

**Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez**

**Keynote Address at UTRC, Region 2 Symposium on Building Sustainable Transportation  
Systems for NYC's Future**

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Good morning and thank you. Let's give a round of applause to Dean Anid and the NYIT campus for hosting us this morning!

I also want to thank Matt Daus who helped to put this great event together, bringing in a truly impressive group of transportation experts in our city. This is a testament to his strong body of work over his career, coupled with a real interest and desire in seeing innovative ideas come to the fore to help move New Yorkers in better ways.

I also want to thank the University Transportation Research Center, who continue to bring policy makers and academics together to the benefit of the region. And to Cubic Transportation Systems, our sponsors today, and also a leading part of Car Free Day, working to measure the results and collect important data about how New Yorkers are moving about. We will hear from them shortly about last year's efforts and what we have planned this year.

As many of you may know, we started Car Free Day in New York City with a simple idea: There are so many ways to travel around our city that take up less space, produce fewer emissions and, most importantly for New Yorkers, get you there faster. Let's find a way to celebrate them. This idea has grown, and with the support of the Department of Transportation, on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, we'll be opening up streets to people citywide, including 30 blocks of Broadway from Union Square to Times Square.

Thankfully, in 2017, it takes less to convince New Yorkers to get around without cars than it once did. We've made strides on our bike infrastructure, with over 1000 miles of bike lanes and more of them becoming protected lanes every year; we've seen historic highs in subway ridership over the past few years; and our younger residents are less inclined to purchase a vehicle in our city.

And yet, we don't need the recent headlines to see how clogged our streets are with cars. We feel it, we see it and its impacts are severe. A 2006 report from the Partnership for NYC found that

traffic congestion in Manhattan's central business district alone cost the city \$13 billion in economic activity annually and caused us to lose a potential 52,000 jobs. Beyond the immediate economic cost, bumper to bumper traffic adds to our carbon output, increasing our contribution to climate change.

To free up space on our streets, I suggest several steps our city can and should take to ease congestion and ultimately rely less on vehicles.

- To start, we must rethink the way packages and goods are delivered. Trucks are a major contributor to congestion, loading and unloading often in the middle of the street. With the increase in online retail sales, the Amazon effect, more trucks are delivering to homes as well. We can dramatically reduce the number of trucks on our streets during the busiest hours if we require them to deliver goods to businesses at night, between the hours of 7pm and 7am.
- For personal deliveries, especially local ones, there is no reason why trucks and vans should be doing this work. Companies like UPS have already begun to tackle this challenge through delivery cyclists. Even for heavier items, with electric-powered delivery tricycles, deliveries are much nimbler and much more energy and cost efficient. New York City must open the door to this methodology and it is why I am announcing my support to legalize e-bikes at the State level and end the crack down on e-bikes here in New York City.
- For major deliveries, we should never see trucks coming into our densest areas. Coupled with the model above, we can look to develop delivery centers outside of New York City, where truck traffic can be directed, and from there, have delivery cycles traverse the city. I am glad that Dr. Alison Conway from CCNY is here with us on a panel today, as her research focuses on these concepts and we have seen them become more popular in forward-thinking cities.
- As for garbage pickup, this also should be managed during night time hours, keeping trucks off streets when they are busiest. I am working on legislation in the Council to examine the potential impacts of this strategy, but it makes sense that pickups during the day contribute to our congestion.

These are short term changes that will not require major investments in infrastructure. They are logistical changes that can seriously benefit our city and allow New Yorkers to breathe a little easier.

When it comes to reducing the number of car-commuters, we face different challenges. From the low price of parking, to the free bridges into Manhattan, to the preference to travel by car over train or bus, there is much we can and must change. We cannot allow the future of New York City transportation to be car-centric. It must be sustainable and it must be through active and mass transportation if we are to remain a successful global city.

But we have to be honest about reality:

- Our bus service is terrible. We've lost 2 million annual riders over the past 10 years because buses are unreliable and can even be slower than walking sometimes.
- Our subway system is overcrowded and disruptions in service are growing more frequent. Riders are frustrated, rightfully so, when they cannot plan a trip in a reasonable amount of time, without delays or major service changes impacting their ride.
- Cycling is on the rise and shows so much promise. But to continue growing this modal-shift, we have to double down on protected lane expansion. Folks looking to test out commuting by bike need to feel as safe as they would on a train or bus if they're going to make the switch permanent.
- It also means getting serious about expanding Citi Bike. When major portions of our city are cut off from this inexpensive option, especially those that need it most, we're not doing all we can to truly encouraging cycling.

On the flipside, app companies have proliferated, offering inexpensive rides. Consumers are making their choices clear when it comes to travel: they would rather tap a button and get a ride than deal with unreliable public transit, even if it's less expensive.

The challenge before us now is to dramatically improve and incentivize public transit. It means doing so in a cost-effective way, leveraging private partnerships and making simple but transformative changes. It means working in partnership across agencies. It means being ambitious and creative over tinkering at the status quo.

To start, we need a serious reset on bus service system-wide. We can no longer condemn the remaining riders to the purgatory of poor service. We can—and must—develop real Bus Rapid Transit in New York City.

We need to set a serious goal of having every route use all-door-boarding, off-board fare payment, transit signal priority and dedicated and camera-enforced bus lanes.

Then we must go further, thinking about set aside lanes, at-grade boarding and fully dedicated transit corridors on routes far from subways. Buses should not *compete* with cars on our streets, they should come first. They move more people, using less space, with fewer emissions. It is simply science.

At the end of this process, we can have what effectively amounts to an above-ground subway network. It is not a crazy notion as cities across the world are already miles ahead here.

For our subways, we can also take cues from cities that have really started to figure it out.

While they maintain a private system, Hong Kong's subways are the envy of the world. The business community in their city recognizes this and works closely to ensure trains are efficient and that if the system faces delays or breakdowns, they are quickly fixed. The private sector contributes directly to the success of the subway system. There is a direct revenue sharing model, where the subway system receives earnings from major commercial hubs like malls or office buildings in exchange for providing quality transportation to employees and consumers in these areas.

While we have a dramatically different system, built up over 100 years both physically and bureaucratically, we do have an ability to leverage the New York City economy and its thriving private businesses to make our subway system more streamlined and cost effective.

To start, I encourage the MTA to look into public-private partnerships to create an “adopt-a-station” model, allowing businesses to advertise exclusively in a handful of stations. They could be required to have stations both in the central business district and beyond to ensure equity, while covering the maintenance costs. This could remove this cost from the MTA and allow them to put it into service improvements, easing pressures to raise fares.

But there are more ways to engage the private sector on this important need. We need to look at new value capture models that, even if not relying 100% on them for new construction, can lower the cost of projects for transit improvements. After all, the MTA is a \$1 trillion asset; it should be maintained like one.

- This means serious investment in capital improvements that go well beyond the 5-year programs.
- It means dedicated revenue streams like the one Move New York put forward. And while I know this plan faced tough political winds, I believe there is still a way to move forward, even if it means allowing city residents to be exempt from new bridge tolls to get it off the ground and get the funding the system needs to remain in good repair.
- Getting serious about improving the system means real oversight on spending so that projects stop setting records for the most expensive subway projects in the world.

Improving our subway system and all our mass transit systems is the only way to become less car reliant.

Fundamentally, we must make the experience of not driving a car cheaper, faster, safer and more enjoyable than the alternative. I am eager to hear our panelists ideas for this as well and I know that we can make progress as a city.

This is a modest start, just like the idea of Car Free Day. I am aiming to begin this conversation because the cost of inaction is too high.

We have an excellent set of panels for you all this morning and I hope you enjoy and learn something new today. Finally, I invite you all to join me on Earth Day, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, to leave your cars at home and enjoy great open streets with all the potential they hold.

Thank you.