May 26, 2023

The Honorable Eric Adams
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor Adams:

We are writing to respectfully request a meeting with you directly regarding the NYC Department of Transportation’s (DOT) Fordham Road – Inwood Bus Priority Proposal, which would create a busway on Fordham Road, and/or relocate the current curbside bus lane to the offset travel lane. The signatories below are all part of a thriving economic, social, and health ecosystem comprised of The Belmont Business Improvement District, The Fordham Road Business Improvement District, The Bronx Zoo, New York Botanical Garden, Fordham University, SBH Health System, and Monroe College, with varying significant concerns about and opposition to DOT’s proposal that we would like to discuss with you.

We have had countless conversations with our local elected officials, who have indicated that they have spoken with you, and we have written and spoken numerous times to your Administration at the city agency up to the deputy mayor levels, with no indication that our concerns are influencing DOT’s plans. Instead of DOT simply enforcing and improving the existing bus lane, we fear that DOT will advance this proposal and we will face unintended consequences.

DOT’s proposal presents economical, safety, health, and environmental concerns for our organizations, and it does not take many of the community’s unique components into consideration, like that millions of private passenger vehicles access our vibrant communities and reputable institutions by Fordham Road and Pelham Parkway annually. DOT has not committed to commissioning an EIS for the neighborhood before proceeding, even though a project of this magnitude and impact cries out for it.

DOT’s plan for moving the existing bus lane over to a current travel lane (resulting in one travel lane) will significantly impact crucial traffic flow on these main arteries and cause more traffic than already exists. Implanting a busway eastbound (or in both directions) from Morris to Webster, would not only impact access, ingress and egress, but would disproportionately burden side streets, both residential and commercial (that already have bike lanes, outdoor dining structures, and Play Streets), which were not designed to handle a substantial number of vehicles. We are concerned about the health of residents as there will surely be an increase in carbon emissions and smog as cars idle in traffic, and cars forced to turn on local community streets will further impact pedestrian safety and affect the quality of life. Another important factor that cannot be ignored is how EMS, FDNY, and NYPD response times to Belmont, Fordham, and Bedford Park would be impacted.
Bus speeds should be faster; however, it cannot be accomplished at the expense of the community at large. As Bronx Borough President Gibson recently advised DOT, it is her mission ‘to improve the local economy, and it cannot be done if businesses are negatively affected by even well-intentioned changes.’

A majority of the ecosystem at stake is a regional destination, contributing significant revenue and a vibrant tax-paying workforce (a sizable portion are local residents) to the city and state, something the city claims to be focused on as we collectively recover from the pandemic. A pedestrian survey in Bronx Little Italy was recently conducted through an independent consulting firm, and it found that an astonishing 50% of those surveyed would definitely cut back on their visits with the implementation of a busway. Thus far, the limited data DOT has presented has not included the impact of their proposal. We are concerned that DOT will advance this proposal without considering our data and on the ground experience.

Lastly, and very importantly, bus speeds were once satisfactory in the decade-old existing bus lane but have been reduced due to the bus lane being blocked by parked cars, for-hire vehicles, deliveries, and unlicensed vending setups. Since November, DOT has tried to keep the existing bus lane clear through on-board camera enforcement, though its effectiveness is unclear, and as we understand it, the City is not utilizing booting, towing, and traffic agents. As Council Member Feliz recently told DOT, ‘buses on Fordham Road travel at unacceptable speeds because bus lanes are filled with parked cars due to non-enforcement of the rules.’

Due to the urgency of the ramifications we face if this proposal is implemented, we invite you to meet with us in the neighborhood for lunch or dinner at your earliest convenience to further discuss our point of view. We respectfully look to you, our Mayor, for your help, support, and intervention on this critical issue. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Peter Madonia
Chairman
Belmont Business Improvement District

David Rose
Chairman
Fordham Road Business Improvement District

John Calvelli
Executive Vice President, Public Affairs
Wildlife Conservation Society, The Bronx Zoo
Jennifer Bernstein
Chief Executive Officer
New York Botanical Garden

Tania Tetlow
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Fordham University

Dr. David Perlstein
President/Chief Executive Officer
SBH Health System

Marc M. Jerome
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CC:
Meera Joshi, NYC Deputy Mayor for Operations
Maria Torres-Springer, NYC Deputy Mayor for Economic and Workforce Development
Philip Banks, NYC Deputy Mayor for Public Safety
Maxwell Young, Director of Communications
Congressman Ritchie Torres
Ydanis Rodriguez, Commissioner of NYC Department of Transportation
Kevin Kim, Commissioner of NYC Small Business Services
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