



Members:

Atlantic Avenue Betterment Association
Auburndale Improvement Association
Banana Kelly Community Association
Bronx Shepherds Restoration
Care About the Slope
Boerum Hill Association
Brooklyn Heights Association
Bronx Shepherds Restoration
Carroll Gardens Association
Chambers-Canal Civic Association
Charles St. Block Association
Cherry Tree Association
Clinton Hill Society
Dean St. Block Association
Ditmas Park Association
DUMBO Neighborhood Alliance
Eden Wald Gun Hill Neighborhood Center
First Street Resident's Association
Fort Greene Coalition for Clean Air
Fulton Ferry Landing Association
Grand Avenue Block Association
Greenpoint/Williamsburg
Environmental Watchperson Project
Harlem Environmental Impact Project
Highbridge Advisory Council
Holland Street Neighborhood Association
Institute of Public Administration
Jane Street Association
Jefferson Avenue Block Association
Juniper Park Civic Association
Kingsbridge Heights Neighborhood Improvement
Linden Blvd. Improvement Association
Monroe, Nostrand, Marcy Block Association
Monroe, Patchen, and Reid Block Association
Mothers on the Move
Neighbors in Highbridge
Nos Quedamos
NYC Environmental Justice Alliance
Our Lady of Refuge PTA
Park Slope Action for the Environment
Project for Public Spaces
Richmond Town and Clark Ave. Civic Association
Seventeenth St. '200' Block Association
Sierra Club—NYC Chapter
SoHo Partnership
South Bronx Community Coalition
St. Francis de Chantal PTA
St. James/Ful/Gates Block Association
Sunset Park Restoration
Transportation Alternatives
Trees Not Trucks
Tri-State Transportation Campaign
University West Burnside Neighborhood Association
Wakefield Tax Payers and Civic League
Walk NY
Watkins Street Block Association
West 9th Street Block Association
West Village Houses Tenants Association
University-West Burnside Neighborhood Association
Bronx PTAs 5, 6, 14, 20, 23, 27, 41, 48, 36, 54, 55, 62, 66, 71, 73, 79, 81, 83, 95, 96, 103, 105, 106, 112, 119, 126, 130, 132, 156, 161, 214, 226, 246, 306, 360
Queens PTAs 66 and 166

No Progress on Traffic Calming Law

The passage of the NYC Traffic Calming Law in September 1999 was a landmark moment for pedestrian safety and neighborhood quality of life. The law makes it clear that the city is allowed to use new traffic calming tools—such as extended sidewalks, raised crosswalks, slow-speed zones in residential neighborhoods, and more effective speed humps that were previously resisted because of the state mandated “design speed” of 30 m.p.h. in NYC.

However, despite Mayor Giuliani’s enthusiastic endorsement, the NYC Department of Transportation has thus far not used the law in any form, and the Neighborhood Street Network’s November letter requesting a meeting with Deputy Mayor Joe Lhota to discuss the law went unanswered. Meanwhile, neighborhoods all over the city continue to clamor for relief from dangerous and oppressive traffic.

Neel Scott, on behalf of the NSN, sent Lhota another letter in early April renewing our request for a meeting to discuss how and where to begin implementing slower speeds and traffic calming. The meeting’s agenda would include a basic citywide traffic calming plan, a working list of initial pilot traffic calming projects, an agreement on standards for traffic calming projects in all five boroughs and a statement of total funds dedicated to speed humps and other traffic calming methods.

‘Human Bowling Alley’ on Queens Boulevard

Queens Boulevard is one of the most hazardous streets for walking in NYC, with more than 50 pedestrian deaths since 1993. Cars tear down the ten-to-twelve lane boulevard and create a great divide that area residents cross at their own peril. On New Year’s Eve, in a particularly gruesome incident, a 26-year-old Brooklyn man was the victim of a hit and run when he was struck by two cars in succession and dragged four blocks to his death.

A recent study funded by the Queens borough president’s office and Councilmember Karen Koslowitz found that, during rush hours, pedestrians often had only 33 seconds to cross the average 170-foot wide boulevard. Even more dangerous, lights were timed at 38 mph on the 30 mph road, thus encouraging rampant speeding. While the city has increased pedestrian crossing time at certain intersections, it has been slow to act on many of the study’s recommendations, and has yet to commit to significant pedestrian improvements such as neckdowns and widened pedestrian refuges. Meanwhile, Queens Boulevard remains a no man’s land.



Wider than a football field, Queens Blvd has long been a pedestrian terror zone.

Debunking the Myths: Traffic Calming Liability

One thing that community groups and others seeking traffic calming for their neighborhoods often hear is that liability—both for individual engineers and the City—is a big problem. This is simply not true. No NYCDOT engineer has ever been held personally liable for damages arising from traffic calming, and in the four years that NYC has had speed humps, the City has only paid one liability claim, for a broken muffler, because a warning sign was mistakenly installed *after* a speed hump. Nationwide, tens of thousands of speed humps and traffic calming devices have been installed since the 1970s, with only six liability verdicts. Compared to the steady stream of liability cases that cities face from simple road maintenance and construction issues, speed humps and traffic calming devices—when designed and constructed to international standards—have minimal liability risk.

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DOT Turns Traffic Calming Project On Head

At a March 30th meeting of the Downtown Brooklyn Traffic Calming Task Force, NYCDOT Brooklyn Borough Commissioner Kathy Keegan outraged neighborhood groups by repeatedly claiming that motorist ‘safety concerns’ preclude standard traffic calming practices in Downtown Brooklyn. Spurious in the extreme, her claim is, moreover, 100% antithetical to the intent of traffic calming and the Downtown Brooklyn project.

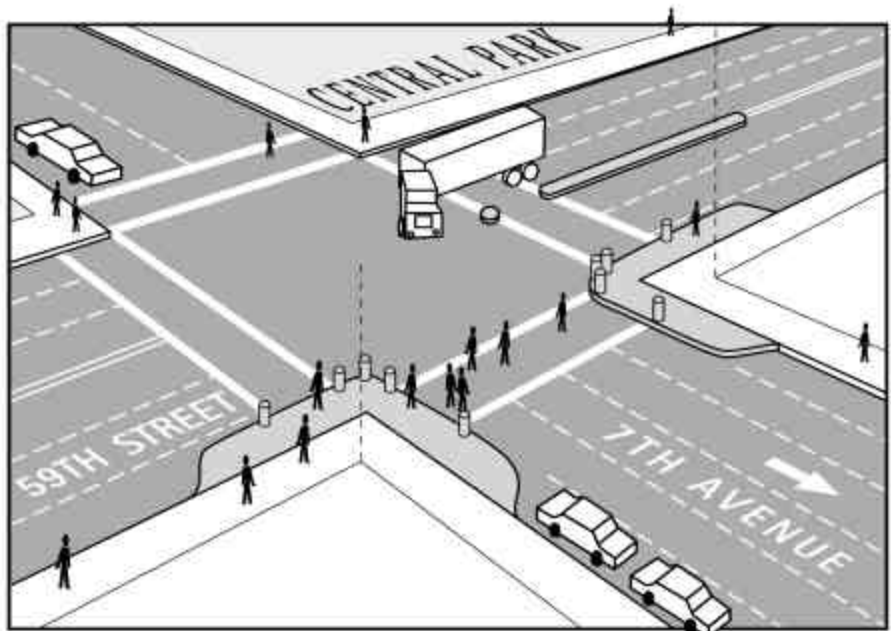
The purpose of the project is to make pedestrians safer and reduce the impact of cars on the quality of life in Downtown Brooklyn. This means slower speeds and pedestrian-friendly street design. Commissioner Keegan’s statements indicate that DOT’s goal for this project is to have as little impact on drivers as possible. An example of this is Commissioner Keegan’s assertion that raised intersections and crosswalks **cannot be built any higher than 2 inches because of ‘safety concerns.’** However, in their technical memorandum on traffic calming devices, the project consultants Ove Arup and Partners themselves stated that “raised crosswalks are constructed 3-4 inches above the roadway surface”, and **the international design consensus for ‘raised traffic calming platforms’ is 4 inches.** Raised crosswalks and intersections have been built at this height in countless locations across the US and around the world, with no evidence that they are unsafe to motorists. There is, however, indisputable evidence that they slow vehicles and increase pedestrian safety. Conversely, a case study in The Institute of Transportation Engineers’ seminal Traffic Calming: State of the Practice found that **a two inch platform could just barely be felt at 60 mph.**

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The pilot projects are meant to test the limits of the possibilities of traffic calming in Downtown Brooklyn, and if need be, to revise or scale down. By prioritizing the movement of cars over safety of pedestrians, NYCDOT is turning its back on the communities who have worked for the past five years to bring this project to fruition, and undermining the project consultants’ traffic calming expertise. If Commissioner Keegan holds to her bogus ‘safety’ claims, Downtown Brooklyn Traffic Calming project’s interventions will be weak and ineffectual, and will ultimately fail to do anything to make pedestrians safer or reduce air pollution, noise and traffic.

City to Pedestrians: ‘Watch for Trucks on Sidewalk’

The sign below is from the corner of Central Park South and 7th Avenue—the same intersection where, in 1995, Eugenia Renom, 80, and Angelica Chorberg, 50, were simultaneously killed by a truck as they tried to cross the street. Now, according to DOT, not only must pedestrians take their lives into their own hands when they try to cross the street, but they should be ready and willing to dive out of the way when trucks jump the sidewalk. This is a prime example of a location where pro-active engineering, made possible by 1999’s traffic calming law, should be applied. Transportation Alternatives recommends that the City install full eight-foot neckdowns and bollards at the corners, and a median to prevent illegal turning movements.



As always, please remember to send us your press clips and correspondence—anything that tells your neighborhood’s story. If you know a local group that is fighting for safer streets, let us know. Send a note with the contact person, address, and phone number of the group you have in mind to: Neighborhood Streets Network, Attention Neel Scott, 115 West 30th St. Suite 1207, New York, NY, 10001. Or fax to (212) 629-8334.