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DOT's 9th Street Plan: Frequently Asked Questions

BY AARON NAPARSTEK - STREETS BLOG.ORG - 4/11/07



Ninth Street at Eighth Avenue in Park Slope, outside of Dizzy's Diner.

The Department of Transportation's plan for pedestrian safety, traffic-calming and bike lane plan for Park Slope's 9th Street is causing quite a bit of anxiety. Some of this angst, clearly, has been generated due to DOT's failure to bring community stakeholders into the planning process that produced this redesign. But a lot of anxiety over the plan is being generated by misinformation and misunderstanding. Below is an attempt to address some of the questions and comments currently floating around out there. I hope that members of Community Board 6 will read this before casting their vote this evening:

Double-parking fines are not more expensive in a bike lane.

According to the New York City Dept. of Finance web site, double-parking fine is \$115, bike lane or not. The technical differences between "Stopping," "Standing," and "Double-Parking" make no functional difference.

The Prospect Park Alliance has not said it is opposed to this plan.

PPS President Tupper Thomas has said that she has concerns about how the 9th Street bike lane connects to Prospect Park's entrances. She doesn't want cyclists riding on the 9th Street pedestrian paths. She wants cyclists using the Park's 15th Street entrance.

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DOT's 9th Street plan is not being dropped on the community from out of nowhere.

This plan is a direct response to long-standing community concerns. Ninth Street has long been known as a street with an unusually high number of car crashes. In March 2004 two fifth grade boys were killed by a truck at Third Avenue and 9th Street, generating a major public outcry. In the summer of 2004 a sedan went through the front door of Dizzy's restaurant on 8th Avenue and 9th Street. This incident initiated a public process during which area residents collected nearly 1,200 signatures urging DOT to address 9th Street's pedestrian safety and reckless driving problems. Rather than ignoring the request or installing some street signs and calling it a day, DOT put thought and creativity into the issues raised by the neighborhood and came up with a thorough, detailed plan that will significantly improve pedestrian safety, calm traffic and provide much needed facilities for bicycling.

The organizers of the Dizzy's petition drive do support DOT's plan.

Konrad Kaletsch, the 9th Street resident who organized the 1,200-signature petition drive for pedestrian safety and the owners of Dizzy's Diner, Matheo Pisciotta and Ben Hoen say that DOT's 9th Street plan is consistent with their petition's goal of improving pedestrian safety around the intersection of Eighth Avenue and 9th Street. "The petition was about making the intersection



safer," Kaletsch told Streetsblog. "Clearly, a large number of people saw that as a concern. We floated a number of specific ideas for how to make that happen. Now we are looking at DOT's suggestions for how to make this intersection safer. Some of these ideas are different than what we put forward but this plan still fulfills our request to improve safety."

This plan is not likely to create new traffic congestion problems on 9th Street.

As noted on slide 10 of DOT's presentation, 9th Street is designed to be just as wide as Atlantic Avenue yet it carries less than half of the traffic. This creates "excess capacity" which leads to speeding, reckless driving and dangerous left-turns on 9th Street. DOT recently narrowed Vanderbilt Avenue down to one travel lane in each direction with a median in the middle. By most accounts, Prospect Heights residents are very pleased with the results. Vanderbilt carries 19,500 vehicles per day. Ninth Street carries 11,500 vehicles per day. If Vanderbilt can function as a two-lane street, 9th Street certainly can as well.

This plan does not prevent drivers from loading and unloading their cars.

It is important to remember that the bike lanes and medians are just stripes on asphalt. As anyone can readily see, Park Slope's Fifth Avenue bike lanes do not prevent motorists from double-parking to load and unload or from making the occasional u-turn. Like the Third Street bike lane, there will be a 3-foot buffer between the bike lane and the travel lane. On 3rd Street, residents and trucks often park on the buffer to load and unload their cars. This is legal.

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This plan does not represent a sudden imposition of cyclists on 9th Street.

Ninth Street has, for years, been a prominent route on the New York City Bike Map and Bicycle Master Plan. It is an important connector between Prospect Park and Red Hook and a number of north-south bike lanes. Park Slope has one of the highest rates of bike commutership in the city according to Transportation Alternatives. These lanes will be a great benefit to many residents of Community Board 6 and will likely encourage more Park Slopers to leave their cars at home and use bikes for local trips.



Putting bike lanes on 9th Street will make cycling safer.

A major study by New York City's Department of Transportation, Public Health and Police suggests that bike lanes -- even just stripes on asphalt -- make cyclists safer. Of the 225 bike fatalities over the past decade, only one took place within a marked bike lane.

The June 2005 cyclist fatality on Fifth Avenue was not caused by the bike lane.

On June 9, 2005 the community suffered a great loss when pro-bono lawyer Elizabeth Padilla was killed at Fifth Avenue and Park Place while biking to work. Some have suggested that the bicycle lane on Fifth Avenue was responsible for her death. In fact, the narrower stretch of Fifth Avenue from Carroll Street to Flatbush Avenue has no bike lane. After Padilla's death activists pushed the DOT hard to install shared-lane bike stencils along this stretch of the avenue. Elizabeth's family was involved in that effort and has expressed appreciation to those who are working to get more bike lanes built in New York City.

If 9th Street has a double-parking problem, there are good ways to solve it.

Ask DOT to put together a curbside management plan. Set aside loading zones in key spots. As in Midtown, set the prices so that they increase every hour, encouraging trucks to load and unload quickly and open up the space for the next vehicle.

The Park Slope Civic Council did not reject this plan.

This is the text of the Civic Council's motion: "The PSCC thanks DOT for its response to Park Slope's August 2004 call for traffic-calming and improved pedestrian safety around the intersection of 8th Avenue and 9th Street after a car crashed through the front door of Dizzy's Diner. However, we request that DOT table its proposal to install a median, left-turn bays and bicycle lanes on 9th Street until the community and the agency have the opportunity to meet

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and study the plan further. In particular, we urge the DOT to separate the traffic mitigation issues from the proposed bike lanes. We urge DOT to include community stakeholders in planning processes that bring about changes such as this."

This plan is fundamentally about pedestrian safety and traffic-calming. With all of the attention being focused on the bike lane aspect of this plan it should be emphasized that this plan is fundamentally designed to provide our neighborhood with improved pedestrian safety and traffic-calming.

