bloomberg's plan was welcome, though it stopped short of a car-free summer trial.

On August 6, 2007, Mayor Bloomberg inched one step further by granting Central Park an additional car-free hour from 7-8 am along the West Drive. In statements released by the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT), Commissioner Sadik-Kahn explained, "Central Park is busy in the mornings with walkers, joggers and cyclists. I am pleased we will be able to provide additional time for everyone to utilize the park free from vehicles."

T.A. helped Park Slope Neighbors, the Grand Army Plaza Coalition and the Prospect Heights Parents Association whip up a flash of press demanding that Prospect Park receive additional car-free time as well. Citing fairness and equity, Prospect Park received its due a few weeks later when vehicular access to the East Drive was discontinued from 5-7 pm.

"The increase of recreation-only hours on the drive in Prospect Park mirrors a similar increase enabled in Central Park a

few weeks ago," said Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe upon announcing the new hours. "Now there will be even more hours devoted to car-free bicycling, running, blading and simply sauntering. Both parks will be cleaner and greener, and their users happier and healthier."

While these advances fall far short of the goal of completely car-free parks, they represent further steps in the right direction and bode well for achieving T.A.'s interim goal of a car-free summer in both parks for 2008. By focusing on several key areas over the coming months, T.A. is working to assure a long-overdo car-free

summer in both parks.

- This fall and winter, T.A. is working to educate even more City Council members, especially newcomers, about the need for a car-free summer in 2008 and to finally win passage of car-free parks legislation.

- T.A. is insisting the DOT discontinue the wholly unnecessary and counterproductive suspension of weekday car-free hours during the winter holiday period, which runs from

TakeAction!

With new DOT leadership, we are setting our sights on summer 2008 for car-free parks. Please help us win this battle!

Join our Central Park e-mail list at transalt.org/centralpark. You'll receive timely updates and actions that will connect you to T.A.'s biggest volunteer campaign.

Thanksgiving to January 1. Holiday hours permit automobiles to drive on the Central Park loop from 7 am to 7 pm on weekdays.

- T.A. will enlist eight Youth Advocates to promote cycling and galvanize support for a Car-Free Summer in Prospect Park among park users, neighborhood groups and local schools. Youth Advocates will be employed by

Transportation Alternatives and will be supervised by long-term volunteers and staff.

With a mayor who espouses sustainability, a DOT that understands the importance of bicycling and walking, and advocates working tirelessly, the stage is set for car-free parks to surge ahead as never before. 2007 was a year of inches; 2008 is about the whole nine yards. Liberating Central and Prospect Parks from automobiles simply is the fastest, cheapest and most symbolic way that Mayor Bloomberg can celebrate his new vision of a greener, greater New York City. □



Revelers celebrate a newly car-free Prospect Park East Drive this past August.

ADRIAN KINLOCH



Ken Coughlin, T.A. Board Member and Chair of T.A.'s Central Parks Committee, shakes hands with New York DOT Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan as the Commissioner bicycled the Central Park loop during the August 6 celebration.

DAVID VANDENBERG

EVEN MORE HOURS DEVOTED TO CAR-FREE BICYCLING, RUNNING, BLADING AND WALKING

Updated Hours for Central Park:

Central Park is car-free on weekends. The West Drive is car-free during weekdays except from 8 to 10 am; the East Drive is car-free on weekdays at all times except between 3 to 7 pm. The Center Drive/East Drive (from the 6th Avenue entrance on Central Park South to the East 72nd Street & 5th Avenue exit) is open to cars on weekdays from 7 am to 7 pm and the 72nd cross street is open to automobiles only from 8 to 10 am.

Updated Hours for Prospect Park:

Prospect Park is car-free on weekends. The West Drive is car-free on weekdays except between the hours of 5 and 7 pm; the East Drive is car-free except between 7 and 9 am.