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~ Submitted Online ~

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Testimony submitted by Monica Blum, President of the Lincoln Square Business Improvement District, to the New York City Council Committee of Transportation regarding Int 1933-2020 - COVID-19 Relief Package, Temporary space for pedestrians and cyclists.

Thank you Chair Rodriguez and members of the Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding Int 1933-2020.

I am submitting this statement on behalf of the Lincoln Square Business Improvement District in Manhattan. We are specifically addressing the potential closing of Broadway within the boundaries of our district, which extends from the north side of 58th Street to the south side of 70th Street on Broadway, and includes the east side of Amsterdam Avenue from 60th to 70th Street as well as Columbus Avenue from 60th Street to 68th Street. Although we have not seen any specific proposals regarding the closing of Broadway to vehicular traffic, we have read numerous press reports which suggest that that could be a possibility. Accordingly, at our recent Board of Directors' meeting that took place via Zoom on April 21, 2020, I specifically raised this issue and our Board had an extensive discussion. Subsequently, we polled the Board and they were opposed to the closing of Broadway for a number of reasons directly related to COVID-19.

We are opposed to closing Broadway to vehicular traffic for a number of reasons: in light of COVID-19 and our hope that some business will resume operations gradually, we believe that closing Broadway will be a deterrent to curbside pick up and delivery should that be something that our businesses decide to do to provide their customers with the goods they need and to stay in business during an uncertain economic climate. Whether we like it or not, many people will come in vehicles to pick up items that they have ordered online or on the phone. Many of our retail establishments sell large items, i.e. Best Buy, Bed Bath & Beyond, Raymour and Flanigan, to name a few. Other retailers will hopefully receive large orders that cannot be transported by bike or by hand, i.e. clothing items, housewares, etc. Furthermore, we have many garages, which are businesses as well, and many, if not all of them, are on side streets off of Broadway. Some of our garages can only be accessed from Broadway and in some cases, where there is a one-way street, there is no other way to get to them.

Our restaurants and eateries will also be negatively impacted by closing Broadway to vehicular traffic - a pick up for a family of four again may be too heavy to carry and there may be a need for a vehicle. Although our district includes a bike lane on Columbus Avenue, speeding bikes without traffic will undoubtedly come into conflict with pedestrians. Several years ago, as part of Vision Zero, DOT undertook an extensive streets redesign, which expanded pedestrian space and improved pedestrian crossings in the 65th Street bow-tie area of our district to make it safer and more pedestrian friendly. Even in normal times, our sidewalks are not overly crowded by pedestrians although normally there is lots of sidewalk clutter.

The southern boundary of our district is 58th street on the north side and also includes Columbus Circle; Broadway in our district is for the most part one short block from Central Park. A portion of our district includes Central Park West from 60th to 62nd Street. The west side of our district is bounded by and includes Amsterdam Avenue. Further west, we have Riverside Drive and portions of Riverside Park South. We also have Damrosch Park on 62nd Street, which is open to the public daily, and two small Parks – Dante Park between 63rd and 64th Street and Richard Tucker Park between 65th and 66th Street which remain open. Dante Park is surrounded by benches. We are responsible for maintaining these two latter parks, as well as the ten Broadway Malls that run along the spine of our district, which also contain benches for the public's use. We also normally have tables and chairs in both of these parks, but since COVID-19 we have removed them to insure social distancing.

In addition, Lincoln Square is part of the Special Lincoln Square Zoning District and as a result our district has extra wide sidewalks many of which include pedestrian arcades. These wide sidewalks were intended for uses including outside dining though not all of the sidewalks are currently used for that purpose. We also have 13 privately owned public spaces (POPS) within our district; many of which have fixed seating and a few have moveable tables and chairs. Our neighborhood is clearly not lacking pedestrian space all of which create an environment that is conducive to social distancing.

Finally, we are concerned about the danger posed by crosstown traffic going in both directions. The NYPD is overburdened with COVID-19 and we cannot expect them to exhaust their resources by managing and controlling crosstown vehicular traffic. Furthermore, our small Clean Team and small crew of Public Safety Officers are not trained nor equipped to deal with that safety issue. Just look at how much police protection is required for a ten-block street fair – there are officers stationed at every intersection. We question whether this is a wise expenditure of limited and taxed resources. The avenues in our district are all truck routes, which in normal times allow the transport of essential goods to be provided to millions to New Yorkers – eliminating Broadway would push truck traffic to the other avenues away from the commercial corridor.

We recognize that there may be neighborhoods that are not as fortunate as ours is with Central Park and a number of other parks steps away. We believe that these decisions must be made on a neighborhood by neighborhood basis, and if you consider closing streets and avenues, it might make more sense to look at avenues that do not have commercial activity so as to not further negatively impede the gradual reopening of businesses post COVID-19. For all of these reasons, we are strongly opposed to the closing of Broadway in our Upper West Side neighborhood.