

**NYC Department of Transportation Testimony Before the
City Council Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
February 14, 2023**

Good morning Chair Brooks-Powers and members of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. I am Ydanis Rodriguez, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Transportation. With me today are Eric Beaton, Deputy Commissioner for Transportation Planning and Management, Rick Rodriguez, Assistant Commissioner for Intergovernmental and Community Affairs, and Julia Kite-Laidlaw, Director of Safety Policy. We are also joined by Deputy Chief Michael Pilecki and Director Michael Clarke from the New York City Police Department. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Mayor Eric Adams on Street Safety Infrastructure and Vision Zero at large.

I first want to acknowledge the horrific crash that happened in Bay Ridge yesterday. Our deepest condolences are with the family and friends of the person who was killed. And our thoughts are with those who were injured. We wish them a full and speedy recovery. We will assist NYPD with their investigation in any way that we can.

Now, I want to turn to the positive trends from last year. In 2022, traffic fatalities in New York City dropped for the first time since 2018, and pedestrian deaths were near record lows. New York City is defying national trends for pedestrian deaths, which are at a four-decade high across the states. We are also defying the pattern for the rest of New York State. These local trends are encouraging and show that the steps we are taking as a city to make our streets safer are working.

This includes our work to improve intersections citywide. In January 2022, the Mayor and I announced that the City would improve 1,000 intersections, which we exceeded by completing over 1,600 intersection improvements through different treatments. These included:

- Installing Turn Calming treatments at over 220 intersections;
- Installing all-way stop signs at over 420 intersections, the most ever in a single year;
- Installing a record number of raised crosswalks;
- Daylighting over 100 intersections with bike corrals; and
- Installing over 600 Leading Pedestrian Intervals to give pedestrians and cyclists a head start at intersections.

In 2022, DOT completed over 26 new protected bike lane miles and reached 1,500 bike lane miles citywide. We also hardened 10 miles of previously delineator-protected bike lanes, and will harden another 10 miles this year. This will keep us on track to harden

half of the city's delineator protected bike lanes by the end of 2023. DOT also completed 111 Street Improvement Projects in 2022.

Some highlights include:

- Protected Bike Lanes and Pedestrian Safety Enhancements on White Plains Road from 214th to 226th Streets in the Bronx;
- Sidewalk extensions on 8th, 9th, and Lexington Avenues in Manhattan;
- Protected Bike Lanes on Schermerhorn Street in Brooklyn;
- Intersection upgrades at Homelawn Street and Grand Central Parkway in Queens; and
- A raised crosswalk at Delafield Avenue and Manor Road in Staten Island.

We also secured another win for safety: we succeeded in getting authority from the State to expand the speed camera enforcement program to 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The expansion more than doubled the hours of operation, which were limited from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on weekdays. Since the launch of 24-hour operations on August 1, 2022, DOT has experienced a 25 percent reduction in violations, with month-over-month declines.

While we are encouraged by last year's trends, as Mayor Adams has made clear, the only acceptable number of traffic fatalities is zero. The safety of all New Yorkers remains DOT's number one priority, and we are committed to doing more.

New York City is doing this by adopting the Safe System Approach. The goal is to build and reinforce multiple layers of protection to both prevent crashes from happening and minimize the harm caused to those involved if it does. Redundancy is key. If one part of the system fails, the other parts still protect people. This approach focuses on five complementary objectives: safer people, safer roads, safer vehicles, safer speeds, and post-crash care. All five elements are essential for achieving Vision Zero.

Safe System Approach, U.S. DOT



First, safer vehicles. Vehicles are largely regulated by other levels of government. NYC DOT has succeeded in advocating for seatbelt laws at the State level, and local laws to require sideguards on the City fleet and City contracted vehicles, one of which I was proud to sponsor as Chairman of this Committee, and more.

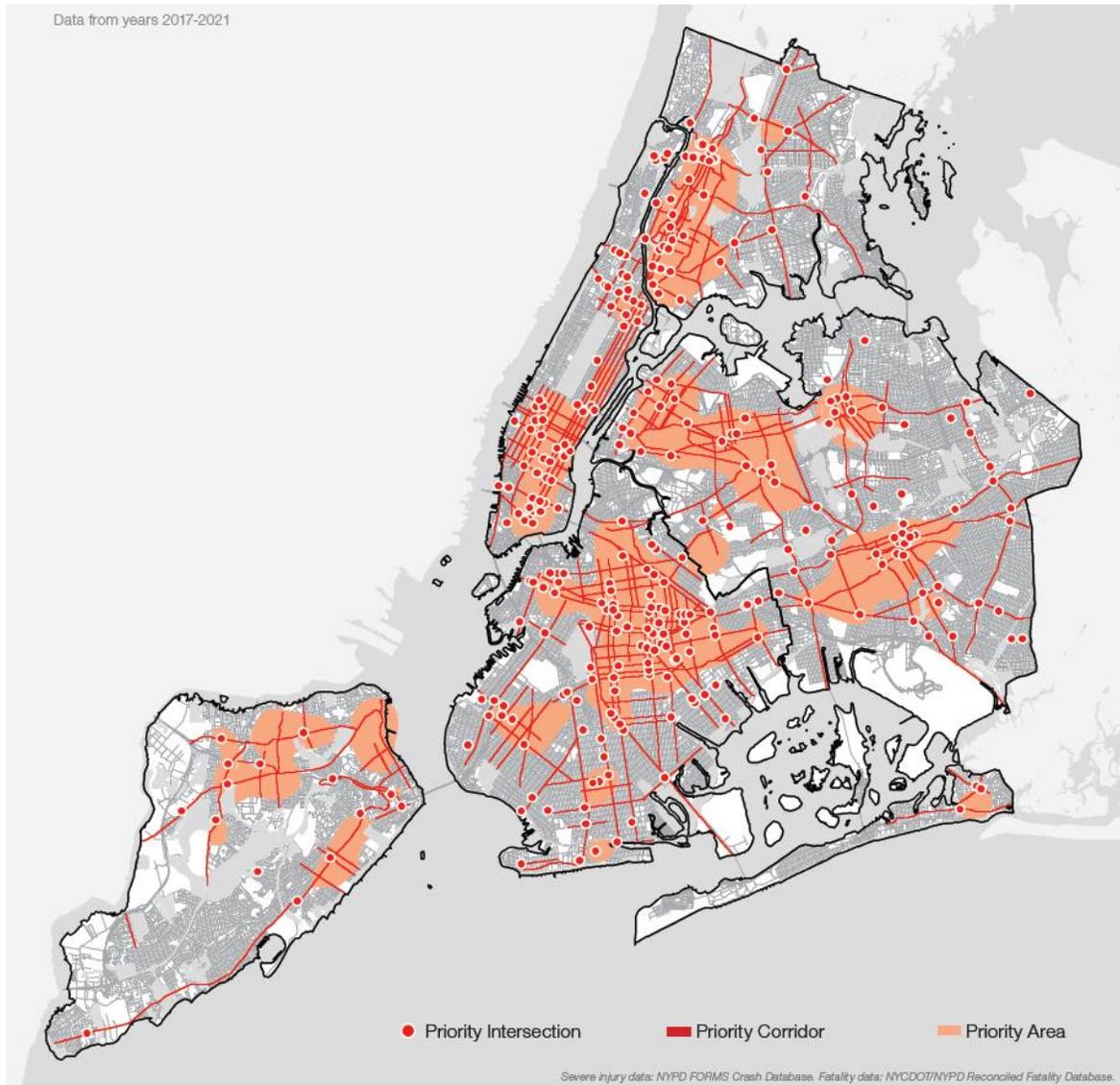
For safer speeds, DOT has expanded our speed camera program and also installs street treatments to encourage slower speeds, including speed humps and cushions as well as road diets.

Regarding post-crash care, our agency partners at FDNY and NYPD work to respond quickly when a crash does occur, and DOT's Emergency Response Unit visits fatal crash sites to ensure any infrastructure in need of repair is fixed promptly.

For safer roads, DOT is committed to making streets safer, and this is the focus of so much of our work. Last week, I was happy to join Senator Gillibrand in celebrating the over \$20 million Safe Streets for All Grant we were just awarded. This funding will go towards safety enhancements on Delancey Street and the development of a new pedestrian model and micromobility planning tool.

This morning, we released our updated Vision Zero Borough Pedestrian Safety Action Plans. These plans show us where our safety interventions will have the greatest effect and help us determine where to implement projects. The plans identify Priority Corridors and Priority Intersections based on locations where most pedestrians were killed or severely injured using multiple years of data. With the first plans published in 2015 and an update in 2019, the 2023 plans identify Priority Corridors and Intersections based on the last five years of available data: 2017 through 2021. We will use these new Priority Corridors and Intersections to guide our work over the coming years.

2023 New York City Vision Zero Priority Map



And also this morning, DOT released the 2023 Streets Plan Update. We are fully committed to the Streets Plan and are working creatively with available resources to deliver high-quality, high-impact projects.

In 2022, DOT met several Streets Plan benchmarks with record-setting numbers. We implemented Transit Signal Priority at a record 781 intersections to reduce the time buses spend stuck at red lights. And we installed Accessible Pedestrian Signals at a record 494 intersections citywide. We also improved the lives of 400,000 daily bus riders with projects that have made bus service faster and more reliable.

I want to stress that the effect these projects have on the lives of New Yorkers is more meaningful than a particular mileage number. A project that is small in mileage can still improve New Yorkers' lives significantly. One great example is our work with MTA at Pelham Bay Park Station in the Bronx. There, one-tenth of a mile of bus lanes will save two and a half minutes per trip for thousands of daily bus riders, and make a more comfortable and seamless connection to the subway, but does little to achieve our overall mileage goals.

The Streets Plan local law set ambitious and laudable targets that we will always strive for. While the agency continues to be adequately funded in the Adams Administration, we continue to experience challenges with agency capacity that have affected our output. We also believe that quality public engagement is central to an equitable process, and we are taking time to make sure we have robust engagement with communities.

We have also launched programs like Open Streets and Open Restaurants that were not envisioned at the time the Streets Plan legislation was passed, but that are still critical to today's New York. This means DOT staff are doing more than ever to expand public space for New Yorkers while also trying to meet goals that were set before the pandemic.

While we are excited to be expanding our operations, like with many sectors of the economy and municipal governments across the country, DOT is facing hiring challenges in the post-pandemic environment—we currently have four percent fewer staff than we did in 2019, and 14.3 percent fewer staff in the Transportation Planning and Management Division which is tasked with much of this work. We recently held a job fair for current engineering college students, and we plan to make conditional offers pending their graduation this spring.

We are actively working to bring on new facility space to be able to hire additional in-house implementation crews. For example, a new yard will allow us to bring on additional concrete crews this year. And we are working with our staff and contractors to maximize efficiency. I want to thank all the employees of DOT for their commitment and dedication to getting the work done despite these challenges.

We also think that the better measure of our work is the real effects on the streets. Our streets are getting safer, more New Yorkers are cycling, buses are moving faster in bus lanes and busways, and we have created wonderful public spaces in all parts of the city.

The final piece of the Safe System Approach is safer people, and we continue to work with our agency partners to create safer people through education as well as enforcement.

DOT has a dedicated Safety Education and Outreach team who conduct pedestrian, cyclist, driver, and child passenger workshops for all New Yorkers throughout the city. This team works with over 600 schools and 200 Older Adult Centers each year. In addition, DOT takes the lead in communication with drivers around the most serious causes of crashes. The Vision Zero Street Team program operates in high-crash areas, with DOT and NYPD representatives talking with New Yorkers in their communities with on-street education.

DOT also teaches Alive at 25, a program at high schools to teach young adults be safer drivers and better passengers if they are in a vehicle with someone who is driving recklessly. DOT also holds STOP-DWI events and oversees the classes for the Dangerous Vehicle Abatement Program, educating drivers who have received over five red light or fifteen speed camera tickets in 12 months.

The Safety Education team also distributes over 20,000 helmets each year—which we are able to do thanks to funding from Council Members, works directly with Delivery Cyclists, and is available to properly install car seats for New Yorkers who drive. This comprehensive work is conducted in every neighborhood with a focus on our most vulnerable New Yorkers in the highest crash areas.

Crash data shows why safer people is so important: since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number and proportion of fatal crashes involving a driver who has been driving recklessly or on a suspended license has increased.

In response, and as the Mayor announced in his State of the City address, we are calling on our colleagues in Albany to pass the ROADS legislative package which stands for Removing Offenders and Aggressive Drivers from our Streets. These bills aim to increase accountability among dangerous drivers and keep those with a history of dangerous driving behavior off our streets. \

The package includes bills to:

- Lower the Blood-Alcohol Concentration threshold for Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) from .08 to .05. Year after year, about 30 percent of fatal crashes in New York State involve drunk drivers. New York has the opportunity to be a national leader in this change that will save lives.
- Suspend the registration of a vehicle that receives five or more red light camera violations within 12 months. Receiving multiple red light camera tickets is associated with higher risk of being involved in a serious crash.
- Combat the persistent problem of driving on a suspended or revoked license due to dangerous driving behaviors, including authorizing a program to impound license plates and bills to strengthen penalties to discourage dangerous driving.
- Target penalties for drivers who injure or kill while driving dangerously.

Legislation

Turning to the legislation before the Council today. We at DOT share your commitment to enhancing safety through street design and support the spirit of this package of bills, and we thank you for your partnership.

We are actively following the data to determine the locations most in need of safety enhancements with the Vision Zero Borough Pedestrian Safety Action Plans I mentioned earlier. We then implement targeted safety treatments that produce the greatest safety benefits at those locations. We also continue to evaluate treatments and grow our toolkit. This approach is proven to work. Traffic fatalities in New York City are 15 percent lower than the year before Vision Zero began, despite the pandemic-era rise in dangerous driving. But let me be clear: one is too many.

Because we have a robust toolkit of safe street treatments, we urge the Council to allow us to retain flexibility to determine which treatments will be most effective in each location based on our data-driven safety criteria and our professional engineering judgement. While we support the intent of this package of bills, we have concerns about their effect on the agency's ability to make the appropriate safety changes on our streets. Streets are dynamic and conditions are constantly changing. We need to be nimble. And as always, we welcome your partnership in identifying locations of concern and implementing critical safety projects.

Introduction 679

Turning to Intro 679 sponsored by Council Member Joseph. This bill would require DOT to install traffic-calming devices at over 50 blocks next to older adult centers or Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORC) each year.

Last year, DOT released the groundbreaking *Pedestrian Safety and Older New Yorkers* study. This study shows how DOT's street redesigns have reduced serious crashes for this particularly vulnerable group. In addition, the study contains a robust and comprehensive action plan which directs DOT to install safety treatments and street redesigns within the Senior Pedestrian Zones where people over 65 and senior pedestrian injuries are concentrated. As I announced in June, DOT is targeting Senior Pedestrian Zones and installing turn calming treatments at 50 intersections annually, new Leading Pedestrian Intervals, and more.

We believe the Senior Pedestrian Zones are stronger indicators of safety need compared to the proximity to a senior center or NORC. Therefore, while we support the bill's intent to enhance safety for older New Yorkers, we cannot support this bill as drafted. We would like to work with the Council to ensure we can continue to target our interventions where they would have the greatest safety benefit for older adults and all New Yorkers.

Introduction 854

Next, Intro 854 sponsored by Chair Brooks-Powers. This bill would require DOT to daylight 100 intersections annually, with priority given to high need intersections.

DOT does extensive work each year to enhance safety at intersections. As I mentioned earlier, in 2022 we surpassed our goal of improving 1,000 intersections by improving over 1,600, including daylighting over 100 intersections. Daylighting is an important tool in our toolbox, but it is not the right solution everywhere. It also must be implemented with physical infrastructure in the newly opened space to prevent vehicles from turning more quickly. While we support the spirit of this bill to enhance safety at intersections, we would like to retain flexibility to determine which treatments are the most appropriate in each location.

Introduction 555

Next, Intro 555 sponsored by Council Member Rivera, regarding school safety infrastructure. As a parent, former teacher, and founder of two schools, I know what it feels like to walk to school each day and think about my daughters and students traveling to and from. Student safety is a top priority for me.

DOT has a robust School Safety Program. Through this program, DOT completes comprehensive street redesigns in high crash areas near schools. To give an example, Alexander Avenue in the Bronx is a wide roadway that separates local NYCHA residents from schools on the other side of the street. To enhance safety, DOT installed new signalized crossings and painted sidewalk extensions. These changes led to a 48 percent reduction in injuries overall, and a 67 percent reduction in pedestrian injuries. And in Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn, DOT redesigned three miles of parallel roadways on Avenues V, W, and X. We added bicycle lanes, concrete pedestrian islands, medians, and new crossings. These changes reduced overall injuries by 14 percent and pedestrian injuries by 43 percent.

Intro 555 would require DOT to paint a sign on a street and install at least one overhead sign on each street where a school is present. While we support the bill's intent of enhancing safety near schools, we cannot support it as drafted. Our research shows that the specific treatments this bill would require are not effective at reducing injuries. In fact, there is evidence that excessive signage can *actually distract* drivers from seeing the most important messages.

We look forward to continuing conversations with Council Member Rivera, who I had the honor of working with for many years on the Council. We strongly support focusing our school safety work on the treatments that have been proven to be the most effective in delivering safer streets for students and all road users. And we would be happy to work

with your offices to discuss effective strategies for any specific locations of concern in your districts.

Introduction 879

Next, Intro 879 sponsored by Chair Brooks-Powers, which would require DOT to conduct a study on the effectiveness of bollards in high pedestrian traffic areas, establish guidelines governing installation, and upon determination that installation is necessary, install bollards whenever DOT makes accessibility-related repairs or reconstructs sidewalks, curb extensions, or pedestrian ramps.

Crashes that take place on sidewalks are horrific and shocking, but are responsible for a very small percentage of pedestrian fatalities and serious injuries. They are also hard to predict.

Moreover, installing security bollards is often complicated and expensive, potentially costing millions of dollars at each location. It may involve moving or accommodating underground infrastructure—water, sewer, power and telecommunications, subway tunnels, and building vaults. It can also interfere with pedestrian ramps and block curb access for loading and unloading of both goods and passengers. Therefore, locations must be chosen with care and input from security experts.

As the former Chair who carried a similar bill, I understand and support the intent of wanting to use additional tools to keep pedestrians safe. But we cannot support this bill as drafted because it would tie critical safety and accessibility work to a specific treatment that is costly and complicated to install.

Introduction 805

Next, Intro 805 sponsored by Public Advocate Williams, which would require additional fatal crash data reporting. DOT currently reports on fatal and severe crashes in two main ways: one that is more immediate, and another that is longer-term.

Through the Serious Injury Response, Tracking, and Analysis—or “SIRTA”—program, launched in compliance with Local Law 49 of 2021, DOT investigates, analyzes, and reports on all serious vehicular crashes from the previous quarter. This new program is more comprehensive than what the bill proposes, covering thousands of severe injury and fatality locations annually. This includes reviewing street design, infrastructure, and driver behavior at each crash location and making recommendations for safety maximizing changes to street design or infrastructure.

DOT also publishes the Vision Zero Borough Pedestrian Safety Action Plans released this morning, which look at multiple years of crash data and help ensure that our street redesign work is proactively addressing the most dangerous locations citywide.

Transparency is imperative, but we do not support this bill as drafted because we think these existing crash reports provide sufficient information. We would be happy to speak with the Council further about these reports and also provide additional information about any particular locations of concern.

Introduction 415

Next, Intro 415 sponsored by Council Member Powers which would require a study of dangerous driving. DOT is currently working on the dangerous driving study required by Local Law 36 of 2020. While our agency will continue to closely track dangerous driving behavior on city streets, we recommend that we brief the Council and allow you to review the study first before legislating that it be conducted annually in order to determine its utility.

Resolution 441

Finally, Resolution 441 sponsored by Council Member Farias which calls upon the New York State Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign A.10647 sponsored by Assembly Member Epstein and S.9569 sponsored by Senator Salazar. This bill would authorize New York City to set a five mile per hour speed limit on Open Streets. We support this Resolution as it would enhance safety on Open Streets, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists, and ensure Open Streets remain spaces where New Yorkers can gather in a safe and healthy manner.

In addition, we also urge the State Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign Sammy's Law, which would allow New York City to set its speed limits, including as low as five miles per hour on Open Streets.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to thank the Council for the opportunity to testify before you today on issues of such importance to this agency and this city. Achieving Vision Zero will require that we continue to work together to create safer streets, and also safer people, safer vehicles, safer speeds, and better post-crash care. Our data-driven approach is working. Traffic fatalities in New York City are 15 percent lower than the year before Vision Zero began. And traffic fatalities dropped in 2022 for the first time since before the pandemic—defying national trends.

This coming year, we look forward to building on these safety gains, and partnering with you to get our projects in the ground, projects that will use our broad toolkit to help New Yorkers get where they need to go more quickly and safely. I know that we all share the goal of making our streets safer for pedestrians, cyclists, and all road users. I now welcome any questions.