

Regional Plan Association

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**Testimony of Regional Plan Association
to the New York City Council Committee on Transportation
on Bicycling in NYC - Opportunities and Challenges
250 Broadway, 14th Floor Committee Room, New York, NY
Thursday, December 9, 2010 at 10:00 a.m.**

Regional Plan Association, a private, nonprofit research and planning organization serving the greater New York metropolitan region, is strongly supportive of the Department of Transportation's bike lane initiatives.

Bike lanes are a hallmark of a livable, world-class cities and biking is an environmentally friendly way to travel, reducing auto use and tailpipe emissions while encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle. That is why advanced cities around the world are encouraging bicycle travel through bike lanes and other programs.

Creating segregated facilities is a proven way of increasing ridership. Studies show that countries with a high bike mode share are also the ones with the greatest number of bicycle facilities. One analysis found that every mile of new lanes corresponded to a one percent increase in bike commuting. Here in New York, the creation of the Kent Avenue bike lane in Brooklyn has led to a 300% increase in riders.

While the City adapts to the installation of hundreds of miles of new lanes, it is critical for residents, drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists alike to remember the program is a work in progress. Concerns and adjustments as the development of what in effect is a whole new mode of transportation are natural.

Conflicts with pedestrians need to be taken seriously by collecting accident data and tweaking bike lanes where there is a problem. Too many of us have had near-misses with fast moving delivery bikes and commuters. Pedestrians and drivers need to learn to live with bikes, too, which will be a natural part of the process as cycling reaches the critical mass we all want it to.

Clearly the education of cyclists and enforcement of cycling regulations to discourage unsafe and anti-social behavior on bikes will be needed as the system matures. To this end, the Department of Transportation is already launched an effort to curb negative bicycling behavior such as riding on sidewalks and running red lights.

But it is important to recognize that there is strong evidence to suggest that bike lanes and increased ridership will increase safety. Both AASHTO and USDOT acknowledge that segregated facilities improve safety. Studies found that that as the number of bicyclists and pedestrians increase, the number of collisions with automobiles decreases. The reasons are common sense: Motorists drive more carefully when bicyclists are around.

RPA strongly believes bike lanes are an especially welcome means of providing access and alternative modes of travel around our City's waterfront. Over the past decade, New York City has truly opened public access to the waterfront. A series of remarkable parks and public spaces – close to 2800 acres and 60 linear miles of waterfront – are under construction or planned throughout the City. The next step in this evolution is to knit these spaces together by providing the public clear and safe pathways along the entire waterfront and safe access to them. Mayor Bloomberg has led this effort with the establishment of a continuous Manhattan Waterfront Greenway—a signature creation of the Mayor's first term. Creating waterfront greenways in every borough can strengthen and build communities by improving the streetscapes and other public spaces that help define our neighborhoods. Local residents need safe and attractive pathways if they are to enjoy their waterfronts and new parks, and the greenway vision and plans should include improvements of streets leading down to the waterfront. This is especially true in underserved and environmental justice communities. The city's waterfronts are very poorly served by mass transit. Bicycling can provide an attractive alternative to the automobile use that would otherwise crowd this precious space. We are delighted that the City's draft Comprehensive Waterfront Plan includes the goal of continuous waterfront greenways, and we would urge the Council to support it.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

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