

1  
2 found a way to suggest it. Anyway, I don't want  
3 to take up any more time. I will try to listen to  
4 what you're saying and I ask that you also listen-

5 [Crosstalk]

6 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: I'm going to  
7 move on. I'd like to thank our first panel for  
8 attending. I'd now like to call up Borough  
9 President Markowitz.

10 [Pause]

11 MARTY MARKOWITZ: Whenever you're  
12 ready, Mr. Chairman.

13 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Borough  
14 President Markowitz, please proceed.

15 MARTY MARKOWITZ: Thank you very,  
16 very much. Let me begin by thanking the New York  
17 City Council Committee on Transportation and  
18 certainly you, Chairman James Vacca, and members  
19 for allowing me to speak today. I want to make it  
20 clear that anything I say in my remarks nowhere  
21 negates my opinion that Janette Sadik-Khan is a  
22 consummate professional who cares greatly about  
23 the future of transportation in this city. In  
24 addition, Transportation Alternatives is an  
25 outstanding organization and I thank them for

1  
2 their leadership in bringing issues of  
3 transportation to the forefront. My office, in  
4 fact, has had a long working relationship toward  
5 Brooklyn to name a couple of great events that  
6 we've worked cooperatively with.

7 I'm also in favor of installing  
8 bike lanes, particularly in neighborhoods closest  
9 to Manhattan. I've been a vocal supporter of the  
10 bike lane on 9th Street leading right into  
11 Prospect Park and Park Slope and on the Brooklyn  
12 waterfront greenway that will open up the entire  
13 waterfront from Greenpoint to Sunset Park.

14 I also feel very strongly about the  
15 importance of road safety. In fact, my office has  
16 compiled a safety brochure that promotes civility,  
17 common sense and respect for all road users and  
18 copies are available here for anyone who might  
19 like to review it.

20 But although cycling is a wonderful  
21 way for people to transverse the city, it's simply  
22 not a viable option for the majority of commuters.  
23 Particularly in Brooklyn, many residents depend on  
24 cars because their neighborhoods are not well  
25 served by public transportation or not at all. In

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this age of severe MTA cuts, I fear this group will grow considerably.

As you're well aware, I've been very vocal in my opposition to the drastic changes made to Prospect Park West to accommodate a two-way bike lane. Had DOT installed a traditional bike lane, I would have supported it enthusiastically. I know that overwhelmingly the local residents would have as well. However, the reconfiguration, in my opinion, has been a disaster.

It increases congestion on the roadway, particularly during the height of the rush hour and during the summer months, the warmer months, and ruins the aesthetics, in my opinion, of one of the most beautiful grandest boulevards New York City has, Prospect Park West. It takes away parking spaces in Park Slope, one of the most parking-starved neighborhoods in New York City.

It's increased the propensity of cyclists to fail to yield to pedestrians, especially to seniors, parents with small children and folks with disabilities who can't see the oncoming cyclists on the other side of the parked

1 cars which now are in the middle of the street.  
2  
3 It's grossly unfair, not to mention unrealistic to  
4 ask pedestrians every moment of their lives to be  
5 hyperactive, hyperaware of every hazard just to  
6 get across the street to the park.

7 The point of today's meeting is to  
8 discuss opportunities and challenges to oversight.  
9 I have some suggestions. There's a lack of  
10 clarity in how DOT makes those decisions.

11 Recently, a bike lane, as you already know, on  
12 Father Capodanno Boulevard in Staten Island was  
13 removed at the request of area residents, City  
14 Council Member James Oddo and my colleague Staten  
15 Island Borough President James Molinaro. Yet, my  
16 similar request regarding Prospect Park West fell  
17 on deaf ears.

18 I believe that the borough  
19 president's office is worthy of some deference in  
20 this matter since I'm the only elected official  
21 that represents the entire Borough of Brooklyn. I  
22 have a perspective on the impacts, not only in the  
23 immediate area and the neighborhoods surrounding  
24 the park, but all of Brooklyn.

25 On Central Park West in Manhattan,

1  
2 the DOT somehow found a way to install a  
3 traditional bike lane without drastically altering  
4 the streets and without shifting parking to the  
5 middle of the street. Of course, there is no bike  
6 lane at all on Fifth Avenue along Central Park, or  
7 on the area streets that lead directly into  
8 Central Park. For instance, East 59th Street,  
9 East 72nd Street and East 79th Street, just as  
10 wide as Prospect Park West, between Madison and  
11 Fifth Avenues, all of them go right into Central  
12 Park, no bicycle lane.

13           It's crazy to believe that with all  
14 the museums and tourists that Fifth Avenue doesn't  
15 have the same problems with speeding as Prospect  
16 Park West, allegedly. So why treat Brooklyn  
17 different than the Upper East Side or the Upper  
18 West Side of Manhattan.

19           DOT states that Prospect Park West  
20 bike lane was put in to curtail speeding. You  
21 would think we could have installed a couple extra  
22 stop signs or traffic lights, but no. In my  
23 opinion, the DOT took this request to improve  
24 safety and slow down traffic and used it to turn  
25 Prospect Park West into an experiment to fit their

1  
2 current ideology. To me, allocating road use  
3 should be about balance. Hard for some people to  
4 accept the word balance. But what the DOT has put  
5 on Prospect Park West is not balance, especially  
6 considering that cyclists already have the use of  
7 the roads in the park, which are closed to traffic  
8 22 hours a day on each side during the week and 24  
9 hours a day on weekends.

10 Now we could all agree that over  
11 the last few years the streets of New York have  
12 been radically transformed. This transformation  
13 is happening at the behest of a few policy makers  
14 at DOT acting unilaterally based on their  
15 philosophical beliefs. Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC  
16 calls for the installation of 1,800 bike lanes in  
17 the five boroughs by 2030. DOT has also  
18 instituted programs that have curbed driving,  
19 reduced parking spaces, such as pedestrian refuge  
20 islands, down the street sidewalk expansions and  
21 projects that turn streets into pedestrian plazas.

22 This kind of significant change to  
23 an existing condition in the city should not be  
24 the sole purview of the executive branch of city  
25 government and the DOT. If it were a traditional

1  
2 land use, such change would have to go through  
3 extensive review. But street space gets a pass  
4 because it falls into some sort of oversight  
5 loophole.

6 Like our land use review policies,  
7 large scale changes to streets should involve  
8 approval by the borough presidents and the City  
9 Council, especially given the Transportation  
10 Commissioner Sadik-Khan's own beliefs, as she told  
11 the *New York Observer* in 2008, that in some way  
12 she thinks of herself as the largest real estate  
13 developer in New York.

14 Therefore, while I commend this  
15 committee's current oversight efforts, I believe  
16 that the Council should institute a new and potent  
17 mechanism of independent oversight and approval  
18 for all significant DOT interventions and street  
19 changes. Any studies done on the impact of bike  
20 lanes, plaza or other road changes must be made by  
21 an impartial agency that is independent of the DOT  
22 and not based on unscientific public opinion  
23 polls.

24 Communities impacted by these  
25 proposed road changes should be informed in

1  
2 writing and public hearings should be required so  
3 that community boards can make informed decisions  
4 based on the residents and businesses they  
5 represent. And of course, borough presidents must  
6 be part of this oversight.

7           The Council must confront some  
8 basic questions. How do we see the future of New  
9 York City streets? Do we want the city's limited  
10 road space given over to plazas, islands and bike  
11 lanes, some of which are barely used, while there  
12 are other uses that make more sense and move more  
13 people. Shouldn't any reallocation of this  
14 valuable road space be made to move the most  
15 people and for projects like light rail or  
16 trolleys?

17           There are other questions that need  
18 answering. In this time of budget cuts, where is  
19 this money coming from for these projects? Not  
20 just construction materials and personnel and  
21 contractors staffed to design bike lanes and  
22 plazas. What about the potential for these road  
23 changes to impede emergency vehicles? Do we  
24 really know whether DOT changes are negatively  
25 impacting police and FDNY? Is there even a

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mechanism for the FDNY, not to mention NYPD, the Sanitation Department and private ambulance services to weigh in on plans before they are approved?

The DOT claims their policies foster public safety, but with all due respect, in my opinion this is not only about safety, it's about ideology. It's about an ideology whose ultimate goal is to force people out of their cars.

We must not treat driving and cars as the enemy. Every day cars become cleaner and more efficient. If we stigmatize car owners, in my opinion we risk alienating a large part of the city's middle class. In fact, a surprising thing I found, Mr. Chairman, is that more than half the emails that I received about this issue are folks that are opposed to my position, admitted to me that they own a car as well. For many New Yorkers, owning a car is a quality of life issue, one that offers security, privacy and convenience for many of them, included many bikers.

We need to decide what the fundamental mission of DOT is. Is it to

1  
2 facilitate efficient movement of people and good  
3 throughout the city or to create a traffic  
4 nightmare to discourage car use and implement  
5 nothing less than a backdoor approach to the  
6 failed congestion pricing plan.

7           Since the current leadership of DOT  
8 assumed the job in '07, I believe they have paid  
9 scant attention to the goal of moving goods and  
10 services in and out of New York City as  
11 efficiently as they could. Our city economy  
12 depends on this, but instead the DOT has  
13 apparently decided that its priority is using the  
14 government to force people out of their cars.

15           We need a rational, balanced  
16 transportation policy, one that recognizes  
17 appropriate areas for bicycle users, which I  
18 enthusiastically support. This policy cannot be  
19 developed or overseen by the DOT alone, especially  
20 under its current leadership. So we must empower  
21 the City Council and the borough presidents'  
22 offices to play a larger role in these decisions  
23 so that all New Yorkers, whether they bike, drive,  
24 walk, or take public transportation, can keep this  
25 city moving.

1  
2 In the next few days, many  
3 Brooklynites will receive my annual holiday card.  
4 Let me share with you some of my favorite things.  
5 This, in my opinion, will put some of this in  
6 perspective. If I may, Mr. Chairman, to the song  
7 of "My Favorite Things".

8 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Not to sing  
9 though.

10 MARTY MARKOWITZ: [singing] Lanes  
11 fit for Fido and lanes made for--

12 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: [interposing] I  
13 don't know if I can allow singing at a hearing.

14 MARTY MARKOWITZ: I'll read it.

15 [Laughter]

16 MARTY MARKOWITZ: I'll do it  
17 briefly.

18 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: After you sing,  
19 we may all be singing the blues. I heard you once  
20 before--

21 MARTY MARKOWITZ: [singing] Lanes  
22 fit for Fido and lanes made for lovers, hikers and  
23 bikers, significant others. A lane just for  
24 Santa, but please don't complain. These are a few  
25 of my favorite lanes. Strollers and schlepers and

1  
2 skaters and joggers, holiday lanes just for all  
3 the egg noggers, let's not forget cars, it's  
4 getting insane. Welcome to Brooklyn, the Borough  
5 of Lanes. When the horn honks, when the dog  
6 bites, when the bikers stray, I simply remember by  
7 favorite lanes and then I just say, "oy vey".  
8 Thank you, members of the committee. Thank you  
9 very, very much.

10 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Mr. Borough  
11 President, I wish you a wonderful continued in  
12 government.

13 MARTY MARKOWITZ: I'll try to keep  
14 my day job.

15 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Keep your day  
16 job, yes. Thank you, Mr. Borough President.

17 MARTY MARKOWITZ: Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Keep your day  
19 job. You have a quick question for the borough  
20 president, Mr. Lander?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: I always  
22 look forward to the holiday card. I hope it's  
23 coming with a recording this year. I actually  
24 want to just call out attention to the fact that I  
25 think your bike safety pamphlet is better than the

1  
2 Council's bike safety pamphlet. I appreciate your  
3 distributing it.

4 I do want to make the same request  
5 that I made of the prior panel. I think it's  
6 obvious that you have a different point of view on  
7 what should happen with the lanes altogether, but  
8 we have a set of recommendations, while  
9 maintaining the configuration, that we believe go  
10 to addressing many of the concerns people have. I  
11 hope that we can work together to take a look at  
12 them and get your feedback on them as we move  
13 forward.

14 MARTY MARKOWITZ: Brad, my personal  
15 objective is to remove these two-way bike lanes  
16 and to install a traditional bike lane on Prospect  
17 Park West. I'd love to see that. Any future  
18 ideas for two-way bike lanes should incorporate  
19 some of your ideas. Absolutely, I would totally  
20 support that enthusiastically.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you.

22 [Off mic]

23 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Mr. Borough  
24 President, I thank you very much.

25 MARTY MARKOWITZ: Thank you, Mr.

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Chairman.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: And I wish you  
the best for the holidays.

MARTY MARKOWITZ: All of us.  
Merry, Merry, Happy--

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Good health  
first. Okay. Now our next panel will be--

[Long pause]

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Our next panel  
will be Noah Budnick, Transportation Alternatives,  
Christine Berthet--oh, Christine, how are you?  
Come on up. Eric McClure. Why don't we start  
with Noah Budnick. [Pause] No, tell him no.

FEMALE VOICE: [Off mic] Sure.

MALE VOICE: Yeah, because you're  
second.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Oh, and let me  
acknowledge the presence of Council Member Van  
Bramer, I'm sorry.

[Long pause]

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: All right, just  
for the record, I'm going to give Mr. Noah, Noah--

NOAH BUDNICK: It's all right.