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WEST HARLEM ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION



April 16, 2009

Honorable Janette Sadik-Kahn
Commissioner
New York City Department of Transportation
40 Worth Street
New York, NY 10013

Dear Commissioner Sadik-Khan:

We write to you today representing the Harlem River Park Task Force, a group of 7 elected officials and 34 organizations, with a mission to improve the quality of life of area residents through the creation of and access to Harlem River Park.

On May 27, 2008, as the keynote speaker for the 2008 New York City Greenway Summit at Hunter College, Mr. Jon Orcutt stated that improving the intersections around the three access-ways to Harlem River Park (135th Street and Madison Avenue, 139th Street and 5th Avenue, and 142nd Street and 5th Avenue) were at the top of your administration's priority list. We were thrilled by this announcement but have since been disappointed by the lack of implementation and communication.

Accessing Harlem River Park is hazardous for pedestrians and cyclists, with each access ramp entrance surrounded by high volumes of fast moving vehicular traffic. Between 1995 and 2005, 12 pedestrian and 10 bicycle crashes with vehicles were reported at the above mentioned intersections. In 2008, the Task Force completed a survey that showed a majority of people felt these intersections deter them from using the park more often.

The following are some of the survey findings regarding access safety:

- 65% of park visitors feel that the access at 135th Street and Madison Avenue is not safe for pedestrians and bicyclists;
- 58% would visit the park more if safety improvements to the access points are made;
- 56% of people who had not visited the park believed the access ways were unsafe.

With East and Central Harlem suffering huge public health disparities, accessing Harlem River Park is as much as a public health issue as it is a

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transportation issue. According to the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, one in three individuals is considered obese, 25% of adults do not get any physical activity, and approximately 13% of adults in East Harlem and 12% in Central Harlem have diabetes, compared with 9% of adults citywide. Ensuring safe access to Harlem River Park is a critical step in helping to improve the public health of our residents.

Please see the enclosed report: "Connecting Parks, Health, and Pedestrian Safety: Improving Pedestrian and Cyclist Access to Harlem River Park." It outlines the changes needed to ensure pedestrians and cyclists are safe when they enter the park. Both Manhattan Community Boards 10 and 11 have endorsed these needed improvements and will be sending letters of support to you shortly.

Many of the recommendations for the intersections are short-term and inexpensive. For example:

- Implement Leading Pedestrian Intervals (LPIs) at the 135th Street and Madison Avenue park entrances (north-south and east-west)
- Install protective bollards at park entrance ramp and sidewalk corners at all intersections
- Cut ADA compliant curbs and paint crosswalk at 142nd Street and 5th Avenue
- Implement "daylighting" in front of 142nd Street access-way
- Install a speed bump between 143rd and 142nd Streets just after the Harlem River Drive exit road

Harlem River Park is scheduled to reopen in June 2009. With improvements made to the original section from 135th to 139th streets and construction of a newly expanded section from 139th to 145th streets, this 10-block long waterfront park will be an important recreational asset for not only the local residents, but the city at large. We therefore ask that your agency please implement the pedestrian and cyclist safety improvements listed in the above mentioned report immediately, so that our communities can become healthier.

Sincerely,



Thomas Lunke
Director



Brenda Beener
Chair, Access Committee



Julia De Martini Day
Transportation Consultant

cc: Honorable Margaret Forgione, DOT
Honorable Franc Perry, CB10
Honorable Robert Rodriguez, CB11
Ms. Margaret Newman, DOT
Mr. Jon Orcutt, DOT

Enclosed: Copy of the Report