

Hon. John DeStefano, Jr.
Mayor, City of New Haven
165 Church Street
New Haven, CT 06510

August 24, 2011

Dear Mayor DeStefano:

We would like to thank your administration for its significant work since 2008 to advance the goals of the New Haven Safe Streets Coalition and the Complete Streets Order, passed unanimously by the Board of Aldermen in 2008. At the same time, as detailed below, we also call on you to renew your commitment to many of the Coalition's requests that have not yet received sufficient action from City government.

Over 40 local elected officials and candidates for city office, in addition to more than 2,000 residents, all 12 of New Haven's Community Management Teams, and dozens of local organizations and businesses, signed the Coalition's *Petition for Safe Streets* in 2008.¹ Building upon many previous efforts, this movement was forged upon a widespread concern about the need for improved public safety and quality of life, and the direct relationship of these factors to job creation, public health, crime prevention and social justice.

Through the *Petition*, our citywide alliance demanded a broad array of policy actions that can result in a 75% decrease in citywide traffic injuries and fatalities by 2012, and a 90% decrease by 2015. Following on this, the city's Complete Streets Order required the "*prioritization of walkability, inter-modal transit, traffic calming and pedestrian-based urban economic development over competing goals,*" and created a new Design Manual for local streets. The Order stipulated that the city's "*standards will require that the target speed for streets around schools, hospitals and business districts that depend on pedestrian traffic be a maximum of 15 miles-per-hour.*"²

Although not meant to be an exhaustive list, please consider the following section of this letter to be a progress report highlighting your administration's degree of responsiveness to our Coalition's major requests. Since 2008, we have been present at dozens of public meetings related to these issues, some of them organized or attended by City staff. When it comes to creating opportunities for the long-term economic success of our neighborhoods, the presence or lack of an equitable and safe transportation system is as fundamental as any other concern.

We thank your administration for its progressive work in the following areas, in direct response to our requests:

1. **The City has undoubtedly increased levels of traffic enforcement in some neighborhoods.** As a result of policies set by your administration and the New Haven Police Department, the number of moving violation tickets issued in New Haven more than doubled in the year following the release of our *Petition*, and has remained there since. Specific campaigns were launched around illegal vehicles, DUI, and drag racing. Increased enforcement of the laws that protect our quality of life, catch many illegal

¹ New Haven Safe Streets, <http://www.newhavensafestreets.org/>

² Journal of the Board of Aldermen, October 6, 2008. Following extensive public testimony, the legislation was passed by a vote of 30-0 at the following meeting.

firearms and stolen vehicles, and may help to reduce the hundreds of serious injuries occurring on our streets each year, is a significant accomplishment. We will detail below how there is major room for improvement in this area.

2. **The City has installed dozens of in-street “yield to pedestrian” signs along the city’s two-way streets.** These are a proven, cost effective way to promote pedestrian comfort at intersections, and have benefits for drivers and cyclists too. Although we would like to see the signs begin to remain in place as year-round installations, as they are in other towns, the signs have had a major impact.
3. **The City published the first version of its Complete Streets Design Manual.** Neighborhoods now have a guide for creating more livable streets. Many have begun submitting “request forms” from the manual.³ Elected representatives and citizens will track these requests over time, with the help of semi-annual public reports from the Engineering Department, and ensure that they are adequately addressed.
4. **The City has initiated and led a “Street Smarts” public information campaign,** which has involved various media, public outreach and “walking school bus” days throughout New Haven. We thank Mike Piscitelli and Jim Travers at the Transportation Department for showing extraordinary initiative in launching and sustaining this campaign, despite their minimal staff.
5. **Within the Engineering Department, a large number of new road projects are currently underway.** We commend the Department staff for their hard work to attract federal and state funding for these projects. As a result of the Complete Streets Design Manual, some of them are incorporating traffic calming features, enhanced crosswalks, bicycle lanes, and other features designed to balance the needs of all road users. The Department has also maintained traffic signals and installed new “countdown” signals with extended crossing time for pedestrians.
6. **The Transportation Department has been responsive to the “Bike Plans”** created by Elm City Cycling over the past three years. The City has installed new bicycle parking areas, including many new covered racks at Union Station, and staff have coordinated more than 10 miles of new sharrows and bike lanes throughout New Haven. In 2009, the Transportation Department worked with citizens to complete a thorough analysis of the Downtown pedestrian and bicycle circulation system.
7. **The City has adopted a “Government 2.0” system known as SeeClickFix** in order to better track and respond to citizen requests. This software allows a larger degree of transparency not just between citizens and government, but among citizens themselves. The City has worked with neighbors to resolve hundreds of issues including dangerous potholes, malfunctioning signals, missing in-street signs, and blocked sightlines. In fact, many of the issues reported on the SeeClickFix website have to do with traffic safety. New Haven Safe Streets has been tracking 1,771 traffic-related issues reported within New Haven. Although 862 of these (49%) have been addressed and “closed” on the site, there remain a large number of outstanding requests.⁴

The following requests continue to demand immediate attention:

1. **We continue to request public information on the amount and specific types of traffic enforcement conducted within each neighborhood.** This information has not been forthcoming, except in a few cases where District Managers report it at monthly Community Management Team meetings. Publishing this information each quarter and in a machine-readable format is the best way for neighborhoods to collectively monitor and advocate for improved traffic enforcement in areas that they know are prone to dangerous behavior such as speeding and red light running. Related to this, the City and State should also find ways to report locations that experience frequent crashes.

³ Some of the forms submitted so far may be viewed at <http://www.cityofnewhaven.com/Engineering/completestreets.asp>

⁴ See the New Haven Safe Streets watch area at http://www.seeclickfix.com/watch_area/296 for examples.

2. **The construction of Downtown Crossing Phase One must be done in a way that truly promotes multi-modal transportation in our city, and is in line with the Complete Streets Order legislation.** Arguably the most important development project in decades, the conversion of Route 34 from a highway right-of-way into a livable neighborhood has strong support overall. However, major questions have been raised about the current plan, such as its incorporation of sidewalk-to-sidewalk crossing distances that are, somewhat astonishingly, planned to be in excess of 50 feet, as well as bike lanes that share the street with enormous highways. Recently, an Aldermanic resolution has been introduced which requires a very different approach.⁵ Specifically, it is time for the City to end the rhetoric about potential long-term plans for the area, and instead ensure that in all phases, it designs a place that is truly safe and accessible for our most vulnerable citizens. The *Petition* requested speeds of 15-20 miles per hour in areas such as the Hospital district, which are home to many pedestrians of all ages. The creation of lower MUTCD “area speed zones,” which can be geared to Hospital districts, can help accomplish this goal if combined with appropriate designs for the road system. The challenges of this project within Phase One can only be solved by the most progressive, out-of-the-box thinking. The recent reconstructions of Whalley Avenue in Amity and Whitney Avenue lacked this approach, and have left many residents and local elected officials feeling quite disappointed and vulnerable.
3. **The City needs to greatly expand its routine use of traffic calming measures, also known as “self-enforcing” streets, and ensure public access to information on upcoming street repairs.** The City’s 2011-2012 Consolidated Action Plan for Housing and Community Development lists a goal of one traffic calming project per year.⁶ Particularly given the number of Complete Streets requests, we must be frank that this is not an acceptable pace of improvement within a city of our size, as it will never enable the City to meet its economic development and health goals. Due to budget limitations, other cities have begun looking into lower cost measures such as so-called “temporary” curb extensions and bollards similar to the ones used around many construction sites (which in many cases may be seen as semi-permanent, not temporary), as well as modifications to striping and signage policies. The city’s list of upcoming street repair projects must be made public so that citizens can advocate for these measures. Finding a solution to mitigate traffic speeds is of particular concern to neighbors living near our larger one-way streets, such as sections of Edgewood, Chapel and Elm in the Dwight neighborhood, where the city has not been willing to install in-street signage.
4. **The *Petition* demanded the urgent study, and enactment, of speed reductions within residential zones and core commercial districts.** Slower streets promote business, and are the key to healthier enjoyment of our neighborhoods by people of all ages. New York City is enacting 20 mile per hour speed zones in 75 neighborhoods.⁷ After London enacted 20 mile per hour zones, injuries and fatalities there dropped by more than 40%.⁸ Within Connecticut, many places including Hartford, Darien, Greenwich and the New Haven suburbs have speed limits posted at between 10 and 20 miles per hour. New Haven needs to immediately begin realigning these types of streets along the model of “Living Streets” and “Twenty’s Plenty.”⁹
5. **The City should accelerate its work to create a citywide, interconnected system that makes cycling accessible for all residents.** The city’s primary west-to-east travel routes of Whalley Avenue and Elm Street are among many key “gaps” in the system that have been mentioned in the Transportation Department’s published plans for nearly 10 years, but remain unaddressed. The Tomlinson Bridge (even

⁵ New Haven Independent, 8/3/2011,

http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/how_will_people_cross_downtown_crossing/

⁶ The Consolidated Action Plan is available at <http://www.cityofnewhaven.com/Finance/BudgetsFinances.asp>

⁷ New York City Press Release, 8/16/2010, www.nyc.gov/html/om/html/2010b/pr356-10.html

⁸ <http://www.livingstreets.org.uk/news/uk/-/response-to-20mph-article-in-bmj>

⁹ Twenty’s Plenty for Us, <http://www.20splentyforus.org.uk/>

after the minor improvements made last month) continues to be highly inadequate for cycling, even though it is part of Connecticut's official cross-state bicycling route and the only realistic connection between Downtown and the east side of New Haven. The city should look not only at bike lanes and sharrows, but at some of the more progressive bicycling facilities suggested by the NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide, which are now seeing widespread adoption throughout North America. After similar facilities were installed in Seville, Spain between 2007 and 2010, the number of cycling trips increased dramatically, from 6,000 per day to more than 60,000 per day.

6. **The City must improve the maintenance of key facilities for walking and bicycling, particularly during winter months.** The recent bill to protect municipal liability, P.A. 11-211, takes effect on October 1st and means that there are no longer any excuses to making facilities like the Farmington Canal Trail available for commuters during the winter months. In addition to better plowing, sidewalk enforcement is needed. The snowstorms of 2011 – which forced children and elderly residents to walk in the middle of busy streets like Whalley Avenue, and resulted in many ice-related falls and injuries – demonstrate that new policies are needed for key walking routes. Finally, throughout the year, City departments must pay more attention to property enforcement, pothole repair and street sweeping along the city's busiest cycling routes, such as Chapel Street where it passes several scrap metal yards.
7. **The City must continue to push aggressively for statewide legislation that will help meet the goals of the Complete Streets Order.** Although the City and Police Department have made efforts over many years to support legislative campaigns, such as one that would allow intersection safety cameras in large municipalities and one that would ensure pedestrian safety receives its fair share of funding from highway funding streams, some of these proposals have been thus far unsuccessful. The City has supported new laws that improve safety, like the State's award-winning 2009 "Complete Streets" Law, but more work is needed.
8. **The City must strengthen its efforts to promote parking and transportation demand management (PTDM).** The overwhelming majority of jobs located in New Haven are not held by City residents, resulting in very large traffic volumes that have become a significant health hazard to many of our core urban neighborhoods.¹⁰ The City and Rideworks have worked extensively with employers to increase carpool and transit use, resulting in a small but significant mode shift. However, this mode shift is not likely to improve more until the city incorporates PTDM into all of its zoning ordinances, and shifts its system of direct and indirect subsidies away from cars and garages and towards transportation alternatives.

We again thank the City for its work on behalf of this vision, and request that you take the additional steps that are needed to bring it to reality.

Sincerely,

88 signatures

The authors of this letter, who are listed on the following pages, kindly request a reply. Please contact: Mark Abraham, Coordinator, New Haven Safe Streets Coalition, newhavensafestreets@gmail.com, (203) 500-7059.

¹⁰ For documentation, please refer to the new report, "Transportation and Health: Policy Interventions for Safer, Healthier People and Communities": <http://www.prevent.org/data/files/transportation/transportationandhealthpolicycomplete.pdf>

Signed:

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Hon. Stephanie Bauer, Alderman, Ward 14
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Cordalie Benoit, Board Member, Elm City Parks Conservancy, Historic Wooster Square Association
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Brandon Levin, President, Yale College Council
Geoffrey Little, Member, Chatham Square Neighborhood Association
Martin Mador, Legislative Chair, Sierra Club Connecticut Chapter, on behalf of the 300 members living
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Christel Manning, Member, Chatham Square Neighborhood Association
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