

CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR
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Burt Lazarin
Chair

Jesse R. Bodine
District Manager

March 15, 2018

Cathy Calhoun
Acting Commissioner
New York State Department of Transportation
50 Wolf Road
Albany, NY 12232

Polly Trottenberg
Commissioner
New York City Department of Transportation
55 Water Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10041

Theresa L. Egan
Executive Deputy Commissioner
New York State Department of Motor Vehicles
6 Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12228

Rick Cotton
Executive Director
The Port Authority of New York/New Jersey
4 World Trade Center, 150 Greenwich Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: FIX NYC Report – Bus congestion and Block the Box

Dear Acting Commissioner Calhoun, Commissioner Trottenberg, Executive Deputy Commissioner Egan and Executive Director Cotton,

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) applauds the Fix NYC panel recommendations to (1) assess and address the impact of bus congestion in the Central Business District (CBD) and (2) improve enforcement of traffic laws within the CBD, such as spillback (blocking the box) and bus lane enforcement. We are grateful to Governor Cuomo for including them in his 2019 State budget.

At its March 7th Full Board Meeting, MCB4 voted with 35 in favor, 0 against, 0 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible to vote on the following recommendations:

- The agencies leading the Bus Congestion Project form a steering committee that include representatives of the local communities who are the most affected by this congestion
- The enforcement of blocking the box include pedestrian crossings and bike lanes in the definition of an intersection

The panel recommended that,

“The NYS Department of Transportation, in consultation with the NYC Department of

Transportation and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ), should perform a comprehensive review of conditions and regulations related to commuter, intercity, charter and tour buses that have a particularly detrimental impact on congestion on the West Side of Midtown and in lower Manhattan.”

And the budget language indicated,

“Empower the Department of Transportation and the Department of Motor Vehicles to jointly perform a comprehensive study and make recommendations regarding the impact on congestion in the Borough of Manhattan from the operation of commuter, intercity, charter and sightseeing buses.”

Our district, where Penn Station and the Port Authority Bus Terminal are located, has seen an explosion of curbside terminals and stops. The presence of Broadway Theaters and easy access to the Lincoln Tunnel makes this district a preferred location for bus layover and idling. Recently, we have seen Uber-as-Bus operators pushing to create new routes with curbside stops on overburdened streets like 42nd Street, instead of using the Bus Terminal.

The recent rezoning of Hudson Yards, West Chelsea and Eleventh Avenue has converted this manufacturing district to a residential and mixed-use district, severely limiting the areas where such a massive and fast growing bus operation can be located. It is, therefore, critical that the parking and licensing operation be rethought in conjunction with the redevelopment of the Port Authority Bus Terminal that should be an integral part in this discussion.

We are also delighted that the panel recommends using camera enforcement to curb spillback (or block the box) in the district. In 2006, the Manhattan Borough President declared the intersection of West 38th Street and Ninth Avenue the most gridlocked intersection in New York City and recently a camera enforcement pilot program was executed there. With Lincoln Tunnel vehicular queues occupying Ninth Avenue for four or five hours daily, this intersection is impassable. The FDNY Engine 34/Ladder 21 located on the block is often unable to perform its duties.

A related issue is the tendency of drivers to try clearing the intersection by packing into the bike lanes and pedestrian crossings, before and after the intersecting street, causing bicyclists to dismount and pedestrians to walk in the middle of moving traffic to cross. This is very dangerous for all cyclists and pedestrians and outright impassable for wheelchair users, seniors, and parents with strollers. Pedestrians typically outnumber vehicle occupants in our walkable neighborhoods; it is critical that both bike lanes and pedestrian crossings be defined as part of the intersection and be maintained clear of vehicles by the new camera enforcement.

We look forward to working closely with your agencies to implement these measures.


Sincerely,



Burt Lazarin
Chair
Manhattan Community
Board 4



Christine Berthet
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning
Committee



Dale Corvino
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning
Committee

CC: Hon. Brad Hoylman, NYS Senate
Hon. Richard Gottfried, NYS Assemblyman
Hon. Linda Rosenthal, NYS Assemblywoman
Hon. Bill de Blasio, Mayor
Hon. Corey Johnson, Speaker, City Council
Hon. Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President