



Going Borough Wide!

Posted by [Glenn](#) on February 15, 2006 - 12:31am in [The Oil Drum: Local](#)

Topic: [Environment/Sustainability](#)

Tags: [bicycling](#), [borough president](#), [manhattan](#), [peak oil](#), [scott stringer](#) [[list all tags](#)]

Yesterday I [presented the case for biking](#) to my local Community Board. Today, I was able to secure a spot on [Borough President Scott Stringer's](#) Borough Board Spending Priorities for fiscal 2007 agenda to discuss Transportation issues. Some of the community board leadership from other areas of Manhattan were present as well as folks from various non-profits seeking funding from the City. I think my speech took them by surprise since I didn't represent an organization seeking funding. He told me that they are fully examining all their transportation options and that biking is definitely something they are interested in pursuing. His website certainly sounds that way

I had the honor of being the last speaker to address the BP himself before he turned things over to his deputy. Full text of my speech below.

My speech today:

Borough Board Speech

February 14th, 2006

I. Introduction

Good Afternoon. Thank you for putting this on your agenda. You have renewed my faith in responsive and open local democracy. I live on the Upper East Side (Yorkville)

I have a simple desire. I would like to bike safely for my daily commute to work and for other short trips under 5 miles.

II. Personal Reasons for Wanting to Bike

I want to bike because it would be the fastest, least expensive, most reliable and healthiest way to get to work. Let me explain each of these:

Speed: My 2-mile commute would be an easy ten-minute ride on bike, compared to 25 minutes door to door on the 4/5 train or 35 minutes on the M15. Or my usual 45 minute walk.

Health: If I biked to work, I would burn about 100 calories each way.

Cost: I would save \$2 each way to work as well as money that I currently spend on taxis. Over the course of a year, I have calculated that I could save over \$1000 on transit related expenses from reduced need for trains, buses and taxis. Biking around town could also eliminate my need for a gym membership that costs about \$75 a month - a yearly savings of \$900.

Reliability: If I biked to work, I could start my trip to and from work whenever I am

ready, instead of waiting for the next train, bus or taxi. The transit strike was another recent reminder that New York's great mass transportation system is complex and can fail for many different reasons - terrorism, power outage, labor problems, etc. There are also daily subway outages and major changes every week for emergency repairs or water main breaks or planned capital improvements. And even on a good day, there is severe overcrowding on most Eastside transportation options.

However right now biking in this borough is simply unsafe during the morning commute. With five lanes of active traffic on Second Avenue and no protected bike lane, I have no doubt that I would be risking life and limb attempting to ride those two miles of treacherous terrain.

III. Community Benefits

I'm not just here because of my own narrow self-interest. There are benefits to the entire community of enabling more people to bike around Manhattan.

Here is how the broader community would benefit from more biking.

Transportation Flexibility: In the event of a major disruption, like 9/11, the blackout, transit strike or a water main break, there is no reason that Manhattan residents should not be able to move around town. Bike owners have the greatest independence from these system failures and a city that bikes will have less economic disruption. During the transit strike the people who showed up at work arrived on two feet or two wheels, not four wheels.

Less Dependence on Fossil Fuels: President Bush and Governor Pataki - two men that I often disagree with have both stated that we are addicted to oil and need to find alternatives. Oil and gas prices are steadily rising, and show no sign of going down. Scientists and economists have predicted that oil will not be a stable resource in the near future.

Forget about ethanol - the energy return on energy invested is low. Forget about plug in hybrids - Con Edison can barely keep up with our air conditioners. By providing a network of safe workable bike lanes, the city will put into place a system that will allow New Yorkers to both save money and conserve this diminishing resource

Less Pollution: Unlike all motorized forms of transportation, biking does not pollute the local or global environment with the toxic gases that cause health problems like asthma or lung cancer or contribute to global warming.

Less Car-Traffic Congestion and Noise: A network of bike lanes could tame the mini-highways that run through our dense urban environments that we call "one way Avenues". Perhaps we can further discourage drivers from driving into Manhattan in the first place. And less car traffic would lead to less honking!

Use of Public Space: A bike takes up much less street space to park than an automobile. In fact you could fit at least 12 bikes in the same space as one medium sized sedan.

Less Crowded Mass Transit: If only a small percentage of physically fit Manhattanites started biking to work instead of relying on mass transit, that would free up room for those who truly need mass transit like the elderly, disabled or those traveling long distances. (Not to say the elderly can't bike - indeed my grandmother biked until she was in her late seventies.

Healthy Population: We have an obesity problem in this country in all age groups. This is causing epidemic rates of diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. I watch in amazement at

school children taking a bus 10 blocks to school or young people in their 20s and 30s in this neighborhood who have a 2-3 mile commute to midtown and yet they feel they need to join a gym to ride on a stationary bike or run on a treadmill to get exercise.

You could gain all of this and it really wouldn't cost much to do. You wouldn't have to lobby the Federal or State government for hundreds of millions of dollars or take out an enormous mortgage that the next generation would have to pay. It's a simple matter of local political courage to stand up against the small minority of drivers in this city and stand up for the majority of us who don't own cars.

IV. Enabling Biking in Manhattan

So what can we do to enable and encourage more biking in the community?

Two words: Safety & Convenience.

In 1990 the Department of Transportation did a survey of New York City Residents. Roughly 50% of people that commute less than 10 miles to work would ride their bikes to work if they had safe bike lanes, safe indoor bike parking and a place to change clothes.

1. **Buffered Bike Lanes:** We need network of North/South and East/West buffered bike lanes in Manhattan. We need to connect residential areas to commercial areas. We need to connect bridges to bike lanes and parks. We need to connect the whole city to all the great places where people want to go. Specifically in my neighborhood, we need to connect the Queensboro Bridge to Central Park despite being so close because riders are forced over to First Avenue and then left to dodge traffic heading west in the low 60s. Making that connection easier and safer should be a priority.

Buffered bike lanes would no doubt require reclaiming a lane of traffic from automobiles on these Avenues. But I believe that this could kill two birds with one stone - Create a safe place for bikers on the road and calm the volume of car traffic on these highways that run through the heart of our neighborhoods.

2. **Bike Parking:** I live in a walk-up and it is a major inconvenience to haul my bike up and down two flights of stairs every time I want to use it. And my employer does not offer any indoor bike parking.

City Councilmember David Yassky has introduced legislation that would require commercial building owners to allow tenants to bring their bikes inside. This would go a long way towards encouraging cycling, as this is a major impediment to bicycle commuting cited by potential bike commuters is the lack of safe and secure bike storage.

Specifically I ask you to study the feasibility of installing more high quality sheltered bike racks in key locations:

§ all current and future subway stations - especially major connection points like Penn Station and Grand Central

§ park entrances

§ schools

§ shopping areas

§ hospitals

§ major employers

A market driven solution would be to create a bike parking market in Manhattan. Almost all parking garages in the area refuse to store bikes. Here's the math: 12 bikes times \$35/mo = \$420/month. That's roughly the same as a car space generates for a parking garage.

3. Bike Lane Encroachment / Illegal Biking Enforcement: For the bike lanes that we do have, there are too many double-parked trucks, cars, cab drop-offs, etc that force cyclists into dangerous car traffic. To keep bike riders safe, enforcement of these current lanes and future lanes should be vigorous.

At the same time, we need to also make cycling safe for the rest of the population. We need a real education and enforcement campaign with local take out places to prevent illegal cycling and hold them accountable when their cyclists break the law.

I would also ask that the city and police please re-examine its policy of harassment of the Critical Mass ride every month.

4. Car Traffic Reduction: We need a transportation policy in this borough that prioritizes people over cars. The goal should be to get the most people and goods through a defined space as efficiently as possible, not single occupant vehicles.

§ We need car and truck congestion pricing.

§ We need cars and trucks to pay for the road and bridge damage they cause.

§ We need better enforcement of moving violations, not just parking ones.

§ We need more mass transit service on weekends and late evenings.

§ We need Bus Rapid Transit, Light Rail and trolleys.

§ We need wider sidewalks

§ We need a sensible way for trucks to deliver goods without double parking.

§ We need less free on-street parking for cars (especially for public officials)

§ And we need to encourage more biking in this city.

V. Conclusion

We are blessed with a dense and relatively flat city perfect for all types of person-powered transportation and we should make these safe and accessible to as many people as possible.

In particular, I call on all of you to follow the lead of other cities like Chicago, Copenhagen, London, and Amsterdam where people are prioritized over cars.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this important subject.

From the Borough President's website:

PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLIST SAFETY AND BIKE PARKING

If we are to encourage alternative modes of transport, we have to make the city's streets increasingly safer and more pleasant for walkers and cyclists. Traffic calming techniques, which include various ways of creating the perception that the road is more like a residential street and less like a highway, cause drivers to slow down and be more aware of their surroundings. Red-light running is rampant and on the increase in the city, and, as is said in London safety campaigns, "Kill your speed, not a child." The watchwords for safety are engineering, education and enforcement, and I will work to be constantly vigilant for opportunities to put these principles in practice in order to increase the numbers of walkers and cyclists who choose these modes for travel, not just recreation. And the main reason people do not commute by bike is that they have no safe place to park their bike when they get to their destination. We have to address this issue and make walking and cycling safe and pleasant in order to maximize these modes of transport.

As Borough President, I will work to:

Join with bike-safety advocates to make cycling on the city streets, especially for children, safer and more enjoyable.

Advocate for a completed circumferential greenway in Manhattan.

Work with the Mayor and DOT to follow up on recommendations for enhanced pedestrian and bicycle access to Randall's Island.

Work with the City Council to enact legislation allowing bicycles to be brought into commercial buildings by bike commuters.

Work with the Mayor and City Council to clarify the availability and security of on-street bike parking.

Sounds like we are pretty close on this. It's just going to take some prodding to get the Community Boards to act on this in unison. I plan to be there to make it happen in my area.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 United States License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/).