

**REMARKS FROM
NYC COUNCIL TRANSPORTATION CHAIRMAN YDANIS RODRIGUEZ
10/5/2015**

Ladies and Gentlemen, commissioners, elected officials, distinguished guests, good morning and thank you for joining me here at the Rudin Center for Transportation at New York University.

Thank you Dr. Moss for providing this excellent forum to discuss something that unites us all: a steadfast commitment to improving—through transportation—the lives of New Yorkers and the millions who visit each year. I could not think of a more fitting setting to open a dialogue with so many individuals committed to strengthening the ways we move about our city.

The collective brainpower assembled this morning would breed envy in any urban center and I must say, we are lucky to have your service here in New York. You have each distinguished yourselves as leaders in your respective fields and industries. Your work is recognized globally and your ideas have the potential to reach millions throughout the world.

For these reasons I am here today to start a conversation; to share with all of you, my vision to bolster the safety and efficiency across our transportation networks. With your input, support and partnership, we can take great strides, be more aggressive in achieving common goals and ultimately move our city and region forward into the future as a global leader—an example of urban excellence.

We understand how fundamental transportation can be to the success of a city. Its ability to impact economics, environment, health and public safety is nearly unparalleled in magnitude. Safe and efficient means of moving from one place to another can increase economic opportunity, shrink gaps in income inequality, create a more sustainable city and make those from all walks of life, healthier and more productive members of society.

To these ends, I propose an agenda of aggressive targets here at home; achievable through an array of approaches, including legislation, substantial funding opportunities—both public and, where applicable, private—and strategic advocacy at the state and federal levels. Along each of these avenues, I seek your partnership and ideas, informed by your years of engagement in this field.

It is imperative that we set the groundwork now for the coming decades, putting in place policies—investments, capable of yielding a smarter, sustainable and more equitable city.

According to the NYC Economic Development Corporation, as of 2012, 1.4 million New Yorkers owned at least one car. As a car owner myself, I know the burden this places on one's time and pocket. Single occupancy vehicles, constantly flooding our streets, put a strain on both individuals and our city as a whole. This is one of the most inefficient means of travel available to New Yorkers, yet many in our outer boroughs are forced to rely upon it due to a lack of

options. If we are aggressive in expanding transit options to these areas and put in place policies to incentivize alternate means of travel, we can remove thousands of cars from our roads, instead freeing them up for buses; taxis and FHVs; and bicycles. This makes cyclists and pedestrians safer, limits harmful emissions and ends the dreaded gridlock so many New Yorkers hate.

I am today setting an ambitious goal of lowering the self-selective rate of car ownership to 1 million by 2030. With 400,000 people and families changing their routines, we not only ease congestion and lower harmful emissions but we can also take advantage of public space now used for parking to enhance features for cycling and walking.

Policy ideas to achieve this goal are already underway, with the Department of City Planning recently announcing modifications to certain off-street parking requirements for new development near public transit. If we can broaden these reforms beyond just affordable and senior housing, we will encourage residents to find new, safe and efficient ways to get to work without straining their pockets or our streets. One initiative I plan to start next year is a car-free day, to be held on Earth Day. Working with the city and you as partners, we can drive a public awareness campaign encouraging people to leave their cars at home, as well as remove all non-essential city vehicles from the road. I can only imagine the impact this will have on freeing up our streets, allowing all New Yorkers to see the benefits of fewer cars.

Hand in hand with this goal, I hope to see an even greater number of people on bikes than the city's current targets. Recently, the DOT has said they are looking to double the number of people choosing cycling as their mode of transit by 2020. While the number currently offered remains ambiguous, an estimated 1.5 percent of people in the city are cyclists. We should be more aggressive in this challenge and I want to help the administration achieve their earlier goal of 6% by 2020. But today, I propose we do even more. We should double *that* number to 12% by 2030, revolutionizing how people move about our city.

I commit today to help reach this mark and I will lend my voice to this cause in the city budget process, as well as with our state and federal partners, to fight for the capital dollars necessary to implement more protected bike lanes and make our city even safer for this healthier and energy efficient way of travelling. Other ideas to contribute to this goal would be to invest City dollars to expand bike share more rapidly to underserved areas; including placing stations at key transit access points like subway stations and ferry stops; expand the pilot program of allowing bicycles on the front of MTA buses, and possibly even trains in the future, complete with bike tracks along subway stairs to easily access stations, and finally, through the passage of legislation I recently sponsored, to require residential buildings to be bike accessible, an expansion of the 2009 Bike Access Law.

While New York City was named the number one cycling city in the United States by *Bicycling Magazine* last year—a testament to the forward thinking by the present and former administrations—we all know that too often, cyclists take extreme risks by riding alongside

traffic. I am proud of the work we've done thus far: two weeks ago, we reached the 1000th bike lane installed in NYC. But by 2030 let's reach 2,000! And as a crucial part of this, let's ensure 20% of those lanes are fully protected from traffic.

DOT studies have shown that protected bike lanes make streets safer for everyone, not just cyclists, and yet do not slow down traffic. Moreover, they have been found to boost commercial districts, supporting the growth of our city's small businesses and economy as a whole. I understand the community pushback on the installation of bike lanes, I see it in my own community as well, but to progress as a city, this is one of the most substantial steps we can take, providing benefits across the board. I am committed.

We can also free up street space for safer and more efficient use by mitigating truck traffic on our congested roadways. This is why I am a big believer in the Cross Harbor Rail Tunnel, currently under study by the Port Authority. Representative Jerry Nadler has been a tireless advocate for this project and I am eager to help move it forward however possible. This project has the potential to remove nearly 1 million trucks from our roadways. Connecting train tracks in New Jersey to those in Brooklyn under the New York Harbor, we can more efficiently move freight without the fumes and traffic-clogging trucks create, while making our streets safer for all users. The impact of this project is tremendous in terms of cost savings. We can save on road repair, regain economic activity lost to congestion, lower health care costs for asthma treatments and decrease the burdens on our environmental.

But even before this multibillion dollar tunnel is built, there are smaller steps we can take more efficiently manage truck traffic to the benefit of all. If we can shift the hours when trucks make deliveries to our city's small businesses—through incentives or legislation—we will take a step toward easing congestion during rush hour.

But truckers are veterans of our roadways and their savvy is seen every day as they avoid our city's tolled bridges to instead opt for the free ones we have downtown. These trips, which add a little to their drive, are felt way more by our congested roadways in Manhattan, Western Queens and Brooklyn. But there is a solution to this and numerous other problems that I am fully supporting today: Move New York. Move New York is the most widely accepted plan for easing congestion and funding transit projects to date. There is no longer a question of *should* we pass this plan, but *when*. Working with Sam Schwartz and the Move NY coalition, I will commit myself, over the coming weeks and months, to ensure that my Council colleagues get behind this transformative plan.

Not only will Move NY make a significant dent in reducing our chronic traffic problems – which endanger public safety and cost the region an estimated \$16 billion a year in lost economic activity – it will dedicate money to maintaining the City's roads and bridges and establish a Community Transit Fund that will enable communities to work with their elected officials, the MTA and DOT to address local transit needs. For communities not presently on the transit map,

these funds will contribute toward reaching this goal, making it possible to expand bus routes or study potential for light rail in future capital plans. Connecting these disparate communities can have a substantial impact on reducing inequalities, as lowering commute times directly affects economic gains.

And one of the best arguments for Move NY is that will contribute to the MTA's ability to strengthen our mass transit system, modernizing and securing the most valuable asset to our city. Move NY would quickly put to rest lingering questions over capital plan funding and would allow us to be more aggressive in building out into transit deserts to provide safer and more efficient options.

With this additional funding, we can expand the number of fully-equipped Bus Rapid Transit routes reaching eastern Queens and southeast Brooklyn, putting more communities on the transit map. But there are steps we can take today to address this as well. We should take advantage of our commuter rail systems, the Long Island Rail Road and the Metro North and their ability to move people quickly through the 5 boroughs. If we allow riders living within the city limits to take a train from Jamaica to Penn Station for a price comparable to a MetroCard fare, we lower overcrowding on 7 trains while moving people through our city faster. This can be useful for residents in the East Bronx as well, who will soon receive new Metro North stations, moving people off of the most over-crowded subway lines in the world, the 4, 5 and 6 trains.

Indeed, a more comprehensive approach to commuter rail has the ability to transform our city's transportation entirely. If we're talking big picture solutions, consolidating our commuter rail systems—LIRR, Metro North, New Jersey Transit and PATH—into a unified regional rail system, we could allow for through-running, similar to Philadelphia's SEPTA. Riders could conceivably travel from Montauk, NY to Trenton, NJ with just one ticket on a one seat ride. Transit advocates and professionals have pointed to this as a major upgrade, yielding numerous benefits to riders and I fully endorse this plan.

When it comes to the MTA, we must also talk about safety. In two days, the Transportation Committee will hear two bills and two resolutions aimed at allowing bus drivers to do their jobs without fear of injuring others who use our streets. One of these bills addresses dangerous intersections and would remove parked cars that block drivers' vision of pedestrians beginning to cross the street. The second requires the DOT to study bus routes and find ways to mitigate dangerous crossings through an array of traffic calming measures. Finally, I have sponsored a resolution calling on the MTA to address the concerns of the TWU and ATU regarding blind spots on buses that prevent them from seeing pedestrians. With these changes, we will ease the difficult work of bus drivers while protecting the lives of everyone on our streets.

We should work to increase safety on our subways as well. Each year, an average of nearly 50 people are killed by trains. Two years ago, the MTA began studying methods to protect riders who fall into the tracks at subway stations through a pilot program. They looked at four different

methods of alerting train conductors of danger on the tracks ahead of them, including motion sensors, CCTV cameras, radio frequency technology and thermal imaging cameras. With the MTA already focused on this serious issue, I urge them to share the results of their findings and rapidly implement the most effective strategies to protect riders. Stopgap measures can be taken in the interim, including bars along platforms that could open and close when trains arrive and depart. Every New Yorker's fear is falling on to the tracks as a train approaches, after over 100 years, we should be able to take simple steps to alleviate this concern from people's minds, while investing in the technology capable of substantially making our system safer. I hope to see these systems implemented in future capital plans to prevent loss of life within our subways.

Another simple step to increase efficiency and limit confusion is not as grand but is easily achievable: changing the names of subway stops that repeat throughout the system. Right now there are 12 stops that have a name identical to that of another stop in the system. A simple addition of a cross street or distinctive aspect of the stop to the name, could limit confusion that all but the most savvy riders have, ensuring people do not go to the wrong stop.

Efficiency also relates to energy and environmentally friendly solutions as well. To be more ambitious when it comes to energy savings, harnessing renewable energy from the system could help to drive down costs and increase efficiency. Expanding the use of solar panels along outdoor train stations and bus shelters is a strong step toward greater self-sufficiency; but a true dream of mine would be to mirror the steps taken by the LA Metro, which captures the wind energy created by trains. Understanding that this is a long term project, it would provide countless benefits to both the MTA and our environment as we seek to become a more sustainable city. Your support in advocacy and planning, however, could go a long way toward moving the idea forward.

Now, on a more practical and immediate scale, we must be more conscious of the transportation struggles of those in the disabled and senior communities. As winter approaches, keeping our sidewalks, bike lanes and bus shelters clean from snow buildup can be key to allowing easy access. I expect the city to hold accountable those responsible for ensuring sidewalks are easily navigable, while strongly pressuring Cemusa to uphold their legal responsibility for cleaning our bus shelters, or else finding another service provider who can. Particularly for seniors and members of the disabled community, cleared sidewalks and bus shelters are critical.

These are communities too often left out of conversations around transportation planning. Looking at a subway map listing only accessible stations provides a stark picture of how much more we must accomplish. I understand the MTA carries a great burden—and we know capital dollars do not come easy—but we can and must do more in this area. Not every project requires the installation of a multimillion dollar elevator; there are opportunities to build ADA compliant ramps, as well as at-grade access points that will open up accessibility.

And this responsibility is not simply confined to the MTA. Our streets and TLC-licensed vehicles can and must be more accommodating to those in need. Additional curb cuts on our sidewalks, more Accessible Pedestrian Signals at key intersections and expanded use of Lead Pedestrian Intervals at dangerous crossings can all have a tremendous impact on safety and accessibility. Seniors, themselves often members of the disabled community, are one of the demographics most in danger of being injured or killed on our streets and these steps are ways to account for their safety.

For taxis and FHV's we must be more proactive as well. The city is right to require 50% of its yellow and green taxi fleets to be accessible by 2020 but the disparity across sectors is burdensome, hurting the ability for taxis to compete for drivers. Moving toward a more accessible fleet across all sectors should be addressed, as too many complaints from members of the disabled community reach my office about the poor service provided to them by the FHV sector. Leaving this community stranded is no longer an option.

Funding for these projects is crucial. Last year, working with my colleagues, Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and Mayor Bill de Blasio, we allocated \$12.6 billion dollars to the DOT to implement capital projects over the next ten years, much of it aimed at making our streets safer. Next year, I will fight even harder to see that this crucial agency gets the funding it needs to more aggressively meet these goals. But this money cannot just come from our city's tax payers. Washington has a part to play in keeping our nation's premier city moving. I urge our congress to pass President Obama's Grow America Act and to stop the tired practice of passing short term transportation funding bills that handcuff our ability to get projects moving. I have faith in Senator Schumer and Representative Nadler's ability to put New York at the top of the list for this vital funding.

Albany also has a role to play and I hope to garner support there for the Move New York plan. This plan is the key to unlocking the transit funding capable of modernizing and expanding our subway and bus systems that remain the envy of urban centers across the globe.

Ladies and Gentlemen, now is the time to push the envelope. We must think big and we must be proactive. We must strengthen our existing infrastructure and put into place the progressive practices that will maintain New York's status as a truly global city and model for urban policy around the world. We can continue to be revolutionary with our goals, our thinking and our ability to get things done.

Achieving these goals will not be easy. We will be tasked with tough decisions and tough work. But I ask each of you to join me in helping to flesh out these plans, develop strategies to make positive change and transform our city's transportation networks into ones capable of taking us into the future.

I want this to be an inclusive project. For those of you from the academic world, I ask that you help us in areas of research and data analysis that we might be more innovative in our approach.

For those of you from our city and regional agencies, I ask that you fold these ideas and goals into your plans and always strive to be more ambitious in your work. For those of you who advocate tirelessly on behalf of all New Yorkers, I ask that you join me in seeing these goals through, strategizing on how best to achieve them at each level of government. Your voices are valuable and keep us striving ever-forward toward improvement. And for those of you in industry, labor and the private sector, your support is invaluable. We will need your voices, your experience and your commitment in helping to make our city as safe and efficient as possible.

Thank you and let's get to work.