

Community Board 7  
Transportation Committee  
250 West 87<sup>th</sup> Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10024

February 3, 2011

**Re: Pedestrian safety recommendations for West 70<sup>th</sup> Street and West End Avenue**

Dear CB7 Transportation Committee Members,

Over the last few years, our PTA has received complaints and suggestions from parents and local residents with safety concerns, especially the safety of their children walking to school. The intersection of West 70<sup>th</sup> Street and West End Avenue is an especially dangerous intersection that poses constant safety threats to our families. Accordingly, over the past two months, our PTA has been working with the Department of Transportation, members of Community Board 7, local residents, local community and advocacy groups as well as our elected officials to develop a set of recommendations to improve pedestrian safety around this particular intersection. Most of our recommendations can be implemented quickly and will result in a significantly improved pedestrian experience that makes the road safer for all users.

Our recommendations for this intersection were driven by two safety concerns. First, **drivers coming from West End Avenue turn onto West 70<sup>th</sup> Street dangerously fast**, often unaware of the fact that a school is halfway down the block. This is especially problematic during the morning and afternoon drop-off and pick-up times when there is a heavy concentration of pedestrians. This concern is broader than just a P.S. 199 issue and negatively affects residents from nearby buildings along West 70<sup>th</sup> Street and Freedom Place/Riverside Boulevard, many of whom routinely cross that intersection heading east to reach Amsterdam and other avenues. The left turn from the southbound lanes of West End Avenue is particularly dangerous, as motorists try to quickly make the turn ahead of northbound traffic and often do not confirm that the crosswalk is clear of pedestrians before turning.

Second, **West 70<sup>th</sup> Street is especially wide near West End Avenue, encouraging unsafe driving speeds**. This exacerbates the turning problem as drivers think they are able to speed through the light and onto a wide West

70<sup>th</sup> Street where there is plenty of room for them, notwithstanding the pedestrian crosswalk. The extra width encourages speeding along West 70<sup>th</sup> Street, directly in front of the school.

To address these two main concerns, we recommend the following steps. The first five are ideas that can be implemented quickly, while the remaining two ideas are ones upon which we would like DOT feedback.

- 1. 20 Mile Per Hour School Speed Zone (including heavy signage) along West 70<sup>th</sup> Street.** In order to reduce traffic speed along West 70<sup>th</sup> Street, especially on the stretch between West End Avenue and Amsterdam Avenue, we would like a designated 20 mile per hour school speed zone enforced. Given that many of the speeders are coming from Freedom Place and Riverside Blvd, our preference would be for the entire stretch from Riverside Blvd to Amsterdam to be designated as 20 m.p.h. We also request additional police enforcement during school hours to help make this zone effective.
- 2. Install red light safety cameras at West End Avenue and West 70<sup>th</sup> Street from the western, northern, and southern approach.** We see drivers time and again increasing speeds to beat the lights, whether they are heading east from Riverside Blvd/Freedom Place or turning onto West 70<sup>th</sup> Street from West End Avenue. The presence of well-marked red light cameras would act as a deterrent and enforcement mechanism to improve pedestrian safety.
- 3. Daylighting.** Vehicles parked too close to the intersection of West End Avenue and West 70<sup>th</sup> Street hinder pedestrian and vehicle visibility. We believe that prohibiting parking at the following spots will significantly improve the ability of pedestrians to see oncoming traffic as they cross the street and will enable motorists to more readily see pedestrians.
  - On West End Avenue, the SE corner, right in front of CVS
  - On West 70<sup>th</sup> Street, the SW corner of the intersection, between West End Avenue and Freedom Place
  - On West End Avenue, the NW corner, between West 70<sup>th</sup> and West 71<sup>st</sup>
- 4. LPI signals across West End Avenue.** An LPI, or Leading Pedestrian Interval, is a signal delay that provides pedestrians a head start to cross the street before motor vehicles can proceed. An LPI is already installed for the crossing at West 70<sup>th</sup> Street but does not exist for West End Avenue. We believe that a little head start would benefit the many pedestrians that cross West End Avenue, many of them towing children who will be more visible to drivers if they get a chance to enter the crosswalk before the vehicles can move.

**5. Installation of neckdowns/consideration of pedestrian island.**

At our December 9, 2010 meeting with Commissioner Forgione, the DOT presented the possibility of installing a neckdown at the intersection of West 70<sup>th</sup> and West End Avenue. If large enough, this would extend the curbs at the intersection, reducing the crossing distance for pedestrians and forcing cars to slow down to make the turn onto West 70<sup>th</sup> Street. We see the neckdowns as the best means to improve safety at this dangerous intersection.

We are also interested in the possibility of installing a pedestrian island, similar to those recently installed at West 66<sup>th</sup> Street and West 61<sup>st</sup> Street on West End Avenue. These would create an obstacle for drivers tempted to cut the corner, forcing them to slow down, and would provide a safe waiting place for those pedestrians who cannot make it across West End Avenue in the allotted time. While we are interested in exploring the pedestrian island, we urge that the neckdowns be installed as quickly as possible.

- 6. Traffic calming measures on 70<sup>th</sup> Street.** Something must be done in front of the school/playground area to slow down traffic that is heading east from the wide portion of West 70<sup>th</sup> Street towards Amsterdam and to facilitate a safe crossing area. We are unsure what the best mechanism to accomplish this is. Some of the suggestions presented include a midblock crossing with a blinking red light, speed bumps, a flashing school zone sign and a crossing guard. We are unsure what is most appropriate but we request that you work with us and with the community to develop a plan.

- 7. Analysis of Protected Parking Spaces/Traffic Buffer Zone in front of P.S. 199.** This idea was presented by CB7 member Mark Darin and is attached at the end of this document. Essentially, Mr. Darin proposes to move the parking between the front of P.S. 199 and West End Avenue (the widest section of this super-wide block) away from the south curb and instead have floating parking. This would narrow the street with minimal loss of parking to the community. At this point, we are not prepared to take a position on this plan as we do not have enough information on its viability or benefits versus unintended consequences. We would appreciate DOT's input into the proposal.

Together, these changes will create a much safer pedestrian experience for the many families and local residents who use West 70<sup>th</sup> on a daily basis. Furthermore, we encourage DOT to include this intersection on its planning docket for a complete street redesign that could take into account longer-term changes that would make this small area the envy of all neighborhoods.

Thank you for your time and consideration,



Katy Rosen  
P.S. 199 Principal



Diane Brush and Michelle Ciulla Lipkin  
PS199 PTA Co-Presidents

cc: Mel Wymore, Chair Community Board 7  
Margaret Forgione, Manhattan Borough Commissioner, DOT  
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