

Placards Cut by Half in '08

AS OF ONE YEAR AGO, THE CITY of New York had let government worker parking placard abuse fester for decades. Chinatown streets had turned into illegal parking lots, and neighborhoods like Brooklyn Heights saw their parking and public spaces overwhelmed by the daily deluge of placard-bearing commuters. No part of the city was immune to the abuse. What a difference a year makes.

In January 2008, Mayor Bloomberg announced the free ride was over. Placards would be inventoried and cut by 20%. The internal audit turned up 144,000 permits, nearly double the City's previous estimates and exactly in line with T.A.'s longstanding appraisal of the problem. Over the course of 2008, 54% of placards to firefighters, police officers, teachers and municipal workers were cut from the rolls, bringing the total number of permits down to 66,000.

The placard campaign is retooling for 2009. Having accomplished significant reductions in placards with little fallout from municipal workers in unions, it's unclear whether the Mayor will proceed with further cuts or rest on the progress made thus far. New effort is needed to back up the current cuts with enforcement, and ensure that fewer permits result in fewer cars on the street. □

Two Years of Cleaning Up Permit Abuse

July 2006 – T.A. releases *Uncivil Servants*, the first report documenting placard abuse in Chinatown.

March 2007 – T.A. launches uncivilservants.org. More than 1,000 postings of illegally parked cars have been reported through the site.

March 2008 – The City announces a 32% cut in all non-education permits. Enforcement of illegally parked cars with permits continues to lag.

November 2006 – T.A. releases *Above the Law*, a citywide survey showing 77% of permit holders use them to park illegally.

2009 – T.A. will work to reduce placards below 50,000, finally bring enforcement against illegal permit abuse and revamp signage to reduce on-street spaces for government workers.

January 2008 – Mayor Bloomberg pledges to inventory permits and cut them by 20%.

September 2008 – Calculating that parking permits outnumbered available parking spaces six-to-one, the City cuts Department of Education placards by a startling 83%. The United Federation of Teachers adheres to the decision.

What Makes Main Street Tick?

THROUGHOUT THIS FALL'S presidential election, everyone has been talking about "Main Street." Candidates have been using this word to not only describe the effects of the failing economy on small business, but to also show that they too understand the intrinsic value of everyone's local Main Street—that beloved center of cities and towns across America.

What few people talk about is how Main Street—the physical street itself—also plays a critical role in the strength of local economies, healthy populations and strong communities. T.A.'s recent report, *Streets to Live By: How livable street design can bring economic, health and quality-of-life benefits to New York City*, reviews research from around the world and investigates how street design contributes to our lives. It finds:

- City pedestrian zones can boost foot traffic by 20-40% and retail sales by 10-25%.
- Traffic calming has increased property values by as much as 30%.
- Homes on quiet, low-traffic streets are

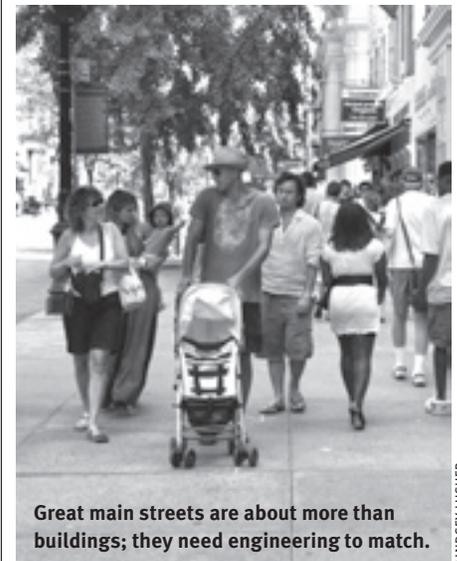
worth as much as 8-10% more than those on noisy streets.

- Public gathering spaces like community gardens increase home values by as much as 30%.

Beyond strengthening home values and retail sales, great streets make walking and cycling a joy and help people lead healthier lifestyles. More people strolling, shopping and enjoying a local street environment naturally creates a livelier city and is the first step toward boosting neighborhood social networks. Street design that encourages walking reduces the risk of traffic injury, levels of air pollution and the risk of obesity, and increases physical activity.

Right here in NYC, new livability pilot programs by the DOT – Broadway Boulevard, the 9th Avenue cycle-track and the public plaza initiative – have demonstrated highly positive results, and T.A. is pushing the Departments of City Planning and Health to quantify the economic and health benefits of all these new streetscapes.

As the nation and New York City considers how it will support local Main Streets in the context of a riskier and more unstable economy, this report makes a strong case that the best solution may be right under foot. □



Great main streets are about more than buildings; they need engineering to match.

LINSEY LUSHER

TRAFFIC STARTS AT HOME

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WHO SPENT their childhoods playing on green lawns and enjoying Kmart values are now proud to call themselves New Yorkers. In the imaginations of many Americans, New York City is the ultimate anti-suburb. Built largely before the private automobile was invented, most neighborhoods are eminently walkable, bikeable and transit-friendly. New York City is the only US city where less than half of households own a car.

But despite all New York's inherent gifts, the city is actually becoming more car-dependent. Our zoning codes remain a throw-back to the 1960s, when New York City yearned to look more like its population-draining suburbs. To shed light on creeping car-dependence, T.A. and other planning and transportation groups recently released two reports, *Suburbanizing the City* and *Guaranteed Parking—Guaranteed Driving*. They were written and researched by former PlaNYC staffer Rachel Weinberger with T.A. consultants Mark Seaman and John Kaehny, and they find that outdated zoning codes are transforming New York City into the kind of car-dependant metropolis that many New Yorkers are proud to have escaped from.

Suburbanizing the City reveals how current zoning laws, many of which were approved in the 1960s, require developers to build parking with new residential buildings regardless of the buildings' proximity to transit or anticipated driving demand. With a parking spot to call their own, these new residents will be 40-50% more likely to own a car than current residents and will bring 170,000 additional cars to city streets by 2030. As New York City creates new housing with required parking for the one million new New Yorkers who will live here by 2030, people and development will be more and more dependant on the private automobile.

The report finds that traffic caused by these new cars is likely to erase many achievements of Mayor Bloomberg's sustainable transportation initiatives. These new cars are expected to add over 1 billion annual vehicle miles traveled to city streets by 2030 and over 431,000 metric tons of CO2 per year by 2030. That's 100,000 tons more CO2 than the Mayor's green taxi initiative will take away.

Guaranteed Parking—Guaranteed Driving is the first study in New York to look at how the security of a parking spot at home induces driving to the Central Business District. The study singles out the effect of a home parking spot by comparing the driving pat-



RACHEL WEINBERGER

New and old construction: two new T.A. studies shed light on the creeping suburbanism taking place in many neighborhoods.



RACHEL WEINBERGER

terns of the residents of Park Slope, Brooklyn and Jackson Heights, Queens. It finds that even though all traditional driving indicators (income, car ownership, transit access, government employment and time competitiveness between transit options) suggest that the residents of Park Slope should drive to the CBD more than the residents of Jackson Heights, the reality is that Jackson Heights sends 13% more drivers to the CBD than in Park Slope. In fact, the residents of Jackson Heights are 28% more likely to commute by car, and 45% more likely to drive to work in the Manhattan Central Business District than Park Slope residents.

What makes them drive? Guaranteed off-street parking. More off-street parking in driveways and alleys exists in Jackson Heights than Park Slope because more of its housing was built after the 1960s zoning changes

that required parking at residences. Jackson Heights has twice the amount of buildings constructed under 1960s code than Park Slope: 16% as compared to 8% in Park Slope. Unlike drivers in Park Slope, who drive less for fear of losing their prime curbside space, drivers in Jackson Heights drive twice as much because they know a spot is waiting for them when they return from work.

The two neighborhoods provide a window into the driving behavior of New Yorkers to come. Not only is the glut of off-street parking in development poised to add hundreds of thousands of new cars to our streets, but those drivers will drive at twice the rate of today's NYC drivers. If the Department of City Planning and Mayor Bloomberg cling to outdated zoning codes that encourage private car ownership, New York City's status as the nation's anti-suburb is in dire straits. □