

The Coalition for a Livable West Side  
Pedestrian Safety:  
Analysis and Recommendations for  
West 70<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor  
West End Avenue  
to  
Riverside Boulevard

September 14, 2011

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## **Introduction**

Starting in April 2011, the Coalition for a Livable West Side has published three reports proposing pedestrian safety measures on West 70<sup>th</sup> Street between West End Avenue and Amsterdam Avenue, near P.S. 199 and along Riverside Boulevard. These reports provide analysis of the traffic-calming plans proposed for these streets by the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT), current research on the efficacy of the proposed changes for pedestrian safety, and recommendations to further improve the livability of these streets.

After numerous site visits between April and September 2011, it is clear that while Riverside Boulevard is almost 1000 feet from P.S. 199, traffic conditions on Riverside Boulevard negatively influence the safety of pedestrians traveling to and from P.S. 199.

In turn, the new curbside regulations for livery cars and enforcement of these regulations on Riverside Boulevard has unfortunately turned the north side of West 70<sup>th</sup> Street between Freedom Place and Riverside Boulevard into the new desirable place for double-parked livery cars.

This report has two parts. First, it presents an analysis of the existing street conditions and traffic operations of West 70<sup>th</sup> Street from West End Avenue to Riverside Boulevard as a basis for formulating recommendations that would improve safety for pedestrians along this corridor.

Second, it offers an analysis of how traffic is operating on Riverside Boulevard and adjacent streets now that the NYCDOT's traffic calming strategies along this street have been in effect for several months (except for the last piece of the NYCDOT plan: to connect Riverside Boulevard to Riverside Drive at West 72<sup>nd</sup> Street).

## **Project History**

On February 3rd, 2011, the Transportation Committee of Community Board 7 (CB7) issued a letter to the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) asking for pedestrian safety measures to be implemented for West 70<sup>th</sup> Street and West End Avenue per request of P.S. 199 (270 W. 70<sup>th</sup> St.).

Two reports from the Coalition's consultant analyzed CB7's pedestrian safety measures and NYCDOT's response. The first report, published in April 2011, provided research and recommendations associated with the safety measures described in the CB7 letter.

The second report published on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011 was a response to the May 16, 2011 letter from the NYCDOT to CB7. In that letter, the NYCDOT detailed the pedestrian safety measures planned for P.S. 199 and listed which measures still required further study and needed sources of funding.

At the CB7 Transportation Committee meeting on May 10, 2011, committee members and the public voiced interest in traffic-calming measures to reduce speeding along West 70<sup>th</sup> Street from West End Avenue to Riverside Boulevard.

During the same meeting on May 10, 2011, NYCDOT's Manhattan Borough Commissioner, Margaret Forgione, presented a traffic calming plan for Riverside Boulevard, from West 62<sup>nd</sup> Street to West 72<sup>nd</sup> Street.

Then, on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the Coalition's consultant published a report describing this traffic-calming plan for Riverside Boulevard and listed numerous unaddressed pedestrian safety issues. The July 8<sup>th</sup> report included recommendations addressing pedestrian safety by means of modifications to the NYCDOT plan.

## **Part 1: Existing Conditions: West 70<sup>th</sup> Street from West End Avenue to Riverside Boulevard**

West 70<sup>th</sup> Street from West End Avenue to Riverside Boulevard is 50 feet wide, with one lane of traffic going east and one lane going west, and with parking on both sides of the street.



**West 70<sup>th</sup> Street looking east from Riverside Boulevard**



### **Aerial image of the West 70<sup>th</sup> Street corridor from West End Avenue to Riverside Boulevard**

The M72 bus travels through the corridor, heading west on West 70<sup>th</sup> Street, turning south on Riverside Boulevard down to West 66<sup>th</sup> Street, and then loops back to West 70<sup>th</sup> Street via Freedom Place. Freedom Place is one-way northbound.

There is a stoplight at West 70<sup>th</sup> Street and West End Avenue. In addition, there are stop signs at West 70<sup>th</sup> Street and Freedom Place and at West 70<sup>th</sup> Street and Riverside Boulevard, but they are generally ignored by drivers.

The West 70<sup>th</sup> Street corridor is flanked primarily by high-density residential buildings and includes several lower-density residential buildings.

There is one 24-hour parking garage on the north side of West 70<sup>th</sup> Street, between Freedom Place and Riverside Boulevard.

## Street Safety Issues

On West 70th Street between West End Avenue and Riverside Boulevard, there are a number of street safety issues for motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists, all related to the design of the street: its 50-foot width, east- and west-bound single lanes of traffic, and parking on both sides of the street.

These street safety issues include:

- Pedestrians crossing at places other than the corners, due to the long distance between traffic control devices: 700 feet between West End Avenue and Riverside Boulevard
- Speeding, fast-turning vehicles, and long crossing distance for pedestrians, all due to the overly wide street.
- Buses being forced to move into the opposing traffic lane to complete their route due to double-parking of trucks and moving vans along West 70<sup>th</sup> Street
- Large quantity of truck traffic
- Large quantity of taxi traffic

## Traffic Calming Recommendations for West 70<sup>th</sup> Street

There are a number of ***low cost street modifications*** that can be applied to the West 70<sup>th</sup> Street corridor to improve safety for both pedestrians and drivers. These include, but are not limited to:

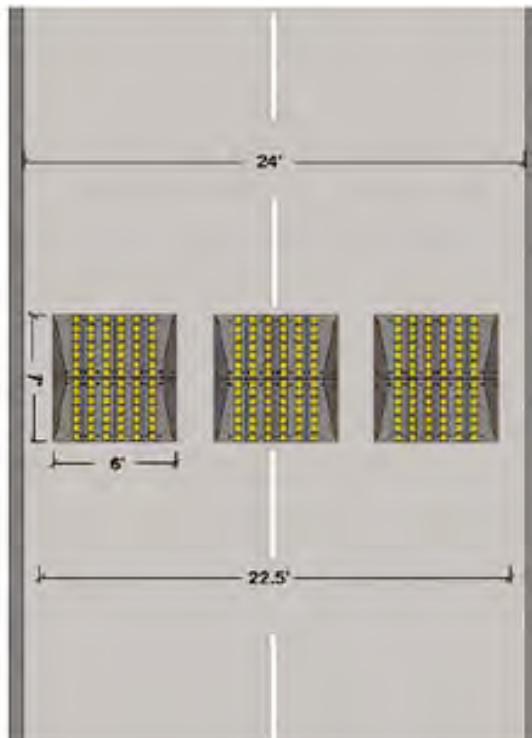
1. Speed Cushions
2. Floating parking on one side of the street
3. Opening West 71<sup>st</sup> Street, one block north, to two-way traffic
4. Protected bus stops

# **1. Speed Cushions**

One of the best ways to slow down motor vehicle traffic is speed bumps and/or speed cushions. Speed cushions are preferable to speed bumps on West 70<sup>th</sup> Street because it is a bus route.

Speed cushions are basically small speed bumps made from either rubber or asphalt, spaced on the roadway so that the wide wheel-base of buses can track between the cushions, but requiring other motorists to slow down.

The image below shows an appropriate design for West 70<sup>th</sup> Street, with three cushions on each side of the street.<sup>1</sup>



**Possible Speed Cushion Placement**

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<sup>1</sup>Trafficlogix.com

Speed cushions are generally preferred over speed bumps by emergency responders. The image below shows how these vehicles track over the speed cushions.<sup>2</sup>



**Fire truck driving through speed cushions**

Speed cushions are also preferable to speed bumps as they require less material to build and therefore are less expensive than speed bumps.

These speed cushions should be installed in three places: at West End Avenue and West 70<sup>th</sup> Street, at Freedom Place and West 70<sup>th</sup> Street, and at Riverside Boulevard and West 70<sup>th</sup> Street. This will reduce speeding and force motorists to slow down while turning on and off West 70<sup>th</sup> Street.

Placing speed cushions at these three locations should force drivers to maintain lower speeds throughout the entire corridor.

## **2. Floating Parking**

Floating parking refers to moving the parking lane from the curb over to the next travel lane. Parking cars in this floating lane away from the curb narrows the street, thereby reducing speeding and double-parking, both of which are constant pedestrian safety problems on West 70<sup>th</sup> Street.

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<sup>2</sup> Trafficlogix.com



**Double-parked trucks are common on West 70<sup>th</sup> Street, forcing west-bound buses to dodge them by driving in the east bound lane.**

The DOT has installed floating parking throughout the city, traditionally by installing a bicycle facility next to the curb. Here is an example of the floating parking lane on First Avenue in Manhattan.<sup>3</sup>



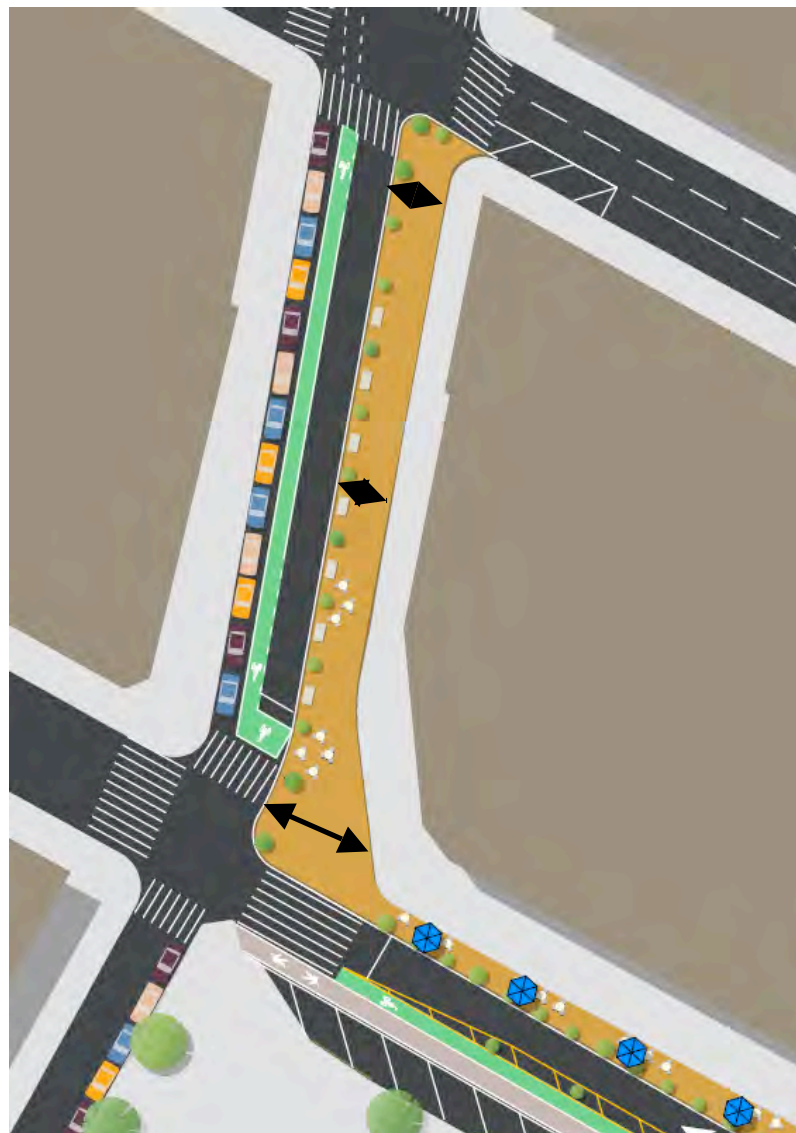
**Clearing the curb by using floating parking**

<sup>3</sup> Photo by Melanie Neichin  
326a 9th Street | Brooklyn, New York 11215 | pfoundationworks@gmail.com | 917-626-2322

Rather than a bicycle facility, it is recommended that planters or bollards be installed between the parking lane and the curb lane to prevent motorists from using this space.

It is also recommended that floating parking should be installed only on the north side of the street to allow the resulting new curb lane to be wide enough for proper maintenance by sanitation vehicles and snow plows, emergency vehicles and efficient bus service.

This graphic shows an example of a similar installation by DOT on 17<sup>th</sup> Street at Union Square. By adding a textured material and pedestrian amenities, this design not only slows down motor vehicles and reduces crossing distances, but also costs significantly less than extending the sidewalk.



**Narrowing the street by extending the pedestrian realm  
(arrows show extended area)**

### **3. Open West 71<sup>st</sup> Street to two-way traffic**

One block north of the subject corridor is West 71<sup>st</sup> street, one-way westbound until West End Avenue. Locked bollards on this street between West End Avenue and Riverside Boulevard prevent through traffic, but allow motorists to travel and/or park in the east and westbound directions on West 71<sup>st</sup> Street.

There is one 24-hour parking garage on the north side of West 71<sup>st</sup> Street, several feet west of the street closure. Vehicles can access this garage only by entering the street from Riverside Boulevard.



**Bollards at West 71<sup>st</sup> Street looking east**

Prohibiting motorists from using West 71<sup>st</sup> Street to access Riverside Boulevard pushes westbound traffic a block south to West 70<sup>th</sup> Street, resulting in a large volume of taxis and livery cars using West 70<sup>th</sup> Street to access Riverside Boulevard.

In turn, the 24-hour parking garage on West 71st is blocked by the locked bollards forming a cul-de-sac, requiring drivers to go down to 70th Street and then up Riverside Boulevard in order to access the garage. This leads to even more traffic on West 70th Street.



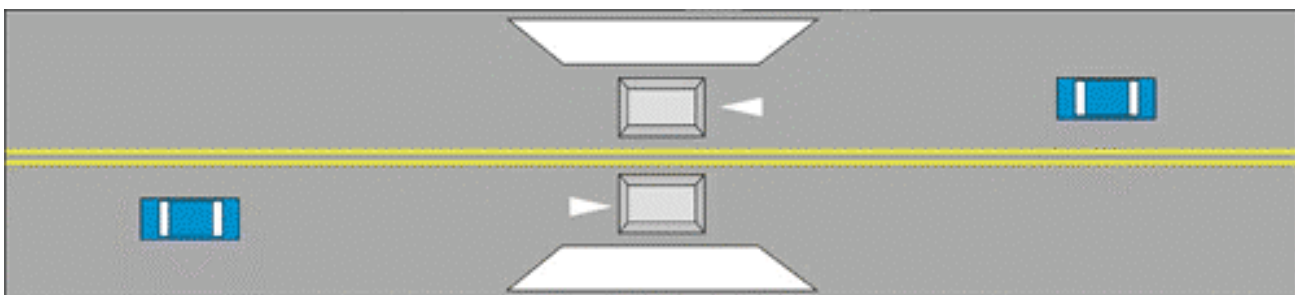
**24-Hour Parking on West 71<sup>st</sup> Street**

Opening West 71<sup>st</sup> Street to two-way, through traffic by removing the bollards would help to reduce traffic volume on West 70<sup>th</sup> Street. This in turn should reduce the amount of double parking by livery cars, taxis and trucks on both West 70<sup>th</sup> Street and Riverside Boulevard, thereby improving bus operations and pedestrian safety.

#### **4. Protected Bus Stops**

Protecting the space at and near bus stops allows buses to move more efficiently through a corridor. The large number of double-parked trucks along West 70<sup>th</sup> Street frequently forces the buses either to pull into the opposing traffic lane or stop short of the bus stop.

Below is one example of a protected bus stop, along with speed cushions:<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Ladpw.org  
326a 9th Street | Brooklyn, New York 11215 | pfoundationworks@gmail.com | 917-626-2322

## **Narrowing the street, protecting the bus loading area, and slowing down traffic with speed cushions and sidewalk extensions**

The protected bus stop can be created by extending the sidewalk into the street, or simply by adding bollards around the stop to create a mini-pedestrian plaza.

Due to the expense of extending the sidewalk, it is recommended that DOT simply open up ["daylight"] these areas by removing several parking spots, thereby making *the waiting pedestrians more visible to motor vehicles approaching the intersection*. Bollards or planters can be used to prevent motor vehicles from using this space.

Each of these four traffic-calming measures addresses the pedestrian safety concerns along this corridor and helps to create a complete school safety zone along West 70<sup>th</sup> Street from Riverside Boulevard to Amsterdam Avenue.

## **Part 2: Riverside Boulevard: September 14, 2011 Update**

NYCDOT implemented the four main elements in its traffic calming plan for Riverside Boulevard this summer:

- Striping a 7 foot center median from West 62<sup>nd</sup> Street to West 72<sup>nd</sup> Street
- Delineating the 8 foot parking lane from West 62<sup>nd</sup> Street to West 72<sup>nd</sup> Street
- Creating For-Hire Vehicle parking zones on Riverside Boulevard
- Creating Truck Loading zones on side streets

As of mid-September the planned connection between Riverside Boulevard and Riverside Drive at West 72<sup>nd</sup> Street has not been made.

The Coalition published its report/critique on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011. After describing numerous pedestrian safety concerns unaddressed by the traffic-calming plan and questioning its efficacy in improving traffic conditions on Riverside Boulevard, the report made recommendations for improving the plan.

The need for implementation of these recommendations is proved by recent observations of current traffic operations on Riverside Boulevard:

- No improvement to motor vehicle or pedestrian safety has resulted from narrowing Riverside Boulevard by striping a center median and delineating parking. In fact, pedestrians viewing this striped area as a

safe place to wait to cross the street are in a more precarious position than they were with the old design.

- Vehicles driving in the north and south bound direction use the striped center median as a lane for passing other cars or for avoiding double-parked cars -- in effect, simply as a through lane all along Riverside Boulevard.
- Double-parking remains a problem in several areas.



**Looking south, motorists driving through the striped center lane on Riverside Boulevard**



**Looking north, motorists driving around the numerous double-parked cars**

Regarding the remaining double-parking problems, it is true that during recent field observations, delivery vans were parked in the newly-designated truck delivery parking zone, with no trucks or vans double-parked on Riverside Boulevard. However, near the intersection of West 70<sup>th</sup> Street and Riverside Boulevard, there were delivery trucks double-parked on the south side of West 70<sup>th</sup> Street with drivers using handtrucks to make deliveries to buildings along Riverside Boulevard.

The locations of deliveries being made along Riverside Boulevard were equidistant from West 70th Street and from the new truck delivery parking zones on the stub end of West 69<sup>th</sup> Street. It is unclear whether trucks double-parked on West 70<sup>th</sup> Street because the zones on West 69<sup>th</sup> Street were full, or because of a long-standing bad habit of double-parking on West 70th between West End Avenue and Riverside Boulevard.

During field observations, the newly-designated livery car parking zone on Riverside Boulevard was fully occupied by livery cars. Yet, at the same time, livery cars were still double parked all along Riverside Boulevard. Unfortunately, New York City Police Department vehicles were observed driving along Riverside Boulevard, but were not observed ticketing any double-parked cars.



**Double-parked livery cars persist on Riverside Boulevard**

The number of double-parked livery cars on the north side of West 70<sup>th</sup> Street near Riverside Boulevard has increased significantly since the new curbside regulations on Riverside Boulevard were put in place. While it is standard to see a few livery cars double-parked on the north side of West 70<sup>th</sup> Street, during

one observation period there were as many as eight livery cars double-parked in this area.

Overall, the traffic calming plan for Riverside Boulevard provides few additional pedestrian safety measures, and has had marginal impact on the problem of double-parking on Riverside Boulevard.

It appears much of the problem of double-parking on Riverside Boulevard has simply shifted to West 70<sup>th</sup> Street.