

June 9, 2014

Honorable Polly Trottenberg, Commissioner
NYC Department of Transportation
55 Water Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10041

Dear Commissioner Trottenberg,

In keeping with Mayor de Blasio's Vision Zero, the Committee for Pedestrian Safety on Riverside Boulevard and the Coalition for a Livable West Side **urge you to immediately institute the following protections for pedestrians crossing Riverside Boulevard.**

1. PEDESTRIAN PROTECTIONS

A. Riverside Boulevard must be immediately designated a 20-mph zone. There is pedestrian traffic from four schools: The River School (62nd and 63rd on West End Avenue); Dwight Early Learning Center (66th and Riverside Blvd.); Bilingual Buds (68th and Riverside Blvd.); and Small Wonder (69th between Riverside Blvd. and Freedom Place).

The River School takes care of infants to pre-K children from 7:30 AM until 7:00 PM. Teachers take the children to the playground on Riverside Boulevard twice a day when the weather permits, as do the pre-nursery schools: Bi-Lingual Buds, the Dwight Early Learning Center and Small Wonder. Currently teachers signal drivers with large STOP signs before even attempting to take children across the road. Dedicated crossings are needed to get the children to the playground safely.

B. Yield Signs must be installed.

For pedestrian safety, NYCDOT **must add a flexible, reflective or illuminated pedestrian crossing YIELD SIGN at all intersections/crossings on Riverside Boulevard.** Motorists who routinely disregard STOP signs, tend to obey YIELD SIGNS. These signs are approved in New York State and are commonly used.

See photo at right.



C. An extra-large crossing, compliant with ADA rules, must be created at West 68th Street.

During the day, children as well as adults and park goers have great difficulty crossing safely and confidently to and from the playground at West 68th Street. Currently, there is also scaffolding around 160 Riverside Boulevard that, together with the trees, obscures the stop sign at West 68th Street and this compounds the problem.

In addition to the above YIELD SIGN at this location, we ask that you seriously consider adding a raised, pressed asphalt extra large crossing. It should be three inches high and twenty feet wide. An example is shown at the right. It could be constructed in a different pattern to make pushing strollers easier.



D. Both STOP and flexible reflective or illuminated pedestrian crossing Yield signs should be at every crossing to Riverside Park South.

Riverside Boulevard is the primary access road to the Riverside South waterfront park and there is increased pedestrian traffic from Riverside Boulevard from late March to the end of October from 7:00 AM to midnight, when crowds go to the varied activities in the park and to the Pier I Café. There is general intimidation of pedestrians accessing Riverside Park South by motorists.

PERTINENT BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A. High-Rises: There are 12 high-rise buildings on Riverside Boulevard from West 62nd Street to West 72nd Street, **with 3,188 apartments**. An additional new building is under construction at West 62nd Street.

B. Parking Garages: There are 11 parking garages. Entrances and exits from the garages are on:

West 70th street (both sides of street); West 68th Street (both sides of street), West 64th Street (both sides of street) and West 62nd Street (one side, the other side is construction of One Riverside Park).

There is also a large Gemini parking garage on Freedom Place between West 67th Street and West 68th. Both residents and non-residents can use the parking garages.

C. Number of Stop Signs (largely ignored by drivers!):

There are 7 STOP Signs going North on Riverside Boulevard from West 62nd to West 72nd Streets (with corresponding numbers going South).



There are also STOP Signs on each street from th east to west from West 62nd to West 72nd Streets, except for dead end streets (West 65th, West 67, and West 71st). These have STOP signs painted on the road.



There are also 7 **APPROACHING STOP** Signs going North on Riverside Boulevard from West 62nd to West 72nd Streets (with 5 APPROACHING STOP Signs going South).



West 64th and West 68th are one -way streets going east. There are STOP signs at West 65th, West 66th and West 67th Streets.

At West 68th Street on Riverside Boulevard, going North and South, there is a neon Yellow Triangle Sign with pedestrians on it.



This location also has a painted STOP Sign on the road, as well as a SCHOOL X-ING SIGN painted on the road.



On 72nd street going North to the West Side Highway, there is also a "15 mph" sign due to the right curve of the street from 71st to 72nd street leading to the highway.



D. Traffic Details for Riverside Boulevard:

Traffic consists of the M72 bus, school vans, taxis, private cars, limos, and a lot of moving vans, as three of the buildings are rental buildings. There are also special vans for children with disabilities in the Dwight Early Learning School, and Access-a-Ride vans for the elderly. There are no regular school buses as most children use taxis or private buses.

E. Traffic Pattern on Riverside Boulevard:

Weekdays are the Busiest Period:

7:30 AM to 9:30 AM onwards weekday mornings.

3:00 PM to 5:00 PM when children come from school and household help and nannies leave.

5:30 PM to 9:30 PM when office workers return home.

Saturday and Sunday from 1:00 PM onwards; Saturday night from 3:30 PM onwards.

F. Cab Problem:

The most common complaint among doormen is that cabs regularly cross the double yellow line in center of road, especially when other cabs are dropping people off.

Enforcement usually occurs only when a call is placed to the 20th Precinct.

G. Scaffolding and Trees blocking the STOP sign at West 68th Street which is the primary access street to the playground and is located between 2 pre-schools:

As the photos below show, the STOP sign and "Warning STOP sign" are now obscured by the scaffolding around 160 Riverside Boulevard, and the trees. Motorists frequently ignore the painted X-ING SCHOOL and STOP signs painted on the road.



H. Important Anecdotal Information on Traffic:

1. On a recent Saturday, a resident noted that from 3:30 PM to 4:15 PM, there were 200 vehicles passing through.
2. Doormen's concerns on the traffic problems on Riverside Boulevard:

Cabs going from North to South on the Boulevard regularly **DO NOT STOP at the STOP signs** because they know there is no road coming in from west to east.

Taxis, limos and private car drivers do not respect the STOP signs, with several just cruising through or speeding through without stopping. Often, taxis, limos and private cars come only to a **rolling stop, not a full stop.**

Drivers are speeding, behaving as if Riverside Boulevard were a raceway to the Highway.

Many drivers, if they are trailing a car which has stopped at a STOP SIGN, **do not stop at all, after they stop initially behind the first car.**

Many of the traffic "issues" occur because of the types of cars using this area; for hire vehicles of different varieties that may be mostly concerned about getting some place else.

- I. **APPROACHING STOP signs** should be removed. Drivers do not understand these signs.



H. Failure of NYCDOT's 2011 Traffic Calming Plan for Riverside Boulevard

Late in 2011, the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) implemented a traffic calming plan for Riverside Blvd., from W. 62nd to West 72nd with four main elements:

- Striping a 7-foot center median from West 62nd Street to West 72nd Street.
- Delineating the 8-foot parking lane from West 62nd Street to West 72nd Street.
- Creating For-Hire Vehicle parking zones on Riverside Boulevard.
- Creating Truck Loading zones on side streets.

The intended outcome of the plan, to slow down traffic, discourage double parking, and improve the visibility of pedestrians **has not worked.** It appears that DOT's emphasis was on moving traffic rather than making Riverside Boulevard a model for pedestrian safety.

There has been no decrease in double-parked trucks and for-hire vehicles on Riverside Boulevard and the curb regulations which require constant enforcement by the Police **have proven to be unrealistic**. At least 20 vehicles circulate on Riverside Boulevard during the morning commuting period.

The DOT traffic calming striping has not added any safety benefit to pedestrians, primarily because striping has little to no influence on the way people drive. As long as there are no physical obstructions or traffic control devices in a roadway, people will drive and park wherever they can.

Unfortunately, DOT's traffic calming plan relied too heavily on enforcement and motorist behavior -- two things that are difficult to monitor or control.

DOT appeared to believe that, since there had been no reported fatalities on Riverside Boulevard, there was no need for traffic lights or unique pedestrian safety measures. The residents, who almost daily witness near- collisions of vehicles and pedestrians, voice vehement **DISAGREEMENT!**

It is unclear why DOT, which has changed many streets to make them safer for pedestrians, has back-pedaled on Riverside Boulevard. What is clear is that the NYC DOT is short-changing the residents and visitors of Riverside Boulevard by opting for inexpensive roadway treatments that rely heavily on good behavior from motorists.

In conclusion, THE NYCDOT's Traffic Calming Program has not been successful. The problems remain, especially with the danger to school children crossing to the park and with drivers ignoring stop signs and lane markings. As a result, we recommend that NYCDOT designate Riverside Boulevard a 20-mph zone. New York State law says New York City can lower speed limits on streets within 1/4-mile of school without State approval. Also, we ask for crosswalk YIELD SIGNS and for a raised pavement on West 68th Street.

The community anticipates that New York City resources will be available to fund the illuminated or reflective crosswalk YIELD SIGNS, as well as the raised pavement on West 68th Street. **The safety of New Yorkers is paramount.**

Thanking you, in advance, for your prompt response to this urgent matter.

Respectfully submitted,
Shoba Pala-Krishnan, Committee for Pedestrian Safety on Riverside Boulevard
Batya Lewton, Coalition for a Livable West Side

Cc: Hon. Margaret Forgione, NYCDOT Commissioner, Borough of Manhattan