

## **Testimony of Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum for City Council Hearing on Transportation for Fiscal Year 2008**

Thank you, Chair Liu, for holding this important hearing.

163 pedestrians were killed by cars on city streets last year. That's 4 percent more than the previous year and the first increase in pedestrian fatalities since 1999. In 2005, more than ten thousand pedestrians were injured by automobiles. A string of tragic accidents with cyclists throughout 2006 was highlighted last December when a 22-year-old New York City Teaching Fellow was killed by a drunk driver on the West Side Highway bike path. By the end of the year, fourteen cyclists died in accidents with automobiles. The statistics speak for themselves. We can no longer spend money on a transportation infrastructure that puts car traffic ahead of human safety.

In order to reduce the number of pedestrian and cyclist fatalities, the city must expand funding for streetscape improvements that calm traffic and make our sidewalks and bike paths safe and welcoming. The Department of Transportation has demonstrated that these improvements can and should be undertaken with its successful redesign of Queens Boulevard. However, the city's efforts cannot end there. According to Transportation Alternatives, a leading advocate for pedestrians and cyclists in New York City, fifty percent of all pedestrian injuries and fatalities happen at ten percent of city intersections. We know where the problem areas are. The city needs to focus more resources on fixing them.

This effort will involve a culture shift in the DOT toward planning for streets that not only serve automobiles but also make way for buses, bikes, and people. Resources must be targeted to create universal design standards for what urban planners are now calling a "complete street." It may take some up-front costs to change the status quo, but the benefits will last for years to come. Safer streets can become more vibrant streets, allowing for economic development in areas that have long been unwelcoming to pedestrian shoppers. We can't let another year go by with pedestrian injuries in the tens of thousands. The city must invest in bringing those numbers down in 2008.

The budget process represents a critical opportunity to strengthen services for all city residents. I look forward to working with the Council to ensure that this year's budget reflects the need to improve street safety.

Thank you.