

A REPORT BY THE OFFICE OF THE
BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT



Is it Safe to Walk to School?

A report on traffic safety for Bronx children.

Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrión, Jr.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, prepared by the Office of the Bronx Borough President, was drafted in response to a concern about the lack of pedestrian safety in the Bronx and, in particular, its disproportionate effects on children.

This report follows a number of previous efforts by the Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrión, Jr. to address traffic safety for children in the borough. In 1998, while member of the New York City Council representing the Bronx, the Borough President introduced legislation require speed bumps and control devices on streets bordering certain schools in order to reduce vehicular speed to 15 miles per hour.

In 2002, following an incident in which reckless driver swerved to avoid school children and wound up slamming his car into the side of the library, the Borough President demanded more long-term, traffic-calming measures in University Heights. As a result, he was successfully in getting DOT to bring long traffic- calming measures to what was cited as one of the most dangerous intersections- 181st St. and University Avenue.

This report examines recent specific incidents involving child pedestrian fatalities and accidents in the Bronx; the statistical trends in pedestrian fatalities in the Bronx; the role of the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) in child pedestrian safety; and finally, provides recommendations for improving child pedestrian safety.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **DOT should hold regular public meetings in the Bronx about traffic safety programs for children.**
- **DOT should implement traffic calming measures- such as improved street signs, re-stripped crosswalks, and speed humps- near all Bronx schools.**
- **In the Mayor's Management Report, DOT should include the number of car- related injuries or deaths of children for each borough as a performance measure.**
- **DOT should work with the City Department of Education to make Traffic Safety Assemblies and visits to Safety City a requirement for all Bronx students.**
- **DOT and the City Council should support the re- introduction of my legislation, Int. 261, from 1998, which required speed bumps and traffic calming measures on streets bordering certain schools in order to reduce car speed to 15 miles per hour.**

INTRODUCTION

This past June, more than 70 Bronx parents and kids marched, carrying a coffin that symbolized the mourning of children who have been injured or killed in car accidents and a petition signed by 25,000 supporters, to Mayor Michael Bloomberg's campaign office on W. 40th Street in Manhattan.

The parents, part of an organization called Community Collaborative to Improve Bronx Schools, urged Mayor Bloomberg to push the DOT to reduce the speed limit in the vicinity of Bronx schools to 15 mph by installing speed bumps and other traffic calming measures.¹

According recent statistics, these parents have very valid concerns about the high level of pedestrian injuries in the Bronx. The Bronx has led the City for the last decade with the highest percentage of children injured annually by cars.²

Although motor vehicle related accidents and injuries in the Bronx have declined in recent years, Bronx children still are at much higher risk of becoming involved, as pedestrians, in motor vehicle related accidents. Child pedestrian injuries in the Bronx remain serious problem because of dangerously fast traffic in many locations where children frequent, along a general public resistance to slowing down the traffic.

In the dense and crowded borough of the Bronx, most children walk to their nearby schools. According to the DOT, 9 out of 10 Bronx children walk to school.³ Stated differently, more than 85 percent,⁴ or an estimated 287,000 of the 337,000 children in the Bronx aged 5-14 walk to school⁵

A majority of children in New York City under 14 struck by motor vehicles were injured near their schools before or after school hours.⁶ It is apparent that that traffic engineering and traffic calming changes to streets and sidewalks around Bronx schools can do much to improve safety both during and after school hours. In addition to focusing various DOT programs to address traffic safety in the Bronx, this report begins by analyzing the problem of child pedestrian injuries and fatalities in the Bronx.

FINDINGS ABOUT BRONX CHILDREN AND PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

Numerous Bronx Children Have Been Killed, Injured or Threatened with Injury in Recent Years in Pedestrian Accidents

- Just a few days ago, a 12- year-old girl was struck and killed by car driven by an off- duty police officer on the Grand Concourse in the University Heights section of the Bronx.⁷
- This past June 2005, a 5-year-old boy was struck and seriously injured by a school bus near Bronx Park.⁸

1 Armstrong, Jago R. ,“Taking It To The Streets,” Daily News, June 30, 2005

2 Transportation Alternatives, Analysis of data from 2002 2004 of pedestrian injuries in New York City.

3 New York City Department of Transportation,Walk to School, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/safety/walktoschool.html>

4 “Safe Routes to School.” http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/bike/Safe-Routes-2004/pages/section-4_newyork.htm.

5 Transportation Alternatives, pedestrian injuries , 2002 2004, Ibid.

6 Kaehny, John, Testimony for New York City Council Transportation & Education Committees Joint Hearing on Traffic Safety around Schools, Transportation Alternatives

7 Fahim, Kareem, “ Officer’s Car Strikes Girl from Bronx, Killing Her,” New York Times, Sunday, September 25, 2005

8 Samuels, Tanyanika and Melago, Carrie, “Boy, 5, Mowed Down By School Bus In BX.,” Daily News, June 8, 2005

- Last year in March 2004, a 9-year-old boy run down and killed in front of his school by a dump truck that was illegally using the street as a shortcut in the Edenwald section of the Bronx.⁹
- In October 2004, two boys, 6 and 9 years- olds, were struck by a driver on their way to school in the Wakefield section Bronx, leaving both with shattered legs, cuts and bruises.¹⁰
- In January of 2002, a reckless driver in the University Heights section of the Bronx swerved to avoid school children and wound up slamming his car into the side of the library.¹¹
- In the summer 1998, a 6-year-old girl was struck and killed by a tractor-trailer truck at an intersection in the Hunts Point section of the Bronx.¹²

The Bronx Currently Leads the City with the Highest Percentage of Children Injured Annually by Cars and Has Lead the City for the Past Last Decade.

- There are approximately 1.6 million children under 14 in the whole city and 337, 000 children under 14 in the Bronx. Our borough accounts for 20% of all children under 14 years old.
- Between 2002- 2004, more than 34% of pedestrian injuries in the Bronx were children under 14 years-old. In comparison, only 17.5% of pedestrian injuries in Manhattan were children under 14 years-old. The Bronx had double the number of child injuries as Manhattan.
- From 2002- 2004, there were more than 2, 100 pedestrian injuries for Bronx children under 14 years-old. In addition, there were 600 injuries alone for children under 4.
- From 1995- 2004, the Bronx led the five boroughs with the highest percentage of children hit by a car.¹³

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Safe Routes to School programs

According to Section 2903, the Department of Transportation (DOT) Commissioner is responsible for controlling pedestrian and vehicular traffic within New York City. This includes the safety of school children traveling to and from schools in the City. On February 25, 2004, the DOT announced the traffic safety initiative “Safe Routes to Schools.” Through the RBA consulting group, 135 priority schools were identified in an inspection of 1,400 public and private schools citywide. To pinpoint specific traffic hazards, the RBA groups will be doing further research on these priority

⁹ Donohue, Pete and Lemire, Jonathan, “Killed Boy’s Mom Blames Trucker,” Daily News, March 13, 2004

¹⁰ Transportation Alternatives, “School crossing mishap shows need for change,” Am New York, October 18, 2004

¹¹ Kappstatter, Bob, “Traffic Trouble Zone,” Daily News, January 15, 2002,

¹² Kappstatter, Bob, “Moms On The Line Vs. Big Rig Traffic,” Daily News, July 29, 2002

¹³ Transportation Alternatives, pedestrian injuries 2002- 2004 , Ibid.

schools by speaking with parents and crossing guards at these schools. Of these, 32 will be chosen for long-term capital improvements. Implementation of reforms was scheduled to begin at the end of 2004. This program is funded by the State with \$1.947 million.¹⁴

The DOT's Safe Routes to Schools traces its roots back to 1997, when the Partnership for a Walkable America brought the international Walk to School Day to Chicago.¹⁵ Taking it a step further, that same year Transportation Alternatives (TA), a nonprofit public interest organization, and the Office of the Bronx Borough President (lead at the time by Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer) created the 'Bronx Safe Routes to School Program' to work with parents, principals, teachers, community leaders and city agencies to create pedestrian improvements around 38 elementary schools¹⁶ with a 10-step process.¹⁷

This program was modeled after a 25-year-old government-sponsored Safe Routes to School program in Odense, Denmark that emphasized parent and community involvement in the planning and implementation of cost-effective traffic calming measures around schools.¹⁸ TA received \$84,000 a year from the Governor's Traffic Safety Committee, which drew on federal funds. Bronx Safe Routes to School succeeded in advocating for the DOT to improve signage, re-strip crosswalks, and install numerous speed humps in neighborhoods around elementary schools.¹⁹

In 2000, Safe Routes to School became a national trend, attracting the attention of the House of Representatives' Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, leading to the creation of Safe Routes to School programs in Chicago, Illinois and Marin County, California.²⁰

In 2001, Transportation Alternatives discontinued their program so that efforts would not be duplicated with the creation of the current citywide Safe Routes to School program.²¹ The program is a state-funded partnership of the New York City Department of Transportation with the New York City Department of Education.²² The DOT initiated the program in 2001 by seeking a consultant to manage the program; the RBA consulting group was hired in 2002.²³ They developed a formula that assigned different weights to various types of car accidents to calculate the acuteness of pedestrian safety problems in a 700-foot radius around each school.²⁴ In 2004, the DOT publicly announced the launch of Safe Routes to School and established a basic plan involving three steps:

1. Survey and map conditions and crashes around all New York City schools.

14 Moskowitz, Eva et al. Briefing Paper of the Human Services and Governmental Affairs and Infrastructure Divisions. "Oversight: An Examination of Traffic Safety Around Schools." March 1, 2004

15 <http://www.tsc.berkeley.edu/html/newsletter/Spring04/saferoutes.html>

16 http://www.bikewalk.org/safe_routes_to_school/SR2S_introduction.htm

17 "Safe Routes to School." <http://www.transalt.org/campaigns/school/>

18 http://www.bikewalk.org/safe_routes_to_school/SR2S_case_studies.htm

19 http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/bike/Safe-Routes-2004/pages/section-4_newyork.htm

20 Transportation Alternatives. <http://www.transalt.org/press/magazine/042Spring/10timeline.html>

21 Transportation Alternatives. <http://www.transalt.org/campaigns/reclaiming/saferoutes.html>.

22 New York City Department of Transportation. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/safety/walktoschool.html>.

23 Transportation Alternatives. <http://www.transalt.org/press/magazine/042Spring/10timeline.html>

24 Levy, Julia. "City moves to improve street conditions around schools." The New York Sun October 28, 2004.

2. Identify 135 schools with the worst pedestrian safety problems.
3. Pick 32 priority schools for traffic calming street engineering in 2004 and 2005.

The following is the language of the original language of the initial plan for the program:

- All 1359 NYC schools, public and private will be involved in the project. The project will study traffic conditions around each of the schools.
- 135 (10% of NYC schools) will be targeted for "priority treatment" based on crash numbers and rates, making sure that priority treatment schools are evenly distributed around the city, and among school types. Dangerous locations at these schools will be identified.
- 32 schools will be "capital improvement" schools. Traffic calming engineering improvements will be built on the streets around these schools.
- The project will work with schools, parents and community, as well as other agencies.
- The DOT's School Safety Engineering will use this project to create a "toolbox" of measures the City can use to improve safety at all schools.²⁵

Projections by the City predicted spending a total of \$50 million on pedestrian improvements around city schools over the next two decades and called for plans for pedestrian improvements and traffic calming measures to be installed around the 135 most dangerous schools by January 2005.

In 2004, the RBA group identified 135 public and private schools; 25 in the Bronx, 46 in Brooklyn, 23 in Manhattan, 33 in Queens, and eight in Staten Island (see figures below). After mapping these areas, they met with principals, parents, local police precincts, crossing guards, and community boards to discuss possible solutions.²⁶ The Mayor's Management Report 2005 reports that RBA is currently preparing detailed recommendations for each of the identified schools that will describe specific hazards and recommend various traffic safety improvements. It also states that, as according to the original plan drafted in 2001, 32 of these schools will be targeted for capital improvement (such as widened sidewalks, raised center medians, redesigned streets).²⁷

Walk to School Program

New York City's Walk to School project is a NYC Department of Transportation-sponsored program that aims to improve safety conditions for pedestrians and address traffic congestion and pollution. This Walk-to-School program is federally funded at \$281,250.²⁸

25 Transportation Alternatives. <http://www.transalt.org/press/magazine/014Fall/15saferoutes.html>

26 Levy, Julia, Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 New York City Department of Transportation, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/safety/walktoschool.html>

As a part of the Walk to School program, one school from the five boroughs will host pilot programs designed to encourage children to walk to school by providing families with safe routes, safety tips and community participation to ensure a secure and pleasant walking experience. The programs, presented within the school curriculum motivate children to participate through fun activities, focusing on their local environment. Lessons include teaching students how their transportation choices affect their community, the environment, and their health.²⁹

The 'Walk to School' project compliments the 'Safe Routes to Schools' program, through infrastructure improvements such as such as sidewalk widening, installation of raised center medians and changes to street design and traffic near schools with the worst accident problems. Currently, 135 different schools (elected based on accident data) are participating in this program.³⁰

Safety City/ Safe Sidewalks Programs

As part of year-round outreach program throughout the City, there are six DOT sponsored Safety City facilities located throughout the 5 boroughs, provide children with hands-on experience and practical lessons on how to make safe choices when walking to and from school, riding a car, or driving a bicycle. Representatives from the DOT present traffic and pedestrian safety information at schools and senior centers throughout the city. The Safe City program serves over 200,000 children and has been credited with contributing to the 90-year low in pedestrian and vehicular-related fatalities.³¹ Much like the Walk to School Program the Safe Sidewalks program enhances the Safe City program through the installation of over 1 million square feet of sidewalks around the City.

CONCLUSION

Many Bronx children and parents live in fear of speeding cars. The borough has led the City for the last decade with the highest percentage of children injured annually by car.³² Additionally, for the last two years, Bronx neighborhood leaders have ranked dangerous intersections as a top quality-of-life issue for the borough.³³

The DOT's newly launched Safe Routes to School and Walk to School Programs have the potential to address and alleviate this deadly problem. Thorough and serious traffic calming measures are the only antidote for the serious problem of child pedestrian accidents. Speed is the single most determinate factor of traffic safety in the Bronx and by reducing speed the streets in the Bronx will be safer, especially for young children. It is a critical priority to make the street safer for one of the most vulnerable groups of road users-children.

29 New York City Department of Transportation, Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 New York City Department of Transportation, http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/about/pr2004/pr04_121.html

32 Transportation Alternatives, pedestrian injuries 2002- 2004, Ibid.

33 Quality of Life Studies Issued in 2004 and 2005 by Citizens for NYC and Baruch College's eTownPanel

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report outlines several of the recommendations from the Office of the Bronx Borough President to improve traffic safety for children in the Bronx:

- **DOT should hold regular public meetings in the Bronx about traffic safety programs for children.**
- **DOT should implement traffic calming measures- such as improved street signs, re-stripped crosswalks, and speed humps- near all Bronx schools.**
- **In the Mayor's Management Report, DOT should include the number of car- related injuries or deaths of children for each borough as a performance measure.**
- **DOT should work with the City Department of Education to make Traffic Safety Assemblies and visits to Safety City a requirement for all Bronx students.**
- **DOT and the City Council should support the re- introduction of my legislation, Int. 261, from 1998, which required speed bumps and traffic calming measures on streets bordering certain schools in order to reduce car speed to 15 miles per hour.**