

The Coalition for a Livable West Side

Analysis of New York City's
Department of Transportation's
Recommendations for
Pedestrian Safety on
Riverside Boulevard

July 8, 2011

Prepared by Amy Pfeiffer,
Consultant

On May 10, 2011, the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) Manhattan Borough Commissioner, Margaret Forgione, met with the Transportation Committee of Community Board 7 (CB7). She presented a traffic calming plan for Riverside Boulevard, from West 62nd Street to West 72nd Street. The presentation can be viewed through this link to the DOT web-site:

http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/2011_riverside_blvd.pdf.

The NYCDOT's traffic calming plan for Riverside Boulevard has 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 four elements together is to keep traffic moving at a slower speed, discourage double parking, and improve the visibility of pedestrians.

While the traffic calming plan could result in fewer double-parked trucks and For-Hire Vehicles on Riverside Boulevard, the proposed new curb regulations require constant enforcement by the Police, an unrealistic and burdensome plan.

There will be 8 spaces allotted to For-Hire-Vehicles, when in reality at least 20 vehicles are circulating on Riverside Boulevard during the morning commuting period.

As traffic laws against double parking are rarely enforced now on Riverside Boulevard, it is unclear why the DOT believes this will change in the future.

In the DOT plan, pedestrian safety is an afterthought at best. Considering the traffic from two schools and a primary access road to the Riverside South waterfront park, it seems that DOT's emphasis is on moving traffic rather than making Riverside Boulevard a model for pedestrian safety.

The DOT appears to believe that, since there have been no reported accidents on Riverside Boulevard, there is no need for traffic lights or other 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, is back-pedaling on Riverside Boulevard.

What is clear, is that the 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.

Upper West Side residents raised the issue of pedestrian safety on Riverside Boulevard (West 62nd – West 72nd Street) at Community Board 7's Transportation Committee a year ago in June 2010.

On June 7, 2011, Community Board 7 voted on the Transportation Committee's resolution - Re: the NYC Department of Transportation's traffic plan for Riverside Boulevard.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT Community Board 7/ Manhattan approves:
Side-street loading zones, Monday-Friday, 8AM – 6PM, up to 60 feet in length;
one on every block off Riverside Boulevard from West 63rd -71st Streets.

Two For-Hire Vehicles (FHV) waiting areas on the east side of Riverside Boulevard, one from West 65th to West 66th Streets, and the other from West 66th to West 67th Streets.

Each waiting area would be 4 car lengths (80-feet long), and would be in effect on Monday-Friday, 6AM - 4PM,

Both the loading zones and the FHV zones would revert to current alternate side regulations when not in effect.

CB7 reserves the right to request amending these regulations six months after implementation and when usage patterns become more evident.

Full Board Vote: 34 in favor; 1 Against; 1 Abstention; 0 Present

A year ago, on July 6, 2010 Community Board 7 voted on the Transportation Committees' resolution:

The following facts and concerns were considered in arriving at our conclusion:

The connection between Riverside Drive and Riverside Boulevard is imminent, which will bring much more traffic along Riverside Boulevard;

There are no traffic lights along Riverside Boulevard;

Many safety concerns have been raised by residents along Riverside

Boulevard, including many near-misses and collisions between pedestrians and automobiles.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT Community Board 7/Manhattan implores NYCDOT not to open the connection between Riverside Drive and Riverside Boulevard until adequate safety measures have been taken, including installation of traffic signals along Riverside Boulevard; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT Community Board 7 requests increased enforcement of traffic regulations by NYC Police Department and the NYC Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) and a reduced speed limit on the boulevard; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT Community Board 7 calls on the Extell Development Company and NYCDOT to make the boulevard safer immediately. Full Board Vote: 34 In favor; 0 Against; 0 Abstentions; 0 Present but not voting.

Critique of the DOT Traffic Calming plan for Riverside Boulevard

The absence of collisions between motorists and pedestrians is not an indicator of a safe street. Given the number of people walking and driving in the City every day, traffic crashes are statistically rare.

The quality of life of those living at and near a street is a much stronger gauge of how well a street operates. The people living on Riverside Boulevard paint a much different picture of the safety of this street than what the DOT has presented.

The DOT should be embarrassed about trying to pass off striped lines on the pavement as a traffic calming measure. Visually narrowing a street with striped lines may or may not have any influence on motorist speed, and certainly plays little or no role in pedestrian safety. In fact, the volume of motorists on a street is a much stronger indicator of safety than the width of the street.

This traffic calming plan relies too heavily on enforcement and motorist behavior --- two things that are difficult to monitor or control.

Notably absent from the plan are traffic control devices (stop signs, traffic signals) along Riverside Boulevard. CB7 members and the community voiced concerns over the lack of traffic signals at the new connection of Riverside Boulevard to Riverside Drive at West 72nd Street, as well as the main access to Riverside South Park at West 68th Street and Riverside Boulevard. (See page 8 for image.)

Additionally, the crosswalk in front of the school at West 66th Street is treated as a standard crosswalk of two parallel lines, while the intersection at West 68th Street has high-visibility ladder-style crosswalks traditionally used to denote a school crossing. The DOT said that the preferred crossing to the school was at West 68th Street rather than West 66th Street, thus the crosswalk marking patterns.

One of the most important questions to ask when reviewing this plan is what are the purposes of any changes on Riverside Boulevard?

According to the NYCDOT presentation, Riverside Boulevard is already calm: traffic volumes and speeds are low, and there have been no recorded crashes between pedestrians and motor vehicles.

The consulting firm of Sam Schwartz did an analysis of future traffic once Riverside Boulevard and Riverside Drive are connected and found little to no change in volume, one rationale for not installing any traffic control devices on Riverside Boulevard.

The basis of this analysis is current land uses, vehicle volume and potential new vehicles associated with the land uses. The design of these traffic analyses and models is static, producing easily manipulated statistics fitting the “need” of place.

The reality of how current and future motorists drive on Riverside Boulevard is not captured in the DOT analysis, and should raise a red flag to the community.

The consulting firm of Sam Schwartz in tandem with DOT determined that the volume and speed of traffic did not meet the Federal Highway Administration’s warrant for traffic control devices. Traffic control devices are the signals put above the intersection to show motorists when they should stop, yield or drive through an intersection; in turn these devices show “WALK”, “FLASHING CAUTION” and “DON’T WALK” to pedestrians.

The Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) published by the Federal Highway Administration guides NYCDOT decisions on traffic controls on Riverside Boulevard. Part 6: “Temporary Traffic Control Devices”, in the latest MUTCD, requires a volume of over 400 vehicles per day before a temporary traffic control device is installed. Section 6B of the MUTCD requires a Temporary Traffic Control (TTC) plan during and after the construction of a new road.

Installing a TTC signal alerting drivers of the new interchange, rather than waiting to see how the intersection operates without a traffic signal, is a

stronger safety mechanism. After a three month pilot study by NYCDOT, the TTC can easily be removed if the DOT deems the device unnecessary.



An example of a TTC¹ used at a school.

Creating For-Hire Vehicle and Truck Zone curb side regulations are up to the Police Department to enforce. Double parking is illegal, but rampant every morning on Riverside Boulevard, with no consequence to motorists.

In the NYCDOT traffic calming plan, the northbound lane is striped at 19 feet. This width allows ample room for the continued practice of double parking. The southbound lane is reduced to 11 feet, with the striped parking lane at 8 feet. While this lane width could deter double parking, through vehicles can still easily drive around double parked cars by driving in the striped center median.

Does striping a center median and creating parking lanes make a safety difference? There is no added safety benefit to pedestrians with striping, 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.

¹ <http://www.omjcsignal.com/images/deployment/Ped2.jpg>
326a 9th Street | Brooklyn, New York 11215 | pfoundationworks@gmail.com | 917-626-2322

The NYCDOT is working on numerous new ideas to manage parking in the neighborhood: offering incentives to business owners to schedule off-peak deliveries, establishing priced parking, and setting specific zones for the different types of traffic, (for example: the For-Hire-Vehicle zones on Riverside Boulevard). Enforcement is critical to the success of the zones, making the potential benefits questionable.

The traffic calming plan proposed by the DOT for Riverside Boulevard offers little to motorists, pedestrians and residents in terms of safety. While the proposed changes may lead to slower two-way traffic, the plan's omission of signalized crossings means that pedestrians on Riverside Boulevard are left to guess when it is safe for them to cross.

Much more can and should be done on Riverside Boulevard by NYCDOT.

The Coalition for a Livable West Side offers the following pedestrian safety measures:

- 1)** Install a temporary traffic control device at the new intersection of Riverside Boulevard and Riverside Drive.
- 2)** Install a temporary traffic control device at West 68th Street, the main entrance to the park.
- 3)** Install speed bumps at West 66th Street and West 67th Street to slow motor vehicles at school entrances.
- 4)** Install flexible bollards through the length of the center-striped median to prevent motorists from driving in this area.
- 5)** Extend the center median so both the northbound and southbound travel lanes are 11 feet wide.

These five changes to the DOT proposal would benefit all roadway users, with particular emphasis on pedestrians.

Below is a diagram presented by NYCDOT at the May 10, 2011 meeting of Community Board 7's Transportation Committee.

The diagram was difficult to read when it was shown on the screen and on a printed board at the CB7 meeting. We are sorry that we do not have a better image. This is the only image available to the public from NYCDOT that's shows the Traffic Calming Project proposed by NYCDOT for Riverside Boulevard.



