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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

**TESTIMONY OF GALE A. BREWER, MANHATTAN BOROUGH
PRESIDENT, TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION ON INTRO 315 AND 641, ON THE SAFETY OF
PEDESTRIANS AND BICYCLISTS AS THEY RELATE TO TRUCKS AND
TRUCK ROUTES IN NEW YORK CITY
March 3, 2015**

Thank you to Chair Rodriguez and the members of the Transportation Committee for the opportunity to testify today. I am here to voice my support for Intros 315 and 641, introduced by Council Members Margaret Chin and Paul Vallone, related to the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists as they relate to trucks and truck routes in New York City.

Intro 315 would require a study every three years on the compliance with the rules of New York City by truck drivers as related to truck routes. Intro 641 would require a similar study every five years on pedestrian and bicyclist safety as related to truck routes. I strongly support both of these bills, which were crafted in the spirit of Vision Zero and our collective efforts to combat fatalities and serious injuries caused by vehicular traffic.

Over the last year, our city has made notable progress in making New York City's streets safer. We have lowered the speed limit, redesigned dangerous intersections, and passed laws to hold reckless drivers more accountable. As a result, pedestrian deaths in New York City fell to a historic low last year. This is an accomplishment of which we should all be proud. But there is still much more that we can do to ensure the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists, starting with Intros 315 and 641. We know that, in 2014, truck collisions resulted in the deaths of 17 people who were walking or biking, which makes up 11 percent of pedestrian and cyclist fatalities. These bills will allow us to study the role trucks and truck routes played in helping create unsafe commuting environments that led to these tragedies, and create comprehensive plans to improve safety.

There is no denying the important role trucks play in supporting our city's economy. According to data collected by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, 320 million tons of freight move through the New York City metropolitan region each year. What's more, 80% of these goods are carried by trucks. Though clearly a vital component to ensuring goods are transported throughout our city, this incredible volume of trucks adds to Manhattan's notorious congestion problem and helps create dangerous commuting environments for pedestrians and bicyclists. Though trucks cause safety problems all over the city, they are a particular concern for Manhattan; according to data cited by DOT's recently released Manhattan Borough Safety Plan, trucks are involved in 25% of pedestrian fatalities in Manhattan, a far higher percentage than the rest of the city.

Unsafe commuting conditions are caused in part when trucks illegally deviate from designated truck routes in the city. According to data released by the Department of Transportation in 2007, which was the last comprehensive report on truck safety carried out by the department, we know that trucks are illegally deviating from their routes all too frequently. In fact, of the 2,389 collisions studied in that report, 35% occurred while a truck driver was operating off of a designated truck route. These are collisions that could have been avoided had these trucks stuck to designated routes. I urge the NYPD to step up enforcement efforts against trucks that are illegally deviating off designated routes.

As anyone who crosses Canal Street on a routine basis knows all too well, trucks contribute to dangerous commuting environments even when they do stick to designated truck routes. Crossing the street along designated truck routes all too often leads to the death or serious injury of pedestrians or cyclists. On Canal Street alone, just this past fall, large motor vehicles struck and killed four pedestrians as they attempted to cross the street. Many more pedestrians and cyclists have had close encounters. This includes Council Member Chin, who has publicly mentioned her own close encounter with a truck while attempting to cross Canal Street.

I appreciate the efforts taken by DOT and the NYPD to address truck safety in the Manhattan Borough Safety Plan. There are several components of the Safety Plan geared towards improving the safety of pedestrians and cyclists as they relate to trucks, including: encouraging overnight deliveries; cracking down on double parking; and stepping up enforcement on trucks that fail to yield to pedestrians. Many of these actions will likely help improve safety conditions for all commuters in the Borough. There is some concern, however, that increasing off-hour deliveries could worsen the incidence of collisions due to increased driver fatigue. For this reason, the University Transportation Research Center has recently launched a project to study the impact of nighttime deliveries in New York City, and I encourage DOT to pay close attention to these findings as it considers expanding its Off-Hour Delivery program.

Additionally, more must be done to ensure that the trucks that are entering Manhattan are within the legal weigh limit and meet safety standards. Based on my own experience, I know commercial vehicles routinely ignore weight limits. In the 1980s, for instance, I conducted a survey of weigh stations for trucks entering Manhattan, and I believe that not one was complying with weight rules and regulations. I have little reason to believe much has changed in the 35 years since I initially conducted this survey. Overloaded trucks are therefore entering Manhattan on a daily basis, contributing to unsafe conditions and the degradation of our city's streets. Part of this problem is due to New York State's relatively lax weigh station regulations. While New York State has several fixed inspection and weigh stations, along with a system of random enforcement, many of our neighboring states have much stricter standards. In Connecticut, for instance, every single commercial motor vehicle is required to stop at weigh stations, while New Jersey requires any vehicle weighing 10,001 pounds or more to stop and be weighed. We should consider employing a similarly strict standard in New York to crack down on truckers entering Manhattan above legal weigh limits.

We should also be ensuring that trucks entering Manhattan are meeting additional safety standards, such as ensuring the proper quality and functioning of truck tires, brakes, and lights. We would ideally be ensuring these standards are being met by providing DOT and NYPD with dedicated resources to implement routine truck safety stops and inspections.

The volume of trucks entering our city each day is not only contributing to unsafe commuting environments, but other problems as well. For instance, our reliance on trucks

worsens our city's terrible air pollution, which in turn causes New York to have one of the highest asthma rates in the country. Our reliance on trucks is also extremely inefficient, and harms our city's local economy. New York City, in fact, is the only major city in the world that is not connected to its country's national freight rail network. Lacking this infrastructure, we instead move goods by truck, which is much more expensive. In fact, moving goods just two miles from Manhattan to New Jersey can cost the same as transporting goods 500 miles or more in areas of the country that are better supported by rail.

To reduce our reliance on trucks, we should look towards alternative modes of transporting goods. I am a supporter, for instance, of the Cross Harbor Rail Freight Tunnel, championed by Congressmen Nadler, which would connect Brooklyn, Queens, Long Island, Westchester, and Southern Connecticut to the national freight rail grid. It is estimated that creating this tunnel would remove roughly 500,000 trucks from our congested streets each year, increasing safety and improving the delivery of goods. I join others in advocating for long-term solutions such as the Cross Harbor Rail Freight Tunnel, to help reduce our overreliance on trucks. While we secure the funding and political support to make this tunnel a reality, however, we can also begin taking more trucks off our road by increasing freight delivery via float bridge systems. Transporting more of our freight via our waterways is something we can do immediately to help reduce the number of trucks in Manhattan.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify here today, and once again urge the Council to approve Intros 315 and 641. These bills will help bring much needed attention to the safety concerns posed by trucks, and help us gather necessary data to address these concerns.