



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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District Manager

May 18, 2009

Christopher Ward, CEO
Port Authority of New York and New Jersey
225 Park Avenue South
New York, NY

Re Greenlight for Midtown

Dear Mr. Ward:

Manhattan Community Board 4 (CB4) requests that the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ) take steps to improve traffic flow on Ninth Avenue. On Memorial Day, NYC DOT will start to implement the partial closure of Broadway in midtown, which will generate additional traffic that Ninth Avenue cannot currently absorb. Without adjustments, the Broadway closures will cause a marked deterioration in commute time, safety and service for all users of Ninth Avenue.

We request that the PANYNJ install way-finding signs and jointly with DOT take various steps to redistribute the tunnel queues to blocks less prone to gridlock and to direct buses and trucks to preferred access.

Lincoln Tunnel traffic at peak hours occupies two out of four moving lanes on Ninth Avenue and those queues cause major gridlock by blocking local traffic on cross streets and by blocking the other two moving lanes on the avenue. Gridlock enforcement would require traffic agents at nine (9) additional intersections, weekdays and weekends, resources that are not available.

There are five major gridlock spots on Ninth Avenue: 42nd, 41st, 39th and 37th Streets and another one at 34th and Dyer. They contribute to the accumulations further north. Since the tunnel is at capacity and cannot yield any further improvements and the queues formation pattern is not predictable, the tunnel overflow must be channeled to proper reservoirs away from high potential gridlock points and residential areas to improve the flow of local traffic.

- 1- Encourage the use of cross streets rather than Ninth Avenue, in Hell's Kitchen South to locate the excess queues in places where intersections are less frequent, in order to reduce the gridlock potential by 60%**

On the New York street grid, the avenue blocks are much shorter (about 200 ft between cross streets) than the street blocks (800 ft between cross avenues west of Eighth Avenue). Thus on a street block, one can store the same queue capacity that on four avenue blocks while the number of intersections is decreased by 60% (from 5 to 2)

By better using the long blocks on 37th and 39th Streets between Ninth and Eleventh Avenues, to offload Ninth Avenue, PANYNJ can take advantage of the equivalent in capacity of 16 avenue blocks while reducing the potential for gridlocked intersections from 17 to 6.

CB4 requests that DOT and PANYNJ jointly install way-finding signs at 37th, 39th, 42nd, and Ninth and Tenth Avenues and at 34th Street and Dyer and Tenth Avenue, to show alternate routes to Lincoln Tunnel further west, so that the excess queues can use these routes.

PANYNJ should also install way-finding signs on Ninth Avenue to direct more volume to 31st Street, since Ninth Avenue between 31st and 33rd Streets forms a longer than usual, commercial only, block.

2- Bar the vehicles turning left at 37th and 42nd Streets from merging in the tunnel queues on Ninth Avenue.

Each of these two blocks is even shorter than an avenue block and a main merging point for two high volume queues, thus experiencing major gridlock.

Between 41st and 42nd Streets, the lane can hold only two buses at a time before spilling onto the intersection. A significant number of westbound vehicles make a left turn from 42nd Street onto Ninth Avenue and then a right turn from Ninth Avenue to 41st Street, a situation that developed during the six years when the Port Authority closed 41st Street to traffic. These long vehicles systematically gridlock the 42nd Street intersection, because the block is even shorter than an avenue block.

There are two supermarkets, a taxi licensing company and very popular pizza parlor on this block and the intersections are located within 500 ft from both Holy Cross School and a Head Start program at 40th Street.

CB4 requests that merging into the tunnel queue be barred on Ninth Avenue for vehicles traveling west on 37th and 42nd Streets. This method has been tested and proven successful on 37th Street: during the week, an agent installs cones at 37th Street and bars the cars from merging when the tunnel traffic backs up.

3- Discourage truck and bus traffic on Ninth Avenue from turning right on West 41st Street to access the tunnel

This entrance attracts large volume of buses and trucks to both Ninth Avenue and 42nd Street when in fact the preferred tunnel entrance for trucks is located on Eleventh Avenue at 40th Street.

Between 2000 and 2007 the annual volume of trucks using the Lincoln Tunnel has increased by 50.87%¹ to reach 11, 077 per business day while the overall volume of trucks crossing the Hudson between New Jersey and Manhattan has declined by 7.38%. Ninth Avenue between 46th and 37th Streets has the second highest rate of truck crashes per mile in Manhattan, according to the DOT truck study².

¹ 2007 Truck Toll Volume, 2008, New York Metropolitan Transportation Council.

² Truck Route Management and Community Impact Reduction Study Final Draft Technical Memorandum 2 – Truck Routing Analysis, p 183 Table 5-1: Manhattan On-Route Truck Accident Corridors

CB4 requests that trucks and buses be encouraged by proper way finding signage to use 41st or 39th Streets when coming from the east, or to use the proper truck route by turning right at West 57th Street when coming from the north. Signage at 42nd Street and Ninth Avenue should direct them to use the proper truck routes and truck entrances by continuing either west on 42nd Street or south to 34th Street.

Further right turns should be barred at any hour for southbound vehicles turning onto 41st Street and as indicated above, left turn onto Ninth Avenue should be barred for trucks and buses driving west on 42nd Street.

We expect these changes to benefit all stakeholders: for the New Jersey-bound drivers, waiting the same amount of time in orderly lanes rather than amidst gridlock and furious honking will replicate their highway experience and improve their commute. For bus drivers, avoiding many dangerous turns and conflicts with pedestrians should make their job less stressful. Less accident will reduce the cost of doing business for truck drivers.

As for the local users, we hope this will help reduce the pedestrian toll which is exceptionally high on Ninth Avenue, with more than 500 pedestrian crashes in the last ten years and two deaths in the last 6 months and improve the quality of the air for the residents who experience the third highest asthma rate in the Manhattan

While CB4 supports increased pedestrian space, without adjustment to the traffic patterns on Ninth Avenue and around the Lincoln Tunnel, the Green Light for Midtown project will cause a marked deterioration in commute time, safety and service for all stakeholders including the many bus riders and commuters. We appreciate PANYNJ support and help to address this issue.

Sincerely,



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Chair
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Christine Berthet
Co-Chair
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c.c.

DOT Borough Commissioner Margaret Forgione
Speaker Christine Quinn
Borough President Scott Stringer
Assembly member Richard Gottfried
Senator Thomas Duane
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