

The View from Uptown

Community Leaders in the Bronx and Northern Manhattan Discuss How Transportation Affects their Neighborhoods

Joan Byron, Director of the Pratt Center's Sustainability and Environmental Justice Initiative will soon launch the Center's new Transportation Equity Project. Here she speaks with four community leaders about the overlaps and disconnects between their work and the work of transportation advocates citywide.

Community-based Transportation Experts and Advocates



Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice
Tawkiyah Jordan
 Director, Community Development and Planning



WE ACT for Environmental Justice, Inc. (WE ACT)
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 Environmental Policy Coordinator



Sustainable South Bronx
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 Greenway Coordinator
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 Solid Waste and Energy Coordinator

JB: How do most people get around in your neighborhood (s)? Do you feel that conditions allow people to walk safely and comfortably?

TJ: Most residents of the South Bronx don't drive but the number of highways and designated truck routes that criss-cross the community result in a tremendous risk to the safety of pedestrians, especially our most vulnerable populations, children and the elderly.

KC-G: There is an absence of ADA-compliant subway stations in Northern Manhattan. "Of Manhattan's 22 fully accessible stations, only 4 are found at or above 125th Street." [In addition to] the handicapped, it is difficult for the elderly or mothers with children to access [subway] stations when the elevator or escalator isn't working. The steep, long stairways in Northern Manhattan subway stops are challenging for mothers to navigate with their strollers and are physically tiring for seniors; thus, riding the bus is more practical for elderly or handicapped people.

JB: Are people's economic, educational and other opportunities in your neighborhood limited by lack of transportation options?

MM: There are not a lot of excellent transportation options in Hunt's Point; there's the 6 and the 2 trains, and the Bx 6 bus. It's actually faster, traveling within the South Bronx, to take a car service; otherwise you have to take the subway down to Manhattan, then transfer and come back up. People who are unemployed tend to never leave Hunts Point, so they're quite isolated.

JB: How does the lack of mobility in the South Bronx affect people's ability to access jobs, e.g. at the Hunt's Point market?

MM: One of the problems is that the Hunts Point market complex, which employs thousands of people, is almost two miles from the subway, and the Bx6 bus doesn't run frequently enough to get employees of the market to their jobs. It's a huge problem for both workers and businesses there. A lot of workers take a car service from the subway.

JB: The MTA says that in areas where transit connections are poor that it's no big deal, you just get an unlimited ride Metrocard and you can walk from the 2 to the 6 train.

MM: People here don't buy Metrocards like that. It's a lot of money up-front. When you're making the daily decision to pay \$2 for a ride, you can do that, but \$70 for a monthly, or even \$24 for a weekly card is too much. You might need that money another day to buy food or for an emergency.

JB: Does any of your organizations' work focus specifically on transportation?

TJ: Yes, YMPJ as well as other grassroots organizations have waged a fight for the creation of new infrastructure beneficial to the health and livability of the community and for the destruction of poorly designed and underutilized infrastructure—the Sheridan Expressway—that is a detriment to the type of community we want for the future.

KC-G: WE ACT has worked for over 18 years in Northern Manhattan communities to address community complaints of poor health and safety problems related to the planning, siting, operations, maintenance, and disposition of MTA diesel buses and facilities.

JB: What motivates SSB to work on the South Bronx Greenway?

MM: The greenway will create open space in a neighborhood that has less than a half acre of open space per thousand people. It will also

make it more obvious where people are supposed to go, and where trucks and cars aren't supposed to go; it creates an area where people can be outside, and live and walk and play in a much healthier, open ... think cycling groups sometimes see greenways as this really great way for themselves) to cycle around the city, and they sometimes don't understand the neighborhood context and the history of these projects.

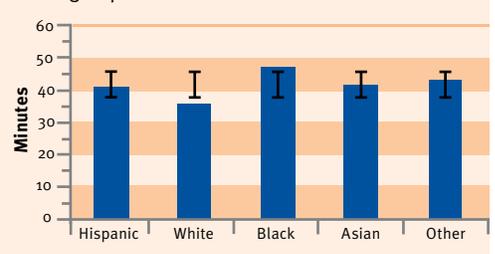
JB: How can more traditional transportation and open space advocates could better support community-based organizations?

KC-G: First, we need to address the myth that "transportation and open space advocates" and "community-based organizations" are two different bodies or represent separate interests. We are, in fact, a community-based organization that advocates for sustainable development, transportation equity, and increased open space. Social and environmental justice is not an "issue" but rather a necessary perspective in each and every facet of transportation and urban planning and design.

EC: Being a good ally means asking questions of and accepting the leadership of the people who are directly impacted by a problem. An ally should never assume that an academic, technical, or general perspective is enough

Are Transportation Benefits and Burdens Equally Distributed in NYC?

New data from the Pratt Center for Community Development show that African American New Yorkers have a ten-minute longer commute to work than white (non-Hispanic) New Yorkers. White New Yorkers have the shortest average commute times of any racial group



to understand the issue or build effective partnerships. This requires an ongoing commitment to listening, seeking out input and being able to adjust workplans and techniques to really work alongside and support the desires of communities. □