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The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan
Transportation Committee
Wednesday March 6, 2024 6:30 PM
Conducted Remotely on Zoom

Please note: The resolution contained in the committee minutes are recommendations submitted by the committee co-chairs to the Community Board. At the monthly full board meeting, the resolution is discussed and voted upon by all members of Community Board 8 Manhattan.

Resolutions for Approval:

Item 1: Queensboro Bridge South Outer Roadway Conversion to a Pedestrian Pathway (Unanimous Approval)

Item 2: Revocable Consent Request – 38 East 75th Street (Disapproval)

Minutes

Present: Lori Bores, Alida Camp, Juno Chowla-Song, Anthony Cohn, Sahar Husein, Paul Krikler, Craig Lader, John McClement, Rita Popper, Abraham Salcedo, Judy Schneider, Cos Spagnoletti, Charles Warren, Stephanie Reckler (public member)

Absent: Michele Birnbaum, Billy Freeland, Rebecca Lamorte, John Philips, Valerie Mason

Approximate Number Public Attendees: 25

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 PM.

Item 1: Presentation by the NYC Department of Transportation on the Queensboro Bridge South Outer Roadway Conversion- (6:33PM)

Members of the NYCDOT Public Realm Team presented the plans to convert the South Outer Roadway of the Queensboro Bridge from a vehicular roadway to a pedestrian pathway. Community Board 8 had previously passed a resolution in January 2020 requesting that this concept be studied.

Karissa Lidstrand, Planning Team Lead for the Public Realm Team of NYCDOT, conducted the presentation. The project was first announced in 2021, and awaits completion of the repairs to the Upper Roadway bridge decks before it can be implemented. The project will add a pedestrian pathway that is accessible, safe and convenient, and also maintains and enhances the existing bike network while maintaining local access for drivers that are accessing buildings along impacted roadways.

The current pedestrian access across the bridge is on the North Outer Roadway via a shared bike/pedestrian pathway that is extremely dangerous, especially for pedestrians as bikes hit high speeds on the downward portions of the bridge. Currently, nearly 2,800 pedestrians cross the bridge daily, and NYCDOT believes that this number would be significantly higher if conditions were safer and they weren't competing for space with over 7,000 daily bikes.

The current South Outer Roadway averages just over 8,000 daily vehicles, which is fewer than the combined bike/pedestrian activity on the North Outer Roadway. The lane configurations of the approaches to the eastbound lanes of the Bridge will be reevaluated after the project is implemented and revised volumes are determined.

The proposed conversion will feature a new pedestrian access point to the South Outer Roadway midblock on 59th Street. A painted sidewalk will be installed on the north side of 59th Street east of the access point, and a study is being conducted to determine whether a midblock crosswalk could be installed by this access point. Two gates will be installed to prevent general vehicles from entering the new pedestrian pathway, while allowing NYCDOT and emergency vehicles the ability to gain access. A painted sidewalk will also be installed on the north side of 59th Street between Second Avenue and the access point. NYCDOT will use various measures and signage protocols from its toolbox to ensure pedestrian safety, including installation of painted pedestrian space to meet Pedestrian Mobility Plan guidelines and to shorten the crossing distance at First Avenue, and installation of a new crosswalk and concrete triangle for traffic calming at Second Avenue. The existing bike network providing access to/from the North Outer Roadway will remain unchanged.

The project had to account for improving access to Honey Locust Park, the need to maintain access for NYCDOT vehicles to their facilities located under the bridge, and continuing access for vehicles to enter and exit 2 parking garages located on the south side of 59th Street. Thus, 59th Street east of the access point to the South Outer Roadway will continue to be bi-directional, but only to maintain access to the parking garage on the south side of the street. Between the garage and the access point, the westbound travel lane will be for authorized vehicles only, along with bikes. West of the access point, the bike lane will be enhanced and the travel lane will continue to be eastbound only.

Parking regulations will generally be minimally impacted, following an East 59 Street Merchant Survey that identified that most businesses are okay with the current curb regulations and do not have issues receiving or making deliveries. The plan will shift parking to the east side of East 59 Street and add truck loading on First Avenue. The plan also extends parking on the east curb of Second Avenue, which adds 1 parking spot.

Along 1st Avenue, the bike lane will be expanded as it approaches 59th Street, as the left turn bay will be eliminated since the closure of the South Outer Roadway to vehicles will greatly reduce the number of vehicles making this turn.

The opening of the South Outer Roadway to pedestrians is expected to occur in late Summer 2024. Before this occurs, NYCDOT will need to build the pedestrian ramps, install signal infrastructure, install the South Outer Roadway protective fence, and install the pedestrian gates at the access points. Similar work will need to be performed on the Queens side of the Bridge to provide access and connectivity in a safe manner. Following the opening of the pedestrian pathway, there will be further work that will need to be performed, but the pathway will remain open.

There was strong support for the proposal, as there was wide agreement that the current pedestrian situation on the Bridge is gravely unsafe and that this project is very much needed to be completed as quickly as possible. There was a comment asking NYCDOT to install more permanent barriers rather than temporary materials such as plastic bollards. There was also a suggestion to ensure the midblock crossing being study results in a solution that is fully accessible and includes some type of traffic control with audible signals. One member noted that the area near the fencing for one of the NYCDOT storage facilities is covered with graffiti which needs to be addressed, and noted that there was funding provided at some point in the past by NYCDEP, in association with the water tunnel project, for fencing and planting in that area.

The following resolution was then put forward by Community Board 8:

WHEREAS; NYCDOT is proposing the conversion of the South Outer Roadway of the Queensboro Bridge to a pedestrian pathway; and

WHEREAS; Community Board 8 passed a resolution in January 2020 asking NYCDOT to conduct a study to determine the feasibility of converting the South Outer Roadway to a dedicated pedestrian pathway to allow bikes and pedestrians to be separated; and

WHEREAS; the current pedestrian route across the Queensboro Bridge is via a shared bike/pedestrian pathway on the North Outer Roadway that is extremely dangerous for pedestrians due to the high speeds of bikes as they descend towards the exits; and

WHEREAS; the 8,000 average daily vehicles using the South Outer Roadway is less than the combined bike and pedestrian traffic on the Bridge; and

WHEREAS; the impacts on congestion resulting from the closure of the South Outer Roadway to vehicles are expected to be minimal; and

WHEREAS; NYCDOT is proposing a series of changes to 59th Street to ensure safe pedestrian access to the South Outer Roadway while maintaining required vehicular access to existing parking garages and NYCDOT maintenance facilities; and

WHEREAS; NYCDOT is conducting further study to determine the feasibility of a midblock crosswalk on 59th Street adjacent to the proposed entrance to the South Outer Roadway pedestrian pathway; and

WHEREAS; ensuring that all access points are fully accessible and safe for all users is essential;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Community Board 8 Manhattan supports the plan, as presented by NYCDOT, to convert the South Outer Roadway of the Queensboro Bridge from a vehicular use to a dedicated pedestrian pathway;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Community Board 8 Manhattan requests that NYCDOT include a midblock crosswalk on 59th Street that is fully accessible and has traffic control in place.

Yes (11+1): Bores, Chowla-Song, Husein, Krikler, Lader, McClement, Popper, Salcedo, Schneider, Spagnoletti, Warren, Reckler (Public Member)

No (0): None

Abstain (0): None

Item 2: PUBLIC HEARING: Revocable Consent Application to construct, maintain and use a fenced-in areaway with steps at 38 East 75th Street (7:10PM)

Braden Novotny and Cate Pharris of the Architectural firm RAMSA presented a revocable consent application at 38 East 75th Street to construct, maintain and use a fenced-in areaway with steps. The project is part of a townhouse renovation in which there is currently a lowered stoop with 4 steps leading to the entrance, and an adjacent stairway leading to the cellar. There is a 3-foot-high metal wrought iron fence in front of this area, and a wrought iron box encasing the waste and recycle bins. The properties on either side of the property have 3-feet and 7-feet high wrought iron fences.

The proposal calls for expanding the areaway by 4 feet to bring it in alignment with property to the east (40 East 75th St.), which would be 4'7" from the building line. The entrance would be recentered and would include a step in alignment with the front door. The lowered entranceway would be maintained, but the stairs to the cellar would be removed. The proposal includes 2 planters containing evergreens; on the streetside there would be a wrought iron fence and limestone pilasters with wrought iron fence gates. All the fencing would then be in alignment with the fencing on adjacent properties. This would result in a minimum of 6 feet of sidewalk clearance in front of the property, which is similar to the clearance elsewhere along the block. The wrought iron fence height would be increased from the current 3 feet to 4 feet, which was a change from their original 5-foot request that the CB8 Landmarks Committee felt was too high.

There were concerns raised by members about the limited sidewalk width that that would result from this project, as 6 feet was not perceived as being sufficient. It was also expressed by some members that this

would not be an appropriate use of public right of way. There was also concern about how the gates would open into the property.

A motion to approve the application for the revocable consent request for 38 East 75th Street was made and seconded. The vote was 6 yes, 8 no, and thus failed. The vote was as follows:

Yes (6): Bores, Lader, Popper, Schneider Spagnoletti, Warren

No (7+1): Camp, Cohn, Chowla-Song, Husein, Krikler, McClement, Salcedo, Reckler (Public Member)

The following resolution was then put forward by Community Board 8:

WHEREAS; 38 East 75th Street is seeking a revocable consent to construct, maintain and use a fenced-in areaway;

WHEREAS; the proposed areaway would be in conjunction with a recentering of the front entranceway of the property; and

WHEREAS; the proposed fence would extend 4'7"; beyond the property line, bringing it in line with the adjacent properties; and

WHEREAS; the proposed effective sidewalk width will be 6'; and

WHEREAS; 6' of clearance was perceived as insufficient for pedestrians, especially those who are pushing strollers or using wheelchairs; and

WHEREAS; limiting public right of way on this block was not going to provide a benefit to the general public;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Community Board 8 Manhattan disapproves the revocable consent application to construct, maintain and use a fenced-in areaway with steps at 38 East 75th Street.

Yes (7+1): Camp, Cohn, Chowla-Song, Husein, Krikler, McClement, Salcedo, Reckler (Public Member)

No (6): Bores, Lader, Popper, Schneider Spagnoletti, Warren

Abstain (0): None

Item 3: NYCDOT Updates (7:35PM)

Colleen Chattergoon, NYCDOT Senior Borough Planner and Liaison to Community Board 8, provided an update on the request to restore street cleaning regulations to Lexington Avenue. She stated that there was a call between NYCDOT and DSNY, and it was decided to install street cleaning regulations on the west side of the street from 7AM to 8:30AM on Monday and Thursday as a 3-month pilot. If successful, similar regulations will be introduced on the east side of the street. She explained that it needs to be done initially as a pilot because NYCDOT needs to reconfigure meters and install new signs, and it will take a few weeks to be done. NYCDOT will then review impacts to the travel lanes and the bus lane. Concerns were raised that this approach will still result in a lack of street cleaning on the east side of Lexington Avenue for the foreseeable future.

Ms. Chattergoon also mentioned that NYCDOT is holding a car free day on Earth Day – April 20th, in which certain streets will be closed to vehicles.

Item 4: Old and New Business

A public attendee asked NYCDOT about the numerous recent crashes involving pedestrians in the district. Ms. Chattergoon said she would check with the traffic department and that NYCDOT would need to analyze the incidents to determine causes and potential engineering improvements to address. NYCDOT has been prioritizing streetscape improvements to improve pedestrian safety.

A public attendee noted that there was an Amazon truck that was frequently performing warehousing activities on the southeast corner of 96th Street and Madison Avenue. Ms. Chattergoon said that NYCDOT is working with Amazon to address such situations, but it remains largely an enforcement issue.

In connection with Dining Out NYC, a member inquired about the new Dining Out NYC rules, and when any illegal structures under the new rules would need to be removed. Ms. Chattergoon indicated restaurants have until August 3rd to apply into the new program, and that any structure that is non-confirming must be removed by November. A member also asked whether there will be an online portal tracking program participants that the public can access; Ms. Chattergoon said that there will be a portal that will be available to Community Boards, but she didn't know if it would be available to the public.

A member asked about opportunities to expand the NYCDOT Summer Streets program, which currently only occurs 3 Saturdays in August and only between 7AM and 1PM. Ms. Chattergoon indicated she would bring that proposal to the Borough Commissioner.

A public attendee asked about the recently published NYCDOT rules regarding cargo bikes, and questioned why the program was implemented in the face of widespread opposition at a public hearing.

A co-chair noted that NYCDOT had provided an assessment of the impacts of the Lexington Avenue Bus Lane to CB8 in writing, and asked if they could present the findings at an upcoming meeting as had been previously promised by NYCDOT. Ms. Chattergoon said that NYCDOT no longer was planning on providing this presentation to CB8, and that the written report should suffice.

A co-chair asked if NYCDOT was going to present the Dining Out NYC rules to CB8 in a public setting, as was previously promised. Ms. Chattergoon indicated that the recent outreach conducted to community boards was the full extent of the outreach they were now planning.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:06 PM.

Respectfully submitted, Charles Warren & Craig Lader, Co-Chairs