

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

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April 29, 2021
Start: 11:43 a.m.
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HELD AT: Remote Hearing (Virtual Room 1)

B E F O R E: Ydanis Rodriguez
CHAIRPERSON

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Selvena Brooks-Powers
Fernando Cabrera
Chaim Deutsch
Ruben Diaz, Sr.
Robert Holden
Peter Koo
Stephen Levin
Mark Levine
Carlos Menchaca
I Daneek Miller
Antonio Reynoso
Deborah Rose

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: PC recording is
3 underway.

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Cloud is up.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Back up is rolling.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Sergeant Leonardo, you
7 may begin the opening.

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning and welcome
9 to the New York City remote Council hearing for the
10 Committee on Transportation. At this time, we ask
11 that Council staff turn on their video for
12 verification purposes. Please place cell phones and
13 electronic devices to silent or vibrate to minimize
14 disruptions. Mr. Chair, we are ready to begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON RODRIGUEZ: Thank you, Rafael
16 and the whole team of sergeants and everyone behind
17 the computers and the technology that work so hard to
18 be sure that not only the members, but that the whole
19 public in New York City are able follow this hearing
20 and all the hearings of the City Council. Good
21 morning. Thank you for joining the Committee on
22 Transportation hearing to vote on proposed Intro
23 number 1933-A, a bill sponsored by my colleague,
24 Council member Carlina Rivera that would amend the
25 administrative code of the city of New York in

2 relation to the Open Streets program. One of the
3 things that the Covid 19 pandemic has shown us is
4 that we really need to think about how our city
5 streets are designed and utilized in order to
6 increase safety and maximize open space. As I have
7 often stated before, we must continue to explore
8 innovative ways to make sure our streets work for all
9 people and move towards becoming the most pedestrian
10 and cycle is friendly city in the country.
11 Unfortunately, I couldn't hold my car-free day this
12 year or last year, where we have been closing the
13 street from Times Square to Union Square. My dream
14 is that one day we closed Broadway from Yonkers all
15 the way downtown in a car free day and that it that
16 comes the normal thing that we can do, dedicating
17 more space from the street to the pedestrians and
18 cyclists. The Open Streets program is not only
19 innovative and groundbreaking, but I believe that it
20 also plays a role in improving our physical and
21 mental health during the pandemic. That is very
22 important that, especially in underserved communities
23 that most of them are dealing with asthma, obesity
24 before Covid and because of those causes, most of the
25 numbers of individuals who died in New York City,

2 they were our black, Asian, Latino, or poor white who
3 didn't have the resources as the wealthy ones. The
4 program has given New Yorkers a vision of space to
5 safely enjoy the outdoors in the midst of one of the
6 worst pandemics we have ever faced. We must continue
7 to do everything in our power to improve the Open
8 Streets program and expanded across our city,
9 especially in communities of color that historically
10 have not received adequate investments in parks and
11 open space. And this cannot be a retort. This has
12 to be a strong commitment. That is what we need. My
13 colleagues are white progressives who live in the
14 wealthy and the middle class community, to be our
15 partners to really bring the resources that we need
16 to continue expanding open space, especially in
17 underserved communities. Proposed Intro number 1933-
18 A seeks to build on what we have started with Open
19 Streets and make it better. The bill would require
20 DOT to operate a permanent Open Streets program with
21 streets managed by DOT or community organizations.
22 It will also require the city to provide staff or
23 resources to at least 20 Open Street areas where
24 community groups want open streets by lack capacity
25 to run them and will require DOT to survey community

2 partners and evaluate open streets and [inaudible
3 00:04:05] to determine whether to apply permanent
4 design changes such as conversion to a shared street
5 or pedestrian plaza. In the past, we have
6 commitments for Times Square Plaza from Disney and
7 all those big players around 42nd Street that they
8 were ready to adopt other plazas-- other areas in
9 their underserved communities. This is the time to
10 expand those partnerships to or underserved
11 communities in the city of New York. I am very proud
12 to be a cosponsor of this important bill and happy
13 that we are voting it out on committee today.
14 Council member Rivera is here. I will now turn it
15 over to her as the bill's prime sponsor. Council
16 member Carlina Rivera, it is your turn now.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Thank you so much,
18 Chair Rodriguez, for permitting me to speak briefly
19 on my bill, Intro 1933-A, and for all of your
20 leadership on all issues transportation and open
21 space. I have learned so much from you, Ydanis, and
22 I am just so proud to call you a colleague. I want
23 to encourage all my colleagues on this committee to
24 vote yes on this very sensible legislation that
25 provides more flexibility for open streets going

2 forward and ensures that there will be an effective
3 community outreach and by and from all stakeholders
4 in these neighborhoods. I think we can all
5 acknowledge the important role that Open Streets
6 played at the height of the pandemic. When we were
7 desperate for more space, for socially distanced
8 recreation, and rest, both mentally and physically,
9 today, though, it is clear that some important
10 changes we need to make to the program and we have
11 the legislation to do just that. Some of the changes
12 very briefly: ensuring city streets have real cities
13 staffing and resources, by ensuring Open Streets be
14 more flexible in the actual way that they use the
15 road, by ensuring that DOT prioritizes its resources
16 in under resourced neighborhoods with community
17 applicant mentor ship and real outreach efforts so
18 that communities actually have a stake in which
19 streets are appropriate to open in their
20 neighborhoods. And this legislation also is an
21 important priority for Speaker Johnson and it will
22 require the Department of Transportation, who we plan
23 to hold accountable and to make sure listens to us,
24 it requires that DOT annually evaluate and select
25 open streets for permanent upgrades that could range

2 from conversions into a shared street or pedestrian
3 plaza, to bollards, to even raised street grade which
4 will enable that to be flush with the sidewalk. So,
5 these conversations are totally ongoing. We want it
6 to be community led and these conversions would
7 satisfy benchmarks established in Speaker Johnson's
8 Streets Master Plan and that allows for more
9 effective community led transitioned to a truly
10 pedestrian friendly city. So, Open Streets have
11 given us the chance to rethink what is possible for
12 our streets and we have been able to do so in record
13 time. We can't lose this momentum, particularly when
14 we have the opportunity to do so with the program
15 that is led, first and foremost, by our communities.
16 We need to pass this bill today. I thank you all for
17 your consideration of this legislation and I do hope
18 to have your support today. Thank you. Thank you,
19 Mr. Chair.

20 CHAIRPERSON RODRIGUEZ: Thank you, Carlina.
21 And it is also my honor to be working with you and
22 have you as my friend. We knew that we [inaudible
23 00:07:54] with a title Council member, but as
24 organizers. People like you and I and I know that
25 Carlos and others who are standing on the shoulders

2 of many men and women that are in the black and
3 Latino community, especially. They died. They
4 fought. They dedicate their lives and the least
5 thing that we can do is to continue fighting and work
6 to make New York City better and a place of equal
7 opportunity so that children in underserved
8 communities and those children who have been in areas
9 of the wealthy [inaudible 00:08:22] in the city. And
10 I want to, before calling on the vote, I won't to
11 also thank Mayor de Blasio. It is not easier to be
12 the Mayor, especially when you are not someone that
13 comes from a wealthy family. A working-class and
14 middle-class Mayor who goes to City Hall and has to
15 be dealing with so many challenges and so many
16 interests to focus on the negative piece, but I've
17 also got to say that I've got to give him a lot of
18 credit and thanks to Mayor de Blasio and the whole
19 team [inaudible 00:08:50], Jeremy, everybody was
20 working all this time and who have been working. We
21 have Speaker Cory Johnson, Jason Goldman, and anyone
22 who makes this possible. And I will also be inviting
23 my colleagues, especially Carlina and the rest of the
24 members of this committee for the moment when I am
25 going to be inviting Speaker Cory Johnson, Brooklyn

2 borough president Eric Adams, the administration to
3 come as we will be doing the ribbon-cutting of the
4 permanent plaza that was already approved two weeks
5 ago [inaudible 0:09:30] Plaza on Dykeman between
6 Broadway and Seaman. That started as an Open Streets
7 restaurant and thank God, with the support of Mayor
8 de Blasio and Speaker Corey Johnson, he has already
9 been approved as a permanent plaza in Washington
10 Heights. One of the [inaudible 00:09:45] 10034 that
11 most people died in Manhattan because of Covid and
12 anyone can die, but most people that died, they were
13 dealing with respiratory issues, with asthma and
14 obesity and this is our responsibility for the
15 present and future generations. I also want to
16 encourage the administration to work with the borough
17 president's and their leaders as we move in this
18 proposal that we need to work with the community
19 board, but especially the borough president of
20 Manhattan, Gale Brewer, the borough president Ruben
21 Diaz Senior in the borough that represents those
22 where most people also died. The great and my
23 Brooklyn borough president Eric Adams. I want to be
24 sure, again, that City Hall will be working with all
25 those leaders that is going to be expanding this

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2 great proposal led by, again, our friend and
3 colleague, Council member Rivera. I would now ask
4 and before that [speaking foreign language]. With
5 that, we may now-- give me one second, if you know
6 mine. I will now ask the committee clerk to conduct
7 a roll call vote on the proposed bill and strongly
8 recommend that my colleagues vote yes on this
9 important piece of legislation.

10 COMMITTEE CLERK: Good morning. William
11 Martin, committee clerk. Roll call vote Committee on
12 Transportation. Proposed introduction 1933-A. Chair
13 Rodriguez?

14 CHAIRPERSON RODRIGUEZ: Dedicated to the
15 members of the transportation community, Families for
16 Safe Streets, I vote aye.

17 COMMITTEE CLERK: Thank you. Cabrera?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Aye.

19 COMMITTEE CLERK: Koo?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Mr. Chair, can I
21 explain my vote?

22 CHAIRPERSON RODRIGUEZ: Of course.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Thank you. I
24 support the Open Streets program. I think we need to
25 get New Yorkers every possible advantage against the

2 coronavirus. We need to maximize every inch and
3 square footage available to us and we should continue
4 to be vigilant against the virus. When coronavirus
5 shut down the city, the Open Streets program made
6 perfect sense. It turned our streets into fun yards
7 and offered a rare reprieve from isolation in urban
8 areas. It turned areas that were off-limits into
9 spaces where all are welcome. There is no reason why
10 they should not continue now that we are in recovery.
11 So, I support the bill, but I must impress that not
12 every street is suitable for this purpose. The city
13 needs to remain cognizant of competing interests and
14 especially of traffic congestion, sanitation, noise,
15 and fire hazards. Involving traffic on tight city
16 streets can also do more harm than good for local
17 businesses, so I urge the DOT to carefully listen to
18 concerns of the communities where open streets are
19 planned. We need to monitor, analyze, and
20 troubleshoot what works and what doesn't so that open
21 streets don't become detrimental to those who are
22 mostly affected by them. Thank you. Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE CLERK: Thank you. Levin?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Aye on all.

25 COMMITTEE CLERK: Menchaca?

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MENCHACA: Permission to
3 explain my vote?

4 CHAIRPERSON RODRIGUEZ: Permission granted.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MENCHACA: Thank you,
6 Chair. And thank you, Council member Rivera and the
7 rest of the committee that is voting in support of
8 this really amazing community effort and, you know,
9 just thinking about my district in the last year and
10 how the community really came together and made it
11 happen, and this is just maybe why-- and Carlina and
12 I were texting last night and I'm feeling more
13 serious about it. I think we should call this, not
14 Open Streets-- because there actually opened right
15 now for cars. These are community streets and it
16 makes it more clear about what we are trying to do
17 and we are removing these, you know, to time and
18 weapons that have been doing a lot of kind of
19 negative things for our communities and really
20 opening up that street way for community engagement.
21 And in a time of Covid, but also in a time of climate
22 change as we are all trying to figure out how to use
23 space differently and bringing our small businesses,
24 I think community streets would be great. So, I
25 don't know if that is an LS request with to put in to

2 make it happen, but I would really want to push the
3 Council and the Mayor and everyone to start using
4 different language that shows exactly what we are
5 doing here. But, with all that, I vote aye. Thank
6 you, Carlina.

7 COMMITTEE CLERK: Miller?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: No.

9 COMMITTEE CLERK: Reynoso?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: Permission to
11 explain my vote?

12 CHAIRPERSON RODRIGUEZ: Permission granted.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: Thank you.

14 Ydanis-- and I think I'm going to try my best to
15 join you at Biscaya [sp?] Plaza. It's a great
16 thing. It is also very important to the Latino and
17 Dominican community to continue to see these streets
18 named after communities that have felt the city of
19 New York. So, thank you for the work you are doing.
20 I want to thank you for your efforts in organizing it
21 and making it possible. For a lot of those
22 businesses out there, too, this is going to be life
23 changing. So, again, just want to thank you for the
24 work that you are doing related to that Plaza. I
25 just want to also say that Carlina Rivera doing the

2 Open Streets, the fact that I did the outdoor dining,
3 just recognizing the work that is being done by
4 minority members to really expand these open space
5 opportunities and that a lot of people think that
6 these endeavors or initiatives are mostly done by,
7 you know, white elected officials and they're not.
8 You know, we have a public plaza in Manhattan that is
9 going to move forward with Chair Rodriguez. Again,
10 the Open Streets being permanent and the work that we
11 did to make the outdoor dining permanent. We talk
12 about taking back our streets. We just have a very
13 diverse group of people pushing these things forward
14 and want to just acknowledge the work that is being
15 done by our colleagues and congratulations to Council
16 member Carlina Rivera. Very excited that we are
17 making this permanent. Look forward to making sure
18 that it is done the right way and with the resources
19 that are going to be available to us, I feel like
20 that is going to happen, so I will probably vote aye
21 on all. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE CLERK: Ruben Diaz?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER DIAZ: Aye.

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2 COMMITTEE CLERK: Thank you. Holden?

3 Council member Holden?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Aye.

5 COMMITTEE CLERK: Brooks-Powers?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: I would
7 like permission to explain my vote.

8 CHAIRPERSON RODRIGUEZ: Permission granted.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank
10 you. First, I would like to say thank you to Council
11 member Rivera for your leadership around this
12 important bill. For me, I represent a very diverse
13 district, one that has the pleasure of enjoying the
14 boardwalk for most of the year and another part of my
15 district which is more inland. And so, having
16 opportunities where communities have more access to
17 space is always something that I am supportive and
18 members of my community are supportive of the members
19 of my community and supportive of-- I would like to
20 just echo that I have shared publicly in terms of
21 wanting to ensure that the Department of
22 Transportation works closely with communities that
23 they would look and seek to have open streets come
24 to. That is extremely important. We don't find that
25 dynamic often enough in communities of color. Often

2 times we see the big projects come to our community
3 and no real effort being put in part by that agency
4 in a real way and so, I would love to see more open
5 streets in the parts of my district that makes sense
6 where the community would like to see it, but I would
7 also like to work and strengthen the relationship and
8 that communication with the Department of
9 Transportation and I can't really underscore that
10 enough. But I will vote aye on this. So, thank you,
11 again, Council member Rivera.

12 COMMITTEE CLERK: Thank you. By a vote of
13 nine in the affirmative, one in the negative, and no
14 abstentions, proposed Introduction 1933-A has been
15 adopted by the committee and, Mr. Chair, I believe we
16 are waiting for one more member.

17 CHAIRPERSON RODRIGUEZ: Okay. I will leave
18 the vote open, but before, you know, we let all the
19 Council members who voted to go-- most of them have
20 gone already-- I would also like to thank the great
21 Chief of Staff that we have at the Council, Jason
22 Goldman, Speaker Cory Johnson, and the team, again,
23 that works on this bill. Especially the team that
24 has been leading this. Jeff Baker and also Kevin
25 Taylor and also from our Committee of Transportation,

2 Elliott Reed and the rest of the team and my Chief of
3 Staff, Alyssa Deconforme [sp?], Tomas Garrita [sp?],
4 and Evelyn Collado [sp?]. So, everyone who did their
5 part in this bill, thank you and it has been a great
6 honor to be working with Carlina Rivera not only with
7 this bill, but many other bills related to
8 transportation or other bills important for the whole
9 city of New York. I don't want to take space from
10 any [inaudible 00:21:23] community. I just want to
11 be sure that all areas in underserved communities get
12 the same investment in the same attention that the
13 upper middle-class and the upper class get in the
14 city of New York. Thank you. Will you close the
15 hearing, then?

16 COMMITTEE CLERK: We can close it for you,
17 Mr. Chair.

18 CHAIRPERSON RODRIGUEZ: Okay. Thank you.

19 COMMITTEE CLERK: Good afternoon. Final
20 vote Committee on Transportation on proposed
21 Introduction 1933-A is nine in the affirmative, one
22 in the negative, and no abstentions. Thank you.

23 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you, Billy.

24

25

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date August 3, 2021