

June 7, 2004

Mark F. Muriello
Assistant Director, Tunnels, Bridges & Terminals
The Port Authority of New York & New Jersey
One Madison Avenue, 5th floor
New York, NY 10010

Re: Port Authority Assessment of Lincoln Tunnel Traffic

Dear Mr. Muriello,

Manhattan Community Board No. 4 thanks the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey for presenting to our Transportation Planning Committee the results of its recent efforts to increase the efficiency of cars and buses entering the Lincoln Tunnel and improve traffic flow on midtown Manhattan streets during the evening peak period. The changes under discussion include routing Tenth Avenue traffic through the Lincoln Tunnel Expressway, and routing Ninth Avenue traffic through the Expressway at Ramp C at 37th Street, forbidding entrance via 41st Street or 39th Street.

The committee and the public in attendance were generally impressed with the reported increases in efficiency between the time the changes were first implemented, on November 6, 2003, and the time the effects were measured, in February and April 2004. According to your report, those changes include:

- Travel time for autos entering the tunnel from Tenth Avenue reduced by more than 60%;
- Through-traffic travel time on Tenth Avenue reduced by 75%;
- Travel time for autos entering the tunnel from Ninth Avenue reduced by 12%;
- Through-traffic travel time on Ninth Avenue reduced by 65%;
- Travel time for buses exiting the Port Authority Bus Terminal reduced by 50 %;
- Throughput for the tunnel 9.4% more efficient, with 528 more cars exiting Manhattan through the Lincoln Tunnel in the hour between 5:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.

However, members of the committee and the public, including many community residents, expressed skepticism about some of the data and questioned some of the rationale behind the overall project. Community concern centered on these issues:

Pedestrian safety

The changes all seem to be designed to improve traffic flow through the tunnel, or throughput, without consideration to pedestrian safety. Residents of the neighborhood and the Board urge the PANYNJ to review the recent changes from the perspective of pedestrian safety rather than tunnel throughput and report back with its findings. The PANYNJ has devoted significant resources to increasing throughput; the Board requests that it devote at least as many resources to determining how routing changes, new signage, striping, and signal changes may increase pedestrian safety. The Board reiterates its strong objection to the recently installed pedestrian barriers at Ramp C, which make automotive flow into the tunnel a greater priority than pedestrian safety, and create hazardous conditions on the street.

Need for increased enforcement

Residents all testified that a lack of traffic enforcement on the street was allowing gridlock conditions to continue, especially on Ninth Avenue. The Board urges the PANYNJ to work with NYPD's traffic enforcement division to increase the number of enforcement officers at all key intersections surrounding Lincoln Tunnel entrances to prevent gridlock, which endangers pedestrians and creates congestion.

Reliability of measurements showing improvements in through-traffic flow on Ninth Avenue

The first-hand experience of most residents in attendance is that traffic back-ups on Ninth Avenue and crosswalk-obstruction by automobiles is as bad as, or worse than, ever. Local residents and the Board would like to see a more detailed assessment of data relating to Ninth Avenue traffic flow. In addition, residents questioned the rationale of the PANYNJ's plan, which seems to make reductions in Tenth Avenue traffic flow a higher priority than reductions in Ninth Avenue traffic flow. In the view of residents, improving conditions on Ninth Avenue is a greater priority than improving them on Tenth Avenue because of Ninth Avenue's heavier pedestrian traffic.

Examine the possibility of utilizing Eleventh Avenue to divert traffic from Ninth Avenue

Members of the community, reiterating the badly congested conditions on Ninth Avenue, asked that you evaluate the suitability of Eleventh Avenue as an alternate route to the tunnel, diverting traffic from Ninth Avenue.

Examine affect on 41st Street businesses

Auto traffic can no longer reach businesses on 41st Street during peak hours. Members of the community asked that you assess how the PANYNJ's recent changes have affected these businesses.

Examine affect at entry points at 30th and 31st Streets

Auto traffic reaches the Lincoln Tunnel Expressway from Ninth Avenue via entry points at 30th and 31st Streets. Study findings concerning these entry points were not included in your presentation. The completion of development projects, including a new dormitory for the Fashion Institute of Technology on 31st Street just west of Ninth Avenue, will increase the number of residents and pedestrians in this area. Members of the community asked you how the study examined this area and how PANYNJ's recent changes have affected the use of these entry points.

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In summary, the Board is impressed with the efforts the PANYNJ has made to improve traffic flow in the Lincoln Tunnel area, but urges the Authority to reprioritize its efforts and place much more emphasis on pedestrian safety and the quality of life in our public areas. The streets, sidewalks, intersections, and crosswalks in the Lincoln Tunnel area are integral to our community. Their condition affects our quality of life in major and myriad ways. They are not just a place to push cars through quickly. We urge you to treat them with the same thoughtfulness and resourcefulness you've devoted to increasing auto flow through the tunnel.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your response to these concerns and requests.

Sincerely,



Walter Mankoff
Chair
Manhattan Community Board No. 4



Joshua David
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning Committee



John Rust
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning Committee

cc: NYC DOT
NYPD traffic enforcement
F.I.T
Local Businesses and Residents