

Car-Free Parks

Trial Closures a Success!

IN FEBRUARY, THE NEW YORK CITY Department of Transportation released its final report on the fractional closure of the Central and Prospect Park Loop Drives. The study, aptly named "Central Park / Prospect Park: Closure of the Park Drives in Off-Peak Direction," contained great news and fierce corroboration for car-free park supporters.

The first and most significant of the report's findings was that "the pilot project was successful and could be made permanent" in both Central and Prospect Parks. This assertion by the DOT substantiates the long standing and hotly contested claim of car-free park campaigners that increases in car-free hours and car-free areas in New York City's crown jewel parks have never resulted in significant traffic impacts.

The study also found that "impacts were least pronounced in July when overall traffic volumes were approximately 15% below May and September levels." Again, this conclusion confirms what car-free park stalwarts have long maintained: closing

Car-free summers are the ticket. A new DOT study finds traffic lightest in Central and Prospect Parks in July, just as demand for breezy, open space for walking, jogging and cycling peaks.



Avenue south of 72nd street. This 13-block stretch, experienced a mere 3.4 mph drop in speeds, which the study,

through the marvels of rhetoric, characterizes as a 52% reduction in speed. Though technically true, the Department of Transportation has chosen to frame the issue in an extremely regressive way. What has really happened is that an already nearly gridlocked street became slightly slower.

Despite the DOT's foot dragging, the New York City Council and Councilmember Gale Brewer have decided once again to push for legislation that would require a three-month trial closure of the Central and Prospect Park Loop Drives from the beginning of June through the end of August. A trial closure would be a long overdue commonsense way of seeing if the hypotheses of two former DOT Commissioners, the current MTA Executive Director, a former DOT Deputy Commissioner and two

of the most highly regarded transportation analysts working in New York City today are worthy of a three month trial during the season when recreational demand is highest and traffic volumes are lowest.

And as if that was not reason enough, a car-free summer in Central and Prospect Park would mesh perfectly with the Mayor's long-term sustainability initia-

"The pilot project was successful and could be made permanent"

-- Major Finding #1 from the Department of Transportation REPORT ON THE CLOSURE OF PARK DRIVES IN OFF-PEAK DIRECTIONS

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the park to vehicles in the summer has the least impact on traffic, since traffic is already light and the most positive impact on New Yorkers who want to spend summer days in the parks. Certainly, this happy coincidence serves as grist for the car-free summer mill.

The study did, however, point to some areas where traffic was impacted by the closure, most notably, in Manhattan on 5th

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2007 should be a watershed year for the car-free parks campaigns. We have more supporters than ever before, a piece of legislation in City Council, a new up-to-date and affirmative study from the City of New York, and momentum. 2007 just might be the year we have car-free summers in Central and Prospect Park. □

TakeAction!
Contact your City Councilmember and let them know that a car-free summer in Central Park and Prospect Park is a long overdue commonsense improvement to NYC

GRAHAM BECK