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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

**Testimony of Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer
Port Authority of New York and New Jersey Commissioners Meeting
Regarding George Washington Bridge Bicycle-Pedestrian Paths
April 28, 2016**

My name is Gale A. Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. I would like to take the opportunity to thank Port Authority Chairman Degnan, the Commissioners and Executive Director Foye for the opportunity to speak today.

On behalf of Manhattan's residents, especially the vast majority who do not own cars, I urge you to widen the paths on the George Washington Bridge to bring them into compliance with the guidelines from the Federal Highway Administration, the American Association of State and Highway Traffic Officers, and the United States Department of Transportation, as well as to sustain the growth of biking and walking across the region.

The Transportation Committees of Manhattan Community Board 12, representing Washington Heights/Inwood, and Bronx Community Board 5, representing Morris Heights, University Heights, Fordham, and Mount Hope have passed resolutions strongly recommending that the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey enlarge the existing paths on the George Washington Bridge to better serve cyclists and pedestrians.

Currently, cyclists and pedestrians share a path 6'9" wide. With the large recent increase in bicycle traffic, the narrow paths are a safety hazard for walkers and riders. According to the New York Bike Club, up to 500 bikers use the paths every hour. The New York Bike Club, 89 other bicycle clubs, elected officials, bicycle shops and government agencies are proposing to create divided paths with one side for cyclists and one side for pedestrians, much like those on the Brooklyn Bridge.

The region has changed significantly since 1931, and the Bridge should be redesigned to reflect our changing transportation needs. There is no better

time to do so than during the replacement of the suspender cables. I recognize that there are engineering and financial challenges associated with this proposal. However, I believe that the costs, at least, can be justified by the economic benefits of biking. Studies by the National Association of Realtors correlate increases in home prices and tax assessments with proximity to bike paths. These home price and tax assessment increases ranged from 4% in Delaware to 23% in parts of Chicago. In addition, a Rutgers University study showed that biking contributed \$497 million to New Jersey's economy in 2011. On a per capita basis, that's \$56 per person. For the 3.1 million residents of the lower and Mid-Hudson Valley that would be \$174 million annually.

Biking offers a classic example of "if you build it, they will come." As the creation of NYC bike lanes has shown, better infrastructure increases bike ridership, which provides added social and physical activity benefits, along with a reduction in air pollution.

Well-designed bike paths also improve safety, a goal that dovetails with the Mayor's Vision Zero effort to eliminate vehicle and pedestrian fatalities and serious injuries. Currently, pedestrians, cyclists and joggers all share the same 6'9" path, increasing the risk of accident and injury.

In closing, there are strong incentives to improve the pedestrian and bicycle traffic flow on the bridge; some are economic, others a matter of safety and security. Both reflect the changing priorities of the bridge users and our need to respond, and I look forward to working with the Port Authority and the residents of NY and NJ to incorporate the redesign of the bridge pathways into the cable replacement project.