

**NYC DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TESTIMONY BEFORE THE CITY  
COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
June 28, 2022**

Good afternoon Chair Brooks-Powers and members of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. I am Ydanis Rodriguez, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Transportation. With me today are Sean Quinn, Assistant Commissioner for Street Improvement Programs, Yogesh Sanghvi, Associate Commissioner for Grants and Fiscal Management, and Ben Smith, Director of Legislative Affairs. And in our first in-person hearing, in the room we are joined by DOT Borough Commissioners. We are happy to be here with our partner agencies, the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and the New York City Economic Development Corporation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of Mayor Eric Adams on managing the City’s public space and on Introductions 251, 291 and 293.

All New Yorkers must have access to safe, welcoming, and attractive public spaces close to where they live. And every New Yorker must have access to active transportation options, parkland, and the city’s 520 miles of shoreline.

Open, green space should not be a luxury. Being able to walk, jog or bike to nearby parks and other neighborhoods is a necessity and a public good. In the pandemic, many New Yorkers took up biking for the first time leading to a historic “bike boom.” COVID-19 also underscored the value of open space, parks, and biking and walking networks, as more people looked for opportunities for outdoor recreation and active transportation.

But for too long, some of our communities—particularly Black and Brown communities—have been cut off from green spaces and paths for biking and walking. Under Mayor Eric Adams’s leadership, DOT and our sister agencies are committed to creating a greener, more connected, and more livable city for all New Yorkers.

**Public Space**

Earlier this year, DOT launched the 2022 Open Streets program through which New Yorkers will be able to enjoy more vibrant public space at over 150 locations—21 new—covering a total of approximately 300 blocks. The program prioritizes equity with a focus on Priority Investment Areas identified in the NYC Streets Plan. We will announce additional locations this summer and encourage Council Members to connect us with community organizations that are interested in becoming public space partners, including smaller grassroots groups, which may be eligible for financial and operational support.

The Executive Budget included funds that will allow us to advance permanent redesigns of popular Open Streets, including \$88 million to further transform 34th Avenue in Queens.

New York City’s Open Streets program—the largest in the country—first launched in May 2020 as a way to give New Yorkers space to social distance and safely get outside, and they became a source of inspiration and community. As we recover and emerge, we are working to build them into sustainable community amenities, with City resources and community support.

Based on lessons learned over the past five-plus years of our OneNYC Plaza Equity Program, and our recent Open Streets collaboration with City Cleanup Corps, we are restructuring our

program to be more supportive of the wide variety of public spaces and partners across the city. To support new, vibrant public space in areas that would not have had it otherwise, DOT will receive \$5.4 million in funding in FY23 and beyond for a Public Space Equity Program on top of existing baselined Open Streets and Plaza Equity funding, bringing our total annual funding to over \$8 million.

This comprehensive approach to public space support and management includes partner reimbursements and a contract for maintenance, landscaping, and technical assistance for public space partner organizations in greatest need. This will allow us to continue providing direct support to over 20 Open Streets, over 30 plazas, and more in the future.

Turning to Intro. 293, the Open Spaces bill sponsored by Council Member Stevens. This Administration supports the spirit of this bill and is committed to using new ways to transform streets into vibrant public space. This includes building upon the Open Streets and Open Restaurants programs, while also learning from the Open Culture, Open Storefronts, and Outdoor Learning programs. These programs began in response to the pandemic, and as we are transitioning to programs that will continue beyond the crisis, we have found that more oversight is necessary to ensure the many demands for street space are balanced.

In addition, schools and community-based organizations are able to apply for an Open Street which is either a street with limited local access or a full closure. Organizations can also apply to the Mayor's Office of Citywide Event Coordination and Management's Street Activity Permit Office to use a sidewalk or curb lane. We look forward to discussing with the Council how to continue transforming streets, while better understanding how this proposal would relate to our existing suite of public space programs and other street uses.

On Intro. 258 sponsored by Council Member Joseph, this Administration is committed to increasing access to public bathrooms. There are a number of challenges around public bathrooms that we look forward to discussing further with the Council. Under DOT's jurisdiction are the Automatic Public Toilets, or "APTs," installed and maintained by JCDecaux pursuant to its citywide coordinated street furniture franchise agreement.

There are a number of challenges to finding locations for the APTs. These include that the bathrooms are large, heavy, and require water and sewer connections. Therefore they cannot be sited on overpasses, bridges, or any other insecure site. In addition, as a part of the franchise agreement all locations need to be approved by the Mayor and Council Speaker, along with consultation with affected local elected officials and community boards, and many neighborhoods do not want them. We are happy to work with the Council on locations where an APT could be located and look forward to discuss the specifics of this legislation further.

## Greenways

Turning to greenways and Intro. 291 which would require DOT to create a greenway master plan, provide updates on budgets and construction, and engage with communities on such plans. New York City currently has more than 150 miles of greenways across the five boroughs and we are working to maintain and grow this system. This Administration welcomes this bill which is in line with both our vision for a greener, more connected city and ongoing effort to achieve this vision.

Historically, the city's greenway network has mainly consisted of pedestrian and cyclist paths in parks. While the Parks Department has continued to expand important corridors in their properties, in recent years DOT has also implemented transformative separated bike and pedestrian paths in our right of way, connecting New Yorkers to their waterfront and green spaces. To give an example, DOT recently completed two segments of the Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway—one in South Williamsburg along Kent Avenue and another in Sunset Park connecting to the Brooklyn Army Terminal and Owl's Head Park. Working closely with our agency partners, we are expanding the vision of what New York City's greenway network can be.

A comprehensive citywide greenway network will enhance bike and pedestrian safety, promote affordable and zero-emission mobility options, increase access to open space, enhance public health, and provide access to jobs and essential services. Expanding the greenway network will also provide opportunities to connect both residents and visitors to many rich historical and cultural tourist destinations as well as regional hiking and biking trails.

Low- and moderate-income New Yorkers will especially benefit from a more comprehensive greenway network, as non-motorized transportation modes have lower costs to purchase, operate, and maintain. Further, a large body of research shows that cycling is correlated with improved health outcomes, so the expansion of the greenway network will improve health and well-being by encouraging more cycling. Finally, expansion of the citywide greenway network and its ability to connect people to where they live, work, and play will encourage a shift to non-motorized transportation options, resulting in less driving and reducing air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

Building out a citywide greenway plan is in keeping with several of the City's guiding strategic documents. In OneNYC's transportation section, New York City pledges to increase connectivity of the bike network through on-street bike lanes and greenway expansion. Roadmap to 80x50, the City's climate change and emission reduction plan, calls upon NYC DOT to increase the mode share for bicycling to 10 percent of all trips by 2050. And finally, in the cycling portion of the Council-mandated NYC Streets Plan, DOT committed to developing the next generation of greenways that would be the backbone of a high-capacity, separated network for both recreational and commuter trips as a "Transformative Idea."

Greenways improve the physical health and mental well-being of every New Yorker. They create new jobs, decrease our dependence on private automobiles, help absorb storm water, increase our tree cover to help reduce heat islands, and create new habitats for wildlife. They are a win for the economy, a win for nature and environmental justice, a win for our physical health and mental well-being, a win for transportation, and a win for every New Yorker and the entire planet.

Turning to ongoing and future work to build out the greenway network, Deputy Mayor Joshi and I had the privilege to attend the NYC Greenways summit last month along with Council Member Rivera, Senator Schumer and state elected greenway champions such as Assembly Member Gallagher and State Senator Gounardes. We congratulate the NYC Greenway Coalition for their advocacy, and they are an important partner in achieving our vision. At the summit, the Adams Administration committed \$47.6 million in greenway funding for Parks and DOT to implement projects in Brooklyn and Queens developed through the Destination Greenways community planning process last year.

DOT and Parks partnered with community members and stakeholders to determine local needs and the amenities along each route. The funding will go towards a total of six projects, led by Parks with on-street work by DOT. In Brooklyn, work will improve access to the waterfront by building new greenway segments in Leif Ericson Park and reconstructing the existing greenway in part of Shore Road Park. In Queens, we will build new segments in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, Kissena Corridor Park, and Kissena Park, helping to close greenway gaps in neighborhoods that have been historically disconnected.

The City is also partnering with residents in other boroughs to make important greenway connections, such as new greenway connections in the Bronx. For example, as part of daylighting Tibbetts Brook, an exciting environmental restoration project, DEP and the Parks Department will work together to incorporate greenway elements. And work is currently underway with full funding allocated under the previous Administration, to complete a 32.5 mile greenway loop around Manhattan, in conjunction with our partners at EDC, focusing on the UN Esplanade, Harlem River, Inwood, and Esplanade Gardens sections. And Parks recently received additional capital funding for safer greenway connections on Randall's Island and upgrades to the Pike and Allen Street bike path and pedestrian malls.

And in Brooklyn, we recently completed two segments of the Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway I mentioned earlier and work is also underway on one of the most critical segments the Gowanus Connector. Currently planned for completion late next year, this project will create a safe, separated bike path connecting Sunset Park to Red Hook and Gowanus on Hamilton Avenue. Additional pedestrian safety, landscaping, and accessibility enhancements will help realize the vision of a connected waterfront greenway for the borough.

DOT is also working to fill on-street greenway gaps through in-house Street Improvement Projects, including at the following locations in 2022 and 2023:

- Emmons Ave, Jamaica Bay Greenway;
- 233<sup>rd</sup> St, Bronx River Greenway;
- Cropsey Ave Bridge, Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway- in development;
- Richmond Terrace, North Shore Greenway in Staten Island- in development;
- Lafayette Ave, Bronx Waterfront Greenway; and
- E 180<sup>th</sup> Street, Bronx River Greenway- in development.

And the following additional DOT greenway capital projects were recently funded:

- \$25.2 million in the April plan for a new grade separated two-way path along Utopia Parkway from Cryders Lane and Little Bay Park to the Cross Island Parkway and seawall upgrades further north along the Parkway;

- \$16 million for a new connection to the Bronx River Greenway at East Tremont Avenue, including redesigning and reconstructing a complex intersection to transform it into a major gateway to the Bronx River Greenway; this project is now fully funded at \$33 million; and,
- \$19.8 million in the April and September plans to build out and improve segments of the Jamaica Bay Greenway through Marine Park and down Flatbush Ave towards Floyd Bennett Field.

RAISE Grant: Filling the Gaps: NYC’s Greenway Expansion Plan

In order to further advance our vision for greenways, and in line with the goals of Intro. 291, DOT recently requested \$7.25 million in US Department of Transportation Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity, or “RAISE” funding for *Filling the Gaps: NYC’s Greenway Expansion Plan*. This RAISE grant application is part of the City’s effort to go after every dollar available from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to advance projects that will benefit New Yorkers for decades to come.

*Filling the Gaps* will be a collaboration between DOT, Parks, and EDC, to increase walking and cycling for commuting, leisure, and exercise by planning for a comprehensive network of greenways. This RAISE funding will be used to review previous plans and studies, engage community partners, develop analytical tools for determining priority corridors including a micro-mobility demand model, and complete a citywide gap and opportunity analysis.

The outcome of *Filling the Gaps* will include a vision plan that articulates the City’s principles for completing the greenway network, up to five Early Action corridor plans for greenways across the five boroughs, and a set of Future Action corridor candidates for further development. Taken together, these plans will enable a major expansion of the NYC greenway network, with a focus on under-developed greenway sections located in chronically disenfranchised communities.

The aim of *Filling the Gaps* is to prepare for ushering in a new era of multi-modal infrastructure investments focused on greenways, capitalizing on the nation’s changing priorities and increasing investment in active transportation and open space infrastructure, pandemic recovery and job creation, climate action, and equity.

As Intro. 291 moves forward, DOT and our sister agencies look forward to discussing the details of its requirements further—to align it with the aggressive pace of our planning efforts and federal resources we hope to bring to bear, and to structure the reporting, updating, and community engagement requirements to make them as effective and efficient as possible and aligned with our existing mandates.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Council for the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to working with you to enhance access to public space for all New Yorkers and build a more connected greenway network that will benefit New Yorkers for generations to come. We would be happy to answer any questions after you hear from our sister agency colleagues.