



The City of New York

Manhattan Community Board 1

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Committee on Lower Manhattan Redevelopment

Oversight Hearing on The Effect of Increased Tourism in Lower Manhattan

**Testimony by Catherine McVay Hughes
Chairperson**

**Friday, September 28, 2012
250 Broadway, Committee Room, 16th Floor, New York, NY
10:00 AM**

Good morning Chairperson Chin and members of the New York City Council Committee on Lower Manhattan Redevelopment. I am Catherine McVay Hughes Chairperson of Manhattan Community Board One. We thank you for the opportunity to comment on the effect of increased tourism in Lower Manhattan.

Lower Manhattan has long served as a destination for tourists because it is rich in historical, iconic, cultural, and economic assets, ranging from the National 9/11 Memorial, Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island, Wall Street, The Bull (at Bowling Green), Brooklyn Bridge, and Governor's Island. Lower Manhattan residents appreciate the significance of these local assets, understand the desire of tourists to experience them, and recognize the economic benefits such tourists generate for the area and the City.

There has been increased tourism in the aftermath of 9/11. "Eleven years after September 11, Lower Manhattan attracts 10 million tourists per year. According to the Downtown Alliance, the local Business Improvement District largely responsible for spearheading the area's growth, there are 39,380 visitors to the area each day with more than 309,500 weekday workers and 61,000 residents living in more than 325 residential buildings," according to the NY Daily News (September 6, 2012, by Jason Sheftell).

The tourists are visiting an area of roughly one square mile that is teeming with construction projects. The Lower Manhattan Construction Command Center (LMCCC) is currently overseeing 69 major public and private projects from street construction (e.g. Route 9A, Brooklyn Bridge rehabilitation, Hudson Street trunk watermain) to mass transit (e.g. MTA Fulton Center, PATH Transportation Center, WTC Vehicle Security Center) to public projects (e.g. National September 11 Memorial and Museum) to new commercial buildings (e.g. WTC Towers 1, 2, 3, 4; 99 Washington Street, 180 Broadway) to parks and public spaces (e.g. East River Waterfront Esplanade) to new residential to commercial and residential rehab.

There are three key impact areas and opportunities for improvement:

Streets and Vehicular Flow

The influx of tourists exacerbates the area's transportation challenges as local authorities seek to accommodate the increased number of double-decker and other tour buses that transport visitors from out of the borough and from hotels elsewhere in Manhattan while the construction and other vehicles including commuter buses, taxis and black cars navigate downtown.

CB1 welcomed the outreach by the office of Lower Manhattan Transportation Commissioner Luis Sanchez and other City agencies to identify parking spaces where buses can load and unload passengers in proximity to the 9/11 Memorial and a system to charge a fee for these spaces as a disincentive to buses to bring passengers into Lower Manhattan and a way to raise needed revenue and locate suitable spots. This collaboration last year was valuable since the National 9/11 Memorial just completed its first year of operation at the WTC site, where more than 4.5 million people from all 50 states and numerous countries have visited since the phased-in opening a year ago. However, some buses still park in unauthorized zones and idle throughout CB1. This is a particular concern in the area near schools and residential buildings.

Sidewalks and Pedestrian Flow

CB1 is particularly concerned about problems caused by the concentration of tourists on the blocks surrounding the 9/11 Memorial, including Liberty, Cedar, Greenwich and West Streets. In this area, the streets and sidewalks are extremely congested as a result of construction-related scaffolding, street vendors (many of whom operate illegally without a permit), newsboxes and newsracks (people sit on these boxes), and UPS mail cartons (these pile up near mail boxes and then are used as trash receptacles). Tourists contribute to and intensify these problems by congregating in groups on sidewalks and streets in order to take photographs and observe local sights. These conditions hinder pedestrian and vehicular flow, contribute to unsanitary conditions when people litter, attracting rats and other vermin, and generally diminish the quality of life in the neighborhood.

Recent collaboration with The Mayor's Community Assistance Unit and other agencies has helped address the issue of overflowing sanitation receptacles and two trash bins have been added at Liberty and Church. We hope that these positive measures will continue and ask that clutter from those streets is removed.

We are pleased with the recent plan by the Department of Transportation to reconfigure the sidewalk around the Charging Bull sculpture at Bowling Green. This should improve the congestion in the vicinity of the sculpture.

Congested Open Space

The Battery Conservancy provides critical open public space for the Financial District and serves as the launching point for ferries to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. Last year millions of visitors and commuters passed through the Park and those headed for ferries were stopped and screened at the "temporary" security tent. Although security is always a priority, this

“temporary” solution has remained in effect for over a decade, obstructing views of the Statue of Liberty. In addition, we wait for the completion of the construction of the Garden Bikeway that will link the Hudson River Park Bikeway to the East River Esplanade. Construction of the Bikeway will convert acres of asphalt to green space, help create order in an area overcrowded with pedestrians, vendors, tourists queuing for tour buses, and, increasingly, bikers.

The Brooklyn Bridge also provides critical open space via its walkway and bikeway. The narrow and crowded walkway connects commuters from Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn and has increasingly become a major tourist destination. Vendors on and near the Bridge compound the heavy congestion and contribute to sanitation problems. We understand that increasing the width of the path for pedestrians and bicyclists has been proposed and we support a study on this subject that would also look at the possibility of converting one road lane into a bike lane.

In summary, Community Board 1 (CB1) supports the development of tourism in Lower Manhattan; however, we believe that tourism must be managed so that economic benefits to the area and the City are maximized and adverse impacts to the residents and workers are kept to a minimum. CB1 therefore requests and supports the following governmental actions:

Transportation and Vehicular Flow

- City increases mass transit service to and from Lower Manhattan on the weekends
- City and downtown attractions strengthens efforts to promote the use of public transportation as a means for tourists to visit downtown tourist destinations
- MTA cleans subway stations better, even if under renovation
- Encourage buses and concrete trucks to use ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel and advanced clean air retrofit technologies
- DOT, NYPD, DEP and all other involved agencies dedicate sufficient enforcement personnel and resources to limit idling or illegal parking by tour buses and black cars
- NYCDOT needs to paint pedestrian crossing lanes where they have faded and missing at various intersections throughout the district, notably on South Street in the vicinity of the New Amsterdam Market and in construction zones such as on Broadway near John, Fulton, Dey and Church Streets
- Parks Department needs to complete the construction of the Battery Conservancy’s Garden Bikeway that will link the Hudson River Park Bikeway to the East River Esplanade
- NYCDOT needs to study how to improve the pedestrian and bicycle congestion on the Brooklyn Bridge, including making an inbound and outbound lane for bicycles

Safety and Security

- No mid-year budget cuts to NYPD, homeless and mental health services, especially in light of the recent incidents at Pier 15 and in Hudson River Park (Tribeca)
- Battery Park City Authority, Lower Manhattan Development Corporation and City work together to immediately fund and build the West Thames Street Pedestrian Bridge so that the southern portion of the Financial District can finally be safely connected with the

southern portion of Battery Park City, especially for children, vulnerable seniors and people with disabilities

- City works with National Park Service to identify an alternative solution for the security tent blocking the Statute of Liberty view in The Battery Conservancy
- City ensures that bollards and other security measures around the NYSE and other sensitive sites are effective but also safe for passersby
- Educate restaurants and their bike delivery folks on new rules and enforce regulations

Quality of Life Improvements

- City vigorously enforces regulations governing street vendors, including on weekends and evenings and in the “vendor-free zone” around the 9/11 Memorial and on sidewalks in construction zones, e.g. on Liberty Street between Greenwich and Church, Fulton Street between Broadway and Williams Street
- City deploys the resources needed to ensure that garbage is collected before it piles up by increasing the frequency of pick-up of bags collected from trash bins
- Keep newsracks in an orderly and organized fashion and not allowed at corners with construction, scaffolding or highly congested corners
- Regular pick-up of UPS bins
- City explores means including signage, smartphone apps and multimedia to communicate to tourists the importance of reducing activity that may result in adverse impacts to quality of life for local residents and businesses
- National September 11 Memorial & Museum install restrooms after the point of entry to the 9/11 Memorial to alleviate some of the demand on local institutions to provide these facilities
- Parks Department needs to build the new comfort station at The Battery Conservancy Playground
- City and funding partners maintain funding at adequate levels for the Lower Manhattan Construction Command Center to enable the LMCCC to minimize noise, congestion, dust and other quality of life impacts through the peak years of construction (est. 2015)

Supporting Local Businesses

- City and NYC & Company develop and implement strategies to encourage tourists to spend money at Lower Manhattan businesses
- City minimizes the number of barricades or refines their design to improve the image of Lower Manhattan

Thank you very much. We look forward to working with you and the various government agencies to minimize the impact of tourism downtown.