

September 4, 2003

Iris Weinshall  
Commissioner  
Department of Transportation  
40 Worth Street  
New York, NY 10013

Joseph J. Seymour  
Executive Director  
Port Authority of New York and New Jersey  
225 Park Avenue South  
New York, NY 10003

**Re: Pedestrian barricades at intersection of Ramp C and Ninth Avenue**

Dear Commissioner Weinshall and Director Seymour:

Manhattan Community Board No. 4 was surprised and dismayed to learn that your agencies have proposed to eliminate the pedestrian crosswalk crossing Ramp C at Ninth Avenue, and to install pedestrian barricades intended to eliminate pedestrian traffic on the west side of Ninth Avenue between 36<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Streets. This decision was made without notifying or consulting with the community, and has been based on a perception of the traffic conditions at that location that does not match the day-to-day experience of local residents. In addition, the proposed changes are inconsistent with past and pending actions by other city agencies to promote improvements in the area. We request that you defer implementation of the proposed changes until a meeting between representatives of the community, DOT and Port Authority can take place to consider the matter more completely.

The intersection of Ramp C and Ninth Avenue – located just north of 36<sup>th</sup> street – has been a major entry point to the Lincoln Tunnel since 1958. Prior to the ramp's recent reconstruction, a standard crosswalk had been striped across its roadbed for 45 years. Notwithstanding, there remained a conflict between pedestrians and tunnel bound traffic. The community has long sought various safety measures including improved and more effective signage, additional roadbed markings, physical alterations for ADA compliance and the exploration of installing pedestrian and traffic signals.

For years, this Board has worked with the Port Authority to improve signage, to install curb cuts and to undertake other safety measures throughout the Lincoln Tunnel system. Most recently in March 2003, near the completion of Ramp C's reconstruction, representatives from this Board and the Port Authority met on site to discuss problematic conditions at that location and to identify potential solutions. As a starting point, it was agreed that the crosswalk needed to be re-striped as soon as possible after construction and better signage needed to be installed. About two weeks later, upgraded signage was installed, but the crosswalk was never re-striped. The signage still needs better placement at the north side of the ramp, so that drivers are signaled earlier as they approach the turn.

Ultimately, however, it is the Board's position that the physical design of Ramp C must be reconfigured. This street intersection is an irregularity of the Manhattan street grid that requires special treatment to ensure pedestrian safety. This intersection should be made to look and feel as much as possible like other intersections in Manhattan and not as an onramp to the interstate highway system. The Dyer Avenue intersection at 30<sup>th</sup> Street and Ninth Avenue and the recently redesigned streets approaching the Brooklyn Bridge should serve as models for physical improvements at 36<sup>th</sup> and Ninth Avenue.

Presently, moveable lane markers separate two lanes of tunnel-bound traffic from other traffic on Ninth Avenue. This condition, coupled with the ramp's wide turning radius, misleads drivers to think they have already entered Dyer Avenue and results in two lanes of moving vehicles turning off Ninth Avenue with minimal reduction in speed.

The proposed installation of pedestrian barricades is contrary to the goals of the Mayor's Hell's Kitchen/Hudson Yards plan which recognizes "the importance of Ninth Avenue as the central spine of the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood". This current goal is a furtherance of city policy established in 1990, when the Department of City Planning, rezoned the Ninth Avenue corridor from an M1-5 district to a C1-7A district to encourage residential development with ground floor retail space. In the intervening years that rezoning has resulted in the renovation and return to residential use of all buildings except one.

Now in 2003, Ninth Avenue has seen its first newly constructed residential building since the 1930's on Ninth Avenue between 36<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Streets – a building with southern and western frontages on Dyer Avenue. Developed by the Dermot Companies and financed by the AFL/CIO Building Investment Trust, the significance of this project merited a press conference by Mayor Bloomberg. With 259 units (52 are affordable), it is perceived as the anchor for and model of new residential development planned for the neighborhood.

As Hell's Kitchen redevelops, daily pedestrian activity has been increasing. Several large loft buildings along 34<sup>th</sup> Street and Tenth Avenue attract many more workers now as office buildings than they did previously as industrial buildings. More and more commuters arriving at the Port Authority Bus Terminal by bus from New Jersey or by the No. 7 subway line use Ninth Avenue to walk to work everyday. And on Javits Center show days (weekends included), there is a constant stream of visitors traversing the neighborhood by foot. Now with the local residential population on the rise, the need for a better pedestrian environment is urgently needed at the other Dyer Avenue intersections. The area near 36<sup>th</sup> and Ninth Avenue definitely needs improvement, but the recent fatalities of a biker at 41<sup>st</sup> Street and Ninth Avenue and two pedestrians at 40<sup>th</sup> Street and Dyer Avenue make improvements at these locations most pressing. Other locations with hazardous pedestrian crossings include Dyer Avenue at 35<sup>th</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup> Streets and Tenth Avenue at 40<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> Streets.

The goal of DOT and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey should be the updating of the Dyer Avenue intersections to meet the current and future planned reality of residential development. The Hell's Kitchen neighborhood was a victim of the now discredited type of highway construction from the 1930's to the 1970's. The approach today should be 21<sup>st</sup> century, with an emphasis on creating a pedestrian-friendly environment. A balance must be struck

between improving the movement of traffic within this major regional transportation node and the protection and enhancement of pedestrian circulation.

The ground floor commercial space of Dermot's new building is intended to provide retail continuity to Ninth Avenue. Barricades will create a dead-end sidewalk preventing that restoration. A barricade will simply result in a more dangerous pedestrian environment. Despite sidewalk closings during the recent reconstruction of the intersection, pedestrians continued to travel on the west side of Ninth Avenue by walking in the street and around the construction barricades.

The real danger is the intersection of 37<sup>th</sup> Street and Ninth Avenue, specifically from cars traveling west bound on 37<sup>th</sup> Street. Tunnel-bound drivers from 37<sup>th</sup> street attempt to cut into the Dyer Avenue queue, which extends well above 37<sup>th</sup> street and is marked by cones (which are often flattened by drivers attempting to enter or exit the queue). Those drivers both block Ninth Avenue southbound traffic and/or attempt to make the 37<sup>th</sup> Street light by speeding up and continuing the acceleration into the Dyer Avenue queue.

The Board requests southbound turns from 37<sup>th</sup> Street into the queue be prohibited by signage and increased fines. Signage should also clearly direct drivers west along 37<sup>th</sup> Street to the 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 40th Street Lincoln Tunnel entrance.

To repeat, the Board opposes the proposed installation of pedestrian barricades at the intersection of 36<sup>th</sup> Street and Dyer Avenue. The Board further requests to meet with DOT and Port Authority to identify practical solutions for pedestrian safety and better traffic movement at the 36<sup>th</sup> Street and Dyer Avenue intersection and at other Dyer Avenue intersections. Real improvement of the pedestrian environment throughout this part of Hell's Kitchen can only begin with an understanding of conditions at the local level.

Sincerely,



Walter Mankoff  
Chair  
Manhattan Community Board No. 4



Joshua David  
Co-Chair  
Transportation Planning Committee



John Rust  
Co-Chair  
Transportation Planning Committee

cc: Local Elected Officials  
M. Forgione, DOT  
A. Burden and V. Chakrabarti, DCP  
C. Meara, S. Dixon and T. Benczik, PANYNJ  
R. Muller, MBPO

Mike Meola, EDC  
L. Blatchford and A. Weisbrod, Mayor's Office  
M. Meyers and S. Benjamin, Dermot Co.  
Transportation Alternatives

**Deleted:** Elected Officials