

Statement at April 4, 2016 NY City Council Committee on Transportation
Hearing on Carfree Day

The Institute for Rational Urban Mobility, Inc. (IRUM) is a NYC-based non-profit concerned with reducing motor vehicular use and improving the livability of dense urban places.

IRUM commends the Council for holding this hearing and fully supports the designation of April 22, 2016 as **carfree day** for NYC. By urging motorists to leave their cars at home and use other modes of travel that cause less harm to the environment, the Council sends a strong message that reducing motor vehicle use in our crowded city is critical to our long term survival and well-being. Paramount is the need to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases generated by carbon-burning cars and trucks. But unfettered use of freewheeling motor vehicles also produces other significant negative impacts that should be recognized. It is these 4,000 pound particulates that dominate the city's 6,000 miles of streets. Even if all these vehicles were propelled by electricity, generated by solar and wind power, an unlikely scenario any time soon, they would still greatly diminish the livability of the nation's densest concentration of residents and businesses.

The Council and the Mayor have recognized this and have taken action to limit the top speed for cars and trucks to 25mph for most streets in the city and have begun important first steps to advance a "vision zero" plan to eliminate all traffic fatalities in the future.

IRUM urges the Council to adopt an even more ambitious agenda, establishing a four-year goal of reducing vehicle-miles of travel by 20% in the core and 5% citywide.

An example of such a plan, which outlines a set "carrot and stick" strategies for better transit and reduced car use, is described on IRUM's website.

The NYCDOT continues to reject advancing strategies that might adversely reduce "levels of service", the traffic engineers' jargon for measuring the quality of traffic flow on roads and streets. Even with this favored status for cars and trucks, the NYCDOT been able to reclaim many *leftover* scraps of street space and allocate them for pedestrian plazas, bike lanes and planters. But NYCDOT must go much further and allocate street space among all street users in a more equitable manner.

In the past, IRUM's long standing call to remake 42nd Street into an auto-free light rail boulevard has fallen on deaf ears. Hopefully, NYCDOT's view will change, and it will advance a plan that more equitably allocates street space to pedestrians in one of the most crowded streets in the nation, even if some motorists are inconvenienced. It must be recalled that during Earth Week in 1990, 1991 and 1992, the Dinkins Administration closed the busiest section of 42nd Street to traffic on a weekday. The NYCDOT carefully monitored this effort, which was successful. (see attached news clips) As part of its Earth Day efforts, the Council should call on the NYCDOT to repeat this demonstration, and working with NYCDOT prepare a **comprehensive street use plan** for the Manhattan Central Business District that equitably allocates street space, the city's most valuable real estate asset, and develop a VMT reduction plan for the entire city.

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April 20, 1990

Topics of The Times; Fabulous 42d

Yesterday at 9:59 A.M. a New Yorker emerged from the subway at Fifth Avenue and 42d Street to the usual tumult and shouting. Exactly one hour later she returned to the same corner and headed west. This time, she heard her high heels tapping the pavement, in itself a surprise. She could even hear herself think. What her head was saying was, "This is wonderful."

For six hours the street was closed to all vehicles but buses (which were free) and bicycles, in celebration of Earth Day. And while the effect on the midtown environment was minimal, the effect on the psychic environment was startling. Ah, the peace of it!

The buses belched as ever, but no horns yapped and no brakes screeched. With no need to shout above the traffic, pedestrians spoke softly. There may even have been a lowering of the profanity level. And the voice of the singing robot performing on the south side of 42d Street was easily heard on the north side. (His partner, a smaller robot, passed the cup.) And the views! The main entrance to the New York Public Library is deservedly famous, but the north facade is pretty splendid, too. Who has ever seen it whole? One has to be on the other side of the street to do that, and the view is always blocked by cars. But not yesterday.

For that matter, everything on 42d Street was looking good for those six hours, even the grungiest shops. On a clear day, on an almost-clear street, it seemed you could see forever.

Carefree and car-free on 42d St. . . .



DAVID HANDSCHUH DAILY NEWS

. . . they got along with hardly a backfire



RICHARD CORNERY DAILY NEWS

FORTY-SECOND Street! Believe it! As usual, you can hardly find a cab but this time it's because they're banned, for the time being. No cars or trucks, either. You might find a bike or two (page opposite). The grand old thoroughfare was closed to all traffic except buses — which were free — for the day as the city marked Transportation Day of Earth Week. "This is pretty cool," said Robert Parker, a bicycle messenger. "As long as I stay on this side of town." And "Why does it take a whole year to do something that's obviously very successful?" said George Haikalis, chairman of Auto-Free New York. "We shouldn't have to wait for Earth Week."

Join thousands of New Yorkers
to celebrate
Earth Day



Wednesday April 22, 1992
Bryant Park and 42nd Street
11:30 am — 2:30 pm

*Environmental Exposition
and Cultural Festival*
in Bryant Park 11:30 am to 2:30 pm

*Environmental organizations,
info, products & services* *Multicultural programming
Music • Dance • Speakers*

WNEW-FM Stage
Live entertainment in Grand Central area
12:30 pm to 1:30 pm

Free bus transportation on 42nd Street
6am — 9pm

Traffic restricted, 42nd Street from Lexington to 6th Avenue
Buses only 10 am — 4pm

Outdoor Transit Museum
on 42nd Street

*Lexington Ave. to 6th Ave.
featuring antique buses,
alternate fuel vehicles and
other transportation exhibits*

Con Ed
Conservation Center
Lexington and 42nd St.

9 am — 5 pm

(This leaflet and a visit to
The Conservation Center entitles you
to a free water test kit)

For more information call: (212) 255-1219

Volunteers needed: Call Kristen or Frank at (212) 789-1183
Please recycle this flyer • pass it in your office • give it to a friend