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

[Crosstalk]

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

[Pause]

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

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Borough President Markowitz, please proceed.

MARTY MARKOWITZ: Thank you very, very much. Let me begin by thanking the New York City Council Committee on Transportation and certainly you, Chairman James Vacca, and members for allowing me to speak today. I want to make it clear that anything I say in my remarks nowhere negates my opinion that Janette Sadik-Khan is a consummate professional who cares greatly about the future of transportation in this city. In addition, Transportation Alternatives is an outstanding organization and I thank them for
their leadership in bringing issues of transportation to the forefront. My office, in fact, has had a long working relationship toward Brooklyn to name a couple of great events that we've worked cooperatively with.

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

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

But although cycling is a wonderful way for people to transverse the city, it's simply not a viable option for the majority of commuters. Particularly in Brooklyn, many residents depend on cars because their neighborhoods are not well served by public transportation or not at all. In
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
cars which now are in the middle of the street. It's grossly unfair, not to mention unrealistic to ask pedestrians every moment of their lives to be hyperactive, hyperaware of every hazard just to get across the street to the park.

The point of today's meeting is to discuss opportunities and challenges to oversight. I have some suggestions. There's a lack of clarity in how DOT makes those decisions. Recently, a bike lane, as you already know, on Father Capodanno Boulevard in Staten Island was removed at the request of area residents, City Council Member James Oddo and my colleague Staten Island Borough President James Molinaro. Yet, my similar request regarding Prospect Park West fell on deaf ears.

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

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

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

DOT states that Prospect Park West
bike lane was put in to curtail speeding. You
would think we could have installed a couple extra
stop signs or traffic lights, but no. In my
opinion, the DOT took this request to improve
safety and slow down traffic and used it to turn
Prospect Park West into an experiment to fit their
current ideology. To me, allocating road use should be about balance. Hard for some people to accept the word balance. But what the DOT has put on Prospect Park West is not balance, especially considering that cyclists already have the use of the roads in the park, which are closed to traffic 22 hours a day on each side during the week and 24 hours a day on weekends.

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

This kind of significant change to an existing condition in the city should not be the sole purview of the executive branch of city government and the DOT. If it were a traditional
land use, such change would have to go through
extensive review. But street space gets a pass
because it falls into some sort of oversight
loophole.

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

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

Communities impacted by these
proposed road changes should be informed in
writing and public hearings should be required so that community boards can make informed decisions based on the residents and businesses they represent. And of course, borough presidents must be part of this oversight.

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

There are other questions that need answering. In this time of budget cuts, where is this money coming from for these projects? Not just construction materials and personnel and contractors staffed to design bike lanes and plazas. What about the potential for these road changes to impede emergency vehicles? Do we really know whether DOT changes are negatively impacting police and FDNY? Is there even a
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
facilitate efficient movement of people and goods throughout the city or to create a traffic nightmare to discourage car use and implement nothing less than a backdoor approach to the failed congestion pricing plan.

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

We need a rational, balanced transportation policy, one that recognizes appropriate areas for bicycle users, which I enthusiastically support. This policy cannot be developed or overseen by the DOT alone, especially under its current leadership. So we must empower the City Council and the borough presidents' offices to play a larger role in these decisions so that all New Yorkers, whether they bike, drive, walk, or take public transportation, can keep this city moving.
In the next few days, many
Brooklynites will receive my annual holiday card.
Let me share with you some of my favorite things.
This, in my opinion, will put some of this in
perspective. If I may, Mr. Chairman, to the song
of "My Favorite Things".

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Not to sing
though.

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

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

MARTY MARKOWITZ: I'll read it.
[Laughter]

MARTY MARKOWITZ: I'll do it
briefly.

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

MARTY MARKOWITZ: [singing] Lanes
fit for Fido and lanes made for lovers, hikers and
bikers, significant others. A lane just for
Santa, but please don't complain. These are a few
of my favorite lanes. Strollers and schlepers and
skaters and joggers, holiday lanes just for all
the egg noggers, let's not forget cars, it's
getting insane. Welcome to Brooklyn, the Borough
of Lanes. When the horn honks, when the dog
bites, when the bikers stray, I simply remember by
favorite lanes and then I just say, "oy vey".

Thank you, members of the committee. Thank you
very, very much.

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

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

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

MARTY MARKOWITZ: Thank you.

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

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

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

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

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you.

[Off mic]

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

MARTY MARKOWITZ: Thank you, Mr.
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.