



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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LOWELL D. KERN
Chair

JESSE R. BODINE
District Manager

April 16, 2020

Mayor Bill De Blasio
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Re: Proposal for Open Streets

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

In an effort to provide more safe space for New Yorkers to comply with physical distance requirements, Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) requests that streets in our community, and throughout the city, be open to pedestrians and that vehicular traffic be routed through major crosstown and arterials only. This is an easily implementable program based on the City's existing "shared streets" model.

Because COVID-19 emergency decisions are being made by the City very quickly, MCB4 believes it is important to provide input into this topic as soon as possible. This letter has been voted by the Transportation Committee but not adopted by the Full Board. It will be proposed for ratification at the next Full Board meeting.

With the confinement extended by one month, during good weather, and lack of a plan for allowing normal activity to resume, it is critical that New York City follow the lead of other countries and cities who have adopted these policies to slow the contagion.

Pedestrians and emergency workers in our district cannot abide by the 6-foot distancing guidelines due to the narrowness of sidewalks and are subject to potential contagion when they go to work or grocery shopping. As you know, one of the most striking outcomes of the City's efforts to slow the spread of the coronavirus has been the near elimination of cars from our streets, which has made the City quieter, safer, and our air much cleaner. The City must allocate this available street space to those who need it most in order to slow the spread of the virus and let pedestrians use available space near their homes. As such, MCB4 requests the following streets be open to pedestrians 24 hours a day:

- W. 15th, W. 16th, W. 17th, W. 18th, W. 21st, W. 22nd and W. 26th Streets, Sixth Avenue to the West Side Highway
- W. 35th Street, Ninth to Eleventh Avenues,
- W. 36th, and W. 37th Streets, Eighth to Eleventh Avenue
- W. 43rd Street, Eighth to Tenth Avenues,
- W. 44th, W. 45th and W. 46th Streets, Eighth to Twelfth Avenues
- W. 51st, W. 53rd and W. 56th Streets, Eighth to Eleventh Avenues

MCB4 also supports Manhattan Community Board 5’s Transportation Committee’s call to fully pedestrianize Broadway, which is used by those residents living on the eastern side of the district and would work to coordinate an open streets program with our surrounding Community Districts.

This is quite different from the street fair model: the open streets will service essentially the residents from the block and will not be crowded. As it stands today, the risk of physical proximity is much greater on the constrained space the sidewalks provide.

As many cities and countries have now demonstrated, implementation need not be complex or require NYPD assistance. Simple cones and a sign at each street entrance would make this possible. The City should enlist block associations, Business Improvement Districts, and neighborhood associations in this effort. The “shared streets” model already allows ambulances, sanitation, and local traffic to pass as needed.

Many of our residents are confined to small and/or crowded apartments. Domestic violence reports are already skyrocketing. Confining New Yorkers to their homes and sometimes distant and limited park space may have long term impacts on our society. Our shared streets should be open for New Yorkers as necessary “safe spaces” so our front-line workers can safely get to work and trips to the grocery store, doctor, or exercise can be done without risk of contagion.

This is a simple measure that will save lives. It will also go a long way to show the average New Yorkers and frontline workers that you understand their plight, appreciate their sacrifices and will give them the same chances to stay healthy as the more fortunate ones.

Thank you,



Lowell Kern
Chair
Manhattan Community
Board 4



Christine Berthet
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning
Committee



Dale Corvino
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning
Committee

CC: Hon. Jerry Nadler, U.S. Congressman
Hon. Brad Hoylman, U.S. Senator

Hon. Richard Gottfried, NYS Assembly Member
Hon. Linda Rosenthal, NYS Assembly Member
Hon. Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Hon Corey Johnson, New York City Council Speaker