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THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD SIX  
211 EAST 43RD STREET, SUITE 1404  
NEW YORK, NY 10017

Mayor Bill de Blasio  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

Manhattan Community Board Six is eager to voice its enthusiasm for pedestrianizing Broadway between Union Square and Central Park. We gratefully acknowledge the leadership shown by Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and City Council Members Corey Johnson, Carlina Rivera, Keith Powers, and Margaret Chin, and stand in support of Manhattan Community Board Five, whose district encompasses all of that section of Broadway.

With the COVID-19 pandemic ravaging our citizens and their normal routines and with the requirement for social distancing to diminish viral transmission, we clearly need to envision how best to use the city's limited free outdoor space to extend New Yorkers' options for a safe and meaningful quality of life.

Since vehicular traffic has dramatically shrunk during the pandemic, our best and easiest option is to repurpose portions of our streetscape. With safety as our primary concern, we agree that Broadway is an outstanding choice for pedestrianization. Broadway is already reconfigured as a limited-traffic zone between Times Square and Union Square. The infrastructure for pedestrians, cyclists, and other non-vehicular mobility options has been well tested by heavy use. The District BIDs along the Broadway corridor ably perform security and maintenance functions for their areas. Pedestrianization is thus a relatively simple matter of extending and sealing the pedestrianized zone by deploying additional barricades.

Since the BIDs in the area support this initiative, there is no need to station NYPD personnel there. They can simply patrol and respond to calls as they already do. The extended sections should be viewed as analogous to the many play streets around our city, which do not require dedicated NYPD presence. So the costs to the city in this time of budget crunches would be minimal.

The potential benefits are enormous. Broadway runs through this part of Manhattan like a spinal column and offers a unique chance to alleviate the pressure on our limited public spaces.

In Manhattan, complying with the mandates about social distancing can be difficult. We have already seen too many instances of parks overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of users. With playgrounds, pools, and beaches closed, the upcoming summer will bring even more New Yorkers outdoors to parks, plazas, and whatever open space is available in order to recreate and relax.

Already, pedestrians are finding the sidewalks too narrow or crowded for comfort and step into the street. Joggers share sidewalks with pedestrians and use bike lanes, which are fuller than ever with cyclists, e-scooters, and other micromobility options. This growing pressure on our street spaces will continue, partly because few New Yorkers will be willing to use mass transit until their justifiable fears about COVID-19 transmission are assuaged.

It's also important to note that a revamped Broadway could be a lifeline to some decimated small businesses. Ever mindful of social distancing, existing outdoor cafes and pedestrian plazas would help lure customers back to local shops.

Finally, many other cities have reacted vigorously to the pandemic's challenge by pedestrianizing streets; Oakland has revamped seventy-four miles—about 10% of its streets. New York has far more people and greater density, and as a COVID-19 epicenter has far more people at risk. We must start now to repurpose our streetscapes to benefit the majority of our constituents who do not use cars. This section of Broadway is the ideal place to begin.

Sincerely,



Molly Hollister  
Chair, Manhattan Community Board Six

CC: Polly Trottenberg, Commissioner, NYC Department of Transportation (NYC DOT)  
Edward F. Pincar, Jr., Manhattan Borough Commissioner, NYC DOT  
Hon. Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President  
Hon. Margaret Chin, Council Member  
Hon. Carlina Rivera, Council Member  
Hon. Corey Johnson, Council Member  
Hon. Keith Powers, Council Member  
Vikki Barbero, Chair, Manhattan Community Board Five