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Brooklyn Greenway Initiative
c/o NewLab
19 Morris Avenue, Bldg 128
Brooklyn, NY 11205
718.522.0193

BrooklynGreenway.org
[@BKGreenway](https://twitter.com/BKGreenway)

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Deputy Mayor Meera Joshi
The City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Re: Improving management and upgrades as the city expands its Greenway system

Dear Deputy Mayor Joshi,

Thank you for addressing the inaugural NYC Greenway Summit last spring. We appreciate the Adams Administration's commitment of new funding to greenway upgrades and new projects, for pursuing federal funding for a future set of new greenway corridors, for supporting legislation requiring a regularly updated city greenway plan, and for working apace on projects like the East Midtown Greenway.

We write to raise the following policy issues as a follow up to this past year's progress on greenways. We anticipate that these problems, if not addressed, will become greater in scale as the city expands its greenway network:

1. Surface maintenance of NYC Parks greenways

We were encouraged by remarks by administration leaders at the summit that maintenance of existing greenways would be as strong a priority as building new segments. Nonetheless, in our experience of greenways across NYC, it seems that there are structural problems with NYC Parks that inhibit effective maintenance of the city's existing greenways.

Two critical challenges are the lack of a routine repair capability within NYC Parks, and the funding streams for repair and reconstruction that prioritize or deprioritize maintenance on certain segments of the greenway system based on Council district.

We understand that major reconstruction work can entail specific contracts and procurement, but Parks also appears to lack basic in-house or a where/when-type contract to do basic patching or resurfacing of hard surfaces to keep routine maintenance needs from turning into major reconstruction needs in the first place.

Greenways blend the characteristics of neighborhood-level open spaces with borough- and city-wide active transportation networks. Surface maintenance repairs are funded like the former at the expense of the latter, and surface quality varies on different greenways - and sometimes the same greenway - depending on the interests of the officials of the districts they exist in.

The “current” project to rebuild the surface on the Ocean Parkway Greenway demonstrates both of these points:

- Most of the five-mile greenway is in below-average to poor condition, but repairs have been funded in only one section of one of the four Council districts in which it lies;
- Initiation of the project has taken so long that the Councilmember that funded it has been term-limited out of office; and
- Since routine repairs are not being performed, the deterioration is noticeably worse with each passing year.

On rides just this past year, we’ve seen stretches of asphalt paths in deteriorating condition on:

- Pelham Parkway (the worst of this list)
- Belt Parkway east of Pennsylvania Avenue
- Flatbush Avenue south of Avenue V
- Several segments of eastern Queens greenways between Kissena Corridor Park and the Vanderbilt Motor Parkway

2. Greenery for NYC DOT-built greenways

DOT does not appear to have a strong capacity to maintain plantings along the greenways it builds, such as by the Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway along the Brooklyn Navy Yard and Brooklyn Army Terminal. This means that the civic sector has to find and win the ongoing cooperation of “maintenance partners” to create actual greenways as opposed to simple asphalt bike paths. This model is not very sustainable now and will likely see increasing challenges as the greenway network expands.

3. Debris removal and winter maintenance on NYC Parks and NYC DOT greenways

There are inconsistent results for basic sweeping and snow/ice removal on greenways. Again, this challenge is faced by greenway users citywide, though we’ll highlight the greenway along Shore Parkway as an example of all three:

- Trash discarded by vehicles on the Parkway and other sources accumulates along the greenway
- Tire-piercing shells deposited by birds accumulate on the asphalt surface for months at a time
- Days typically pass in normal winters before any snow plow passes through after a weather event, and even in a winter with as little snow as this one, the late December cold-snap and frozen spray from ocean waves rendered the Bath Beach section impassable for days

Suggestion for addressing surface and greenery upkeep challenges

Currently, day-to-day upkeep is a reflection of the mandate of the agency that manages any given section of the greenway system. However, as we previously noted, greenways blend characteristics of neighborhood spaces and transportation networks.

We leave it to the administration to decide whether these agency capability and capacity issues can be resolved within changes to NYC Parks and DOT budgeting/contracting, by providing some level of DOT hardscape maintenance capacity to Parks each year, and conversely, Parks maintenance work on green elements along DOT projects, or whether some other approach is needed.

We are essentially suggesting assignment of agency roles to greenways on less of a territorial basis and more according to function:

- DOT for asphalt and concrete surfaces (DOT already operates major park roadways)
- Parks for greenery/plant stewardship (Parks today tends “Greenstreets” green spaces and street trees within DOT rights of way)
- Sanitation for snow removal/de-icing and basic sweeping

4. Operating hours for greenways

As we noted above, greenways blend characteristics of neighborhood spaces with a transportation system. Users of the transportation aspect tend to expect uniform rules across the city - the roads are open 24 hours a day, as are NYC DOT-managed greenways. However, some NYC Parks-managed greenways are not open 24/7 - some close as early as 6:30pm. We recommend all-hours access to greenways and park drives, even if access to the surrounding park closes at 1am or earlier.

5. Ongoing upgrade of legacy greenways

We couldn't be more excited about and supportive of the federal RAISE grant and the prospect of developing detailed plans for new greenway segments and rights-of-way. At the same time, we urge the city going forward to also develop additional efforts along the lines of the 2021-2022 *Destination: Greenways* effort, which planned major upgrades for specific legacy greenway segments in eastern Queens and southwest Brooklyn. As above, this is needed across the older greenway system, not only to repair surfaces but also in many places where rights-of-way are inadequate for shared bike and pedestrian use, greenways feature awkward or dangerous highway crossings and linkages between existing greenways or to protected bike lanes are missing or tenuous.

6. Advance coordination for greenway construction/upgrade closures

We are very appreciative of greenway maintenance and upgrade work, but urge a much stronger coordination effort for maintaining safe cycling and recreational running/walking capacity when major efforts require greenway closure. Continuity of service — safe cycling and walking paths — during construction will ensure these needed maintenance interruptions do not undermine NYC goals for biking as a viable transportation method as well as maintaining access for New Yorkers less able to cycle in streets with cars. The recent

closure of the West Side greenway north of the George Washington Bridge and the prospect of a future extended closure of Riverside Park's Cherry Walk remain major concerns for our coalition. We are also concerned about pending work on Shore Parkway and the absence of any process for identifying alternate routes to date. Greenway closures are increasing in frequency. Portions of the East Side esplanade in the 70s and 100s are shut today, and of course East River Park has been removed from the greenway network at present. In the latter case, the replacement bike lanes on Avenue C stretch the definition of "protected" significantly.

Thank you for your attention to these issues. We're encouraged that DOT, NYC Parks and EDC are collaborating on the RAISE grant plans and will jointly produce the new city greenway plan. Addressing the issues and potential reforms we identify in this letter should be a natural development as the city takes steps toward an integrated greenway network. We look forward to working with you to realize the potential of a citywide greenway system.

Sincerely,

Hunter Armstrong
Executive Director
Brooklyn Greenway Initiative

Jean Kim
Executive Director
Friends of the East River Esplanade

Jon Orcutt
Advocacy Director
Bike New York

Cliff Stanton
Chair
Friends of the Hudson River Greenway in
The Bronx

John Tomac
Co-Founder
Bike South Brooklyn

Chauncy Young
Coordinator
Harlem River Working Group

Robert Fanuzzi
President
Bronx Council for Environmental Quality

Stanley O'Connor
Administrator
Hudson River Greenway Facebook Group

Edmundo Martinez
Chair
Bronx River Greenway Team

Kevin Daloia
Administrator
Hutchinson River Greenway Group

Sharon Pope-Marshall
Executive Director
CIVITAS

Daniel Abram
Project Manager: Research & Policy
New Yorkers for Parks

Allison Burson
National Greenway Director
East Coast Greenway Alliance

Carl Mahaney
Director of StreetopiaUWS
Open Plans

John Kelly
Co-founder
Eastern Queens Greenway

Paul Steely White
Executive Director
Parks & Trails New York

Tim Gilman-Sevcik
Executive Director
RETI Center

Pamela Cress
President
Shorewalkers

Eric McClure
Executive Director
StreetsPAC

Elizabeth Adams
Senior Director for Advocacy & Organizing
Transportation Alternatives

Carter Strickland
VP Mid-Atlantic and New York Director
Trust for Public Land