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CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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March 12, 2025

Ed Pincar
Manhattan Borough Commissioner
NYC Department of Transportation
59 Maiden Lane, 37th Floor
New York, NY 10038

Re: Battery Swapping and Charging Cabinets for E-Bikes

Dear Commissioner Pincar,

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) applauds the Department of Transportation (DOT) and FDNY's initiative to eliminate deadly fires caused by charging electric bike batteries at home. However, we have serious concerns with the proposed implementation of this program, which we believe will lead to increased conflicts between cyclist and pedestrians on the sidewalk.

In 2024, lithium-ion batteries caused 279 fires and 6 deaths. 34 New Yorkers perished in battery-related blazes in the last five years. The City identified the root cause as the use of "non- UL certified" batteries, and providing access to outdoor, low-cost battery swapping is part of the larger effort to provide users with "UL certified" batteries.

Last year, DOT performed a pilot to install 8.5-ft tall cabinets (4-ft wide, 4-ft deep) at 5 pilot sites, with encouraging results. One of the conclusions of the test is "Location matters: hubs near commercial corridors and restaurant clusters were better used."

Although MCB4 has many commercial corridors and restaurant clusters, they are usually in areas with limited sidewalk space. These corridors are served by a large population of delivery workers who remain on site between 3 and 6 pm when food orders resume. Riding on the sidewalks is common. Should one of these cabinets be installed on the sidewalk, cyclists will enter at the pedestrian ramp, ride on the sidewalk, leave their bikes in front of the cabinet while they swap the battery and ride out to the next corner. In fact, DOT's photos from the pilot illustrate these behaviors.

Therefore, at its March 5th Full Board meeting, by a vote of 43 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible, MCB4 recommends the following:

- Charging infrastructure for electric bikes must **not** be located where it requires illegal riding on the sidewalk. This aggravates conflicts between pedestrians and cyclists, and makes pedestrians feel unsafe. Such infrastructure should be located in an appropriate vehicular context: parking lanes in the roadway, garages and parking lots; it should also leverage other bike infrastructure like bike corrals or bike share.
- Title 34- chapter 7 of the Rules of New York, refers to an 8-ft clear path, while the Pedestrian Mobility Manual provides wider clear paths for certain streets and avenues. If charging infrastructure is to be located on the sidewalk, the latter, more recent guidelines should be used as it is for open dining. It would also make sense to provide an additional 4.5-ft as recommended in the rules since bicycles will be perpendicular to the curb.
- This initiative presents an ideal opportunity for DOT, along with its private partners at Swobee and Popwheels, to implement a mandatory bike education application that the cyclists must engage in before they are allowed to swap their batteries. For example, as part of their ability to participate in the DOT's battery-swap program, Swobee and Popwheels should be required to create an app with a training video or tutorial for cyclists to watch and confirm understanding before they are able to access the battery lockers.
- No advertisement (illuminated or not) should be approved on these very large cabinets.

Thank you for listening to our concerns and addressing them.

Sincerely,



Jessica Chait
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4



Christine Berthet
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning Committee



Jesse Greenwald
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning Committee

cc: Swobee
Popwheels
FDNY