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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

**BOROUGH PRESIDENT GALE A. BREWER
TESTIMONY TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL'S
COMMITTEES ON TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC SAFETY
FEBRUARY 24, 2014**

Thank you, Chair Rodriguez and Chair Gibson, for the opportunity to testify today on preventing traffic fatalities and injuries in our City and the recent Vision Zero Task Force report.

Following several traffic related tragedies last month and upon the formation of the Vision Zero Task Force, I reached out to Manhattan's Community Boards and requested that each District Manager compile a list of 'hotspots' within their Community Boards that would benefit from further attention and analysis.

Each Community Board used its own criteria to develop its list, and so the reasons for concern are varied. Reasons given by Community Boards for citing locations on their lists include, but are not limited to: sites of pedestrian fatality or injury, unsafe conditions due to lighting signage, sight obstructions and construction detours, signal timing issues, excessive speeding, lax enforcement, pedestrian crossing times, and vehicle turns. This list is not meant to be exhaustive or definitive, and was not voted on by the Borough Board.

The 'hotspot' list was submitted to the Task Force on January 30, 2014; an updated version – with 90 identified intersections and corridors – was sent on February 20, 2014. I have brought copies for you.

My office is continuing to work with the Community Boards to map hot spots and provide technical experts to train staff to create overlays that map existing conditions and help plan solutions to local traffic conditions. One challenge is the data that city agencies provide. NYPD lists accidents by intersection, such as 155th Street and Broadway; this does not accurately reflect accidents that occur midblock, which leads to inaccurate data. Furthermore, it is my understanding that certain advocacy groups are also collecting and publishing accident data received from the NYS Department of Transportation. Because this

data also includes incidents where police were not called (ie minor fender benders), there are often discrepancies in comparing these two data sources. We have met with NYPD to improve reporting methods and more easily identify dangerous locations. I am hopeful that we can resolve these challenges. It is also my understanding that the Mayor's Community Assistance Unit has hired a mapper to support these efforts.



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The Task Force report stresses the importance of data-driven analysis, planning, and enforcement; and improving the availability and uniformity of DOT and NYPD traffic and crash data is essential. Many district managers, civic technologists, and safety advocates have expressed frustration with the way that NYPD has historically published datasets in static, PDF format. As the sponsor of NYC's Open Data Law, I would urge NYPD and all City agencies to publish real-time data in open, machine-readable formats, such as CSV or Excel. I was just at a weekend-long event with dozens of techies who are eager to work on these issues; publishing data in these open formats will allow New York's civic technology community to more easily compile and analyze this data, complementing the Administration's efforts.

As emphasized in the report – it is essential that the public be fully engaged in Vision Zero. Involving the Community Boards, early and frequently, in the discussion and planning taps into localized knowledge and creates a critical constituency to make Vision Zero outcomes sustainable.

I wholeheartedly support the Task Force's efforts to seek municipal control over speed and red light cameras as well as speed limits, and to lower the citywide limit to 25 miles per hour. Among other proven and effective traffic calming measures, these measures will immediately save lives and reduce serious injury.

Additionally, we must ensure the safety of people with disabilities and include them in Vision Zero planning. My Local Law 21 of 2012 requires NYC DOT to install 25 Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS) each year; they did 28 APS in 2012 and 26 in 2013. In Manhattan, there are now a total of 24 APS, but not a single one above West 65 Street. Coverage needs to expand. The blind and visually challenged travel all of our streets, not just at the most crowded intersections where DOT is currently installing the signals.

Expansion of Leading Pedestrian Interval signals (LPI) is another Task Force recommendation. LPIs provide pedestrians with important lead time, but they can also be confusing for people with impaired vision. An APS should be installed at each location where there is a LPI. According the DOT website, there are 145 LPI signals operating in Manhattan but only three sites have an APS; 4 additional APS are located midblock. With the support of advocates, I am introducing legislation with Council Member Levine to increase the annual number of APS installations and require an APS at each intersection with a LPI signal.

Finally, school crossing guards are key to achieving our Vision Zero goals, but currently many school intersections are not covered by guards. Not only do we need funding for more guards, but also a uniform assignment system. School crossing guards know the local traffic patterns and families, and provide a calming presence. Where



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coverage is inadequate, police officers from local precincts are sometimes assigned to assist, but this is not a sustainable or optimum approach to student safety.

It's my understanding that, as of January 2014, there are 2112 school crossing guards. But because several guards may be placed at particularly difficult intersections, not all of the 1700 Department of Education school buildings are covered. For example, three guards may be needed to assist families crossing Atlantic Avenue, while there are no guards assisting students across the West Side Highway near PS 276 in lower Manhattan. And because of staff shortages before the mid-winter school break, I was constantly in contact with the commanding officer of the 24 Precinct to assign crossing guards to West 97 Street at both Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues for the families of PS 163. As school communities demand increased coverage, it's essential that enough guards be hired to assign them permanently at all school intersections where children are in danger from traffic.

The need for more school crossing guards tops the District Service Needs Statement of Community Boards year in and year out – yet since 2005, the number of crossing guards seems to have stayed at approximately 2100. More must be done by the NYPD to address retention and recruitment. School crossing guards receive between \$9-12/hour and are on duty for a minimum of 4 hours a day in split shifts. While the flexible schedule, health benefits and role in ensuring student safety is attractive for some New Yorkers – particularly older adults on fixed incomes - the requirement to pay 10% of their health care costs over the summer (as few buildings remain open for instruction) and a steady stream of verbal abuse and even physical threats from drivers create low morale, making retention difficult. The NYPD should make it a crime to abuse, threaten, or harm school crossing guards, and also take steps to improve morale.

As for recruitment, these efforts must expand beyond the walls of the local precinct and NYPD website. Better advertising and communication is needed and much can be learned from similar outreach efforts for the annual recruitment of lifeguards by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation.

Vision Zero will require smart implementation of traffic calming measures and enhanced enforcement. However, to achieve lasting behavioral change we must also include an educational component to create awareness and help improve daily decision-making by all who share and navigate across New York City's iconic fast-paced streets. I look forward to working with the Mayor and City agencies, the Council, Community Boards, constituents, workers, employers, principals, parents, unions, and advocacy groups in a comprehensive and coordinated education and enforcement effort to attain Vision Zero.