Executive Summary

From 2003 to 2007, rising levels of mass transit ridership and bicycle commuting accompanied population and job growth in New York City, while vehicle traffic levels were essentially unchanged. This was the first period since the Second World War that non-auto modes fully absorbed all growth in travel in the city, producing a period of fully transit-centered economic and population growth.

The trend toward a more transit-centered transportation system continued in 2008. Citywide, mass transit ridership increased at a healthy pace in 2008, while traffic levels showed the largest decline in at least 15 years. The pattern was similar for travel into the Manhattan Central Business District (CBD), south of 60th Street to the Battery. Transit ridership and bicycling commuting into the CBD increased, while traffic levels experienced the largest decline in over 30 years aside from the fall-off due to post-9/11 traffic restrictions.

These results for 2008, coming as the city entered the current recession, continue the shift toward sustainable modes of transportation that was seen during the preceding years of economic growth.

More recent data suggest that while transportation patterns were significantly affected by the recession in 2009, there is no evidence of a shift back toward increased auto use. Both mass transit ridership and traffic volumes at tolled bridges and tunnels declined in 2009, while bicycle commuting increased rapidly to reach a record high.

Declines in traffic in the CBD in 2008 and 2009 produced improvements in traffic speeds. Data from taxi Global Positioning Systems (GPS) readings show significant increases in traffic speeds in fall 2008 and spring 2009. The rate of improvement continued although at a lesser rate in fall 2009.

Key findings for traffic and transit trends are:

- Citywide traffic volumes declined 2.0% in 2008, and a total of 3.4% since 2003.
- Traffic entering the Manhattan CBD dropped 3.7% in 2008 and is down 6.9% since 2003.
- Citywide bus and subway ridership increased 3.2% in 2008, for a total increase of 12.3% since 2003.
- Cycling volumes into the Manhattan core increased 32% in 2008 and 26% in 2009, and have more than doubled since 2003.
- Daytime traffic speeds in the Manhattan CBD increased by 8% from fall 2007 to fall 2008, and an additional 4% from fall 2008 to fall 2009. In total, traffic speeds increased by 13% from fall 2007 to fall 2009.
- Between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m., Manhattan CBD traffic averaged 9.1 m.p.h. in the 12 months ending in October 2009.

Overall, these broad transportation performance indicators show a continued strengthening of sustainable modes of transportation, including bus, subway, bicycling and walking.

Moving from a broad macro perspective to a street-level view, performance indicators for DOT street design projects show that these projects are serving the larger goals of safety and sustainability. DOT street redesigns, including changes to traffic regulations, traffic signal operations and parking regulations and addition of bike, bus and pedestrian facilities, have reduced injuries from motor vehicle crashes, sped up bus service, reduced congestion and enhanced the ease and attractiveness of walking and cycling.

Key findings for project performance indicators for a dozen DOT projects completed by the end of 2008 are:

- 77% reduction in total crashes involving injuries at Park Avenue and E. 33rd Street from changes made to traffic patterns in the area.
- 45% reduction in vehicle delays at the Tillary and Adams Streets approach to the Brooklyn Bridge, from signal retimings and turn restrictions.
- 32% increase in ridership on the Fordham Road Select Bus Service (SBS) bus compared with the limited bus that it replaced.
- 19% increase in bus speeds on Fordham Road in the Bronx and 17% increase on 34th Street in Manhattan from the SBS program. The typical commuter on Fordham Road gains two days annually from the time savings.
- 18% reduction in average traffic speeds between 9 a.m. and noon along Skillman and 43rd Avenues in Sunnyside, Queens.
- 16% improvement in bus travel times during morning peak period along Victory Boulevard.
- Six percentage point improvement in weekday parking availability from the Greenwich Village PARK Smart pilot program.
- Five-fold increase in cycling on the new Jewel Avenue bike lane in Queens.
- 15,000 sq. ft. of new pedestrian plaza and bicycle lanes in the Bronx Hub.

Both citywide data and program indicators demonstrate that New York City's progress toward a safer and more sustainable transportation system has withstood the current recession. This progress also positions the city to accommodate renewed job growth and enhance New Yorkers' quality of life as the economy recovers.

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