



UNCLOGGING NEW YORK: A BLUEPRINT FOR BETTER CITY TRANSPORTATION

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Natural Resources Defense Council

New York Building Congress
New York City Environmental Justice
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New York League of Conservation
Voters
New York City Transit Riders Council
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Regional Plan Association
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Getting around New York City is a daily challenge. Our streets are clogged and noisy; driving is nerve-wrenching and unpredictable. Conflicts between motorists and vulnerable pedestrians and cyclists are common and costly. Rush hour in the jam-packed subways can often be an ordeal. Our buses are often slow and irregular. Trips to our airports can take as long as the flights themselves.

New York City will not be able to sustain its economy and attain projected job growth or maintain environmental quality unless we have the transportation capacity to get people to work, and move our freight efficiently.

The next mayor and City Council can dramatically increase our mobility, improve our economic competitiveness, improve the environment, and enhance the quality of our daily lives.

Below is a five-point program for better transportation. Many of the steps require help from different levels of government. All will require mayoral leadership. Our groups—a wide array of business, labor, environmental, and civic interests—call on the next mayor and City Council to:

- 1. Win real progress on major transit and rail projects essential to the city's future—and press for a “fix it first” policy for bridges and roads. The City must demonstrate leadership by increasing and dedicating transportation-related revenues to investment in our subways, buses, highways and bridges.**

Transit: In the last few years, state and regional officials have pledged to move ahead on a host of vital new transit projects. The next mayor should work to insure they keep their commitments, including a Second Avenue Subway; linking the Long Island Rail Road to Grand Central Terminal; rail access to our airports and getting the commuter railroads to better serve city neighborhoods. Many of these promised advances face an uncertain future because of shaky financing. The next mayor should get a real commitment from the state by challenging it with matching city funds—and fighting for new sources of funding, like a re-instituted commuter tax, dedicated to transportation.

Roads and Bridges: Bridge conditions in the city are far worse than the rest of the state. In 1998, 63% of state-owned bridges within the city were rated structurally deficient, compared to 25% elsewhere in New York. Since 1983 New York City's share of state funding has been held to 23% of the available total, well short of the amounts needed to make city roads and bridges on the state-owned system safe and efficient. More money, City and State, is also required for repairs/reconstruction of City-owned bridges to maintain a safe and efficient roadway system. Action must be taken soon, or the costs of repair and rehabilitation will soar. The next mayor must demand that the Governor and the State Legislature make a concerted effort to fix New York City's highways and bridges now. The next mayor should also insist that New York State work toward redesigning our aging highways so that they are less intrusive on our neighborhoods.

Goods Movement: New York City is choking on the fumes and congestion generated by trucks for two reasons. First, we rely on an ineffective truck route system that does not allow

for the efficient delivery of goods to customers within the City and at the same time is a focal point for community anger in virtually every neighborhood. The next mayor must balance the obvious need for trucks to make deliveries with the legitimate concerns of communities that feel overwhelmed by truck traffic on residential streets. Second, our highways are clogged with thousands of extra trucks because we lack a cross-harbor freight rail tunnel and associated rail infrastructure to support interstate goods movement. As a consequence, freight containers come into the ports and intermodal yards of New Jersey and are loaded onto tractor trailers to cross the Hudson. A new freight tunnel, combined with appropriate rail and highway infrastructure improvements, will also help secure New York's continued Hub-port status. The new mayor should be a catalyst for a more effective goods movement system that includes improved rail and highway infrastructure and a truck route system that balances the needs of communities and merchants. The new mayor should also demand that the Port Authority keep its 80-year old promise to build the cross-harbor freight tunnel.

2. Press for much more transit service, less crowding, and faster and more reliable trips.

The City should demand there be no more than a four-minute scheduled rush-hour wait on any of the City's 20 subway lines—and that every rider be able to get a seat in the off-hours. More service for both subways and buses is desperately needed to meet the increasing ridership demands brought on by MetroCard and the continuing strength of our economy. Transit officials have added 11% more subway service and 27% more bus service since 1996, but this has not kept up with the 29% increase in subway ridership and 47% increase in bus ridership at the same time. New York City has the slowest buses in America. As a matter of civic pride, the next mayor should end our last place finish and give buses the priority they deserve on city streets by expanding and redesigning exclusive bus lanes and increasing enforcement to discourage cars from blocking them. The city should also keep pressing the MTA and other bus fleets operating in the City to reduce diesel bus emissions and to have the Long Island Rail Road and Metro North provide more service at lower cost to city riders.

3. Make our streets and neighborhoods safer and more livable.

Calm traffic. Widen sidewalks where pedestrians face overcrowding and dangerous conditions. Make greater use of the city's authority to improve street safety by using traffic calming measures. Expand the "Safe Routes to Schools" pedestrian safety program and make walking in the city safer for everyone. Establish a car-free Prospect Park. Strictly enforce the city's truck routes to protect neighborhood streets. Reduce double parking and congestion by charging parking fees for what is now free commercial loading space. Dramatically expand and link a comprehensive citywide network of bike lanes and bicycle boulevards.

Crack down on speeders and other dangerous drivers, install more enforcement cameras and rebuild dangerous thoroughfares like Queens Boulevard and the Grand Concourse.

4. Make bridge and tunnel tolls much fairer than they are now—and reduce congestion.

Our tolls don't make sense. Some bridges and tunnels are free; some cost \$7. Some "free" bridges exact huge tolls in congestion, lost time and frayed nerves. Start by making sure toll plazas are replaced with barrier-free high-speed EZ Pass collection systems. Appoint a mayoral task force to help you choose among the many options

available to create a smarter and fairer system. Have your experts start with the City Department of Transportation's and Port Authorities "value pricing" programs. These work to reduce congestion and delays by charging lower fares during off-peak periods — including free late nights — and higher during peak periods.

5. Lead by example to reduce congestion and improve transportation decision-making.

Require top city officials to take transit regularly—and cut thousands of unnecessary parking permits for government employees, especially in Manhattan.

Promote "TransitChek," which gives tax breaks to commuters. Only 250,000 area employees are enrolled in this cost-savings program out of a pool of more than five million. Urge city businesses to sign up—and provide all city employees with a range of fare options.

Make transportation a priority. Appoint the Commissioner of the City's Department of Transportation to the MTA Board of Directors, and coordinate all related transportation and planning efforts through a "sub-cabinet" chaired by the head of city DOT.

Increase public confidence in the city's Department of Transportation by improving the basic services the agency provides, from speeding installation of safety signals to fixing potholes to improving service provided by private bus companies overseen by the city.

We urge you to adopt this commonsense blueprint to unclog and calm city streets, ease horrendous crowding on the subways and buses, and move critical freight. Our groups — which include major business, labor, environment, transit and civic interests — have different missions. But we share a deep concern over the city's increasingly inadequate and antiquated transportation system. As mayor, it is your job to provide direction and ensure that the city, a center of so much creativity and innovation, applies some of its energy to building a transportation system equal or better to the world's other great international cities. Be bold.