

Editorial comment

Keep trucks off the parkway

Four months ago, an editorial in this newspaper warned of the possibility that the city might open the Henry Hudson Parkway to truck and bus traffic. Councilman Oliver Koppell duly responded with a letter to the city Department of Transportation.

But it will take more than one newspaper and one elected official to keep the parkway that runs through Riverdale from fouling the air with fumes and noise and clogging our neighborhood's artery with traffic.

Last week, WNYC revealed that "the city Department of Transportation is quietly considering a plan to open parts of the city's parkways to small trucks." According to reporter Andrea Bernstein, "The parkways would only be open to trucks under 8000 pounds — about the size of two SUVs. But the DOT study says about half of all truck traffic in the city comes from small trucks and delivery vans."

The DOT study is presumably a follow-up to the "Truck Route Management and Community Impact Reduction Study" the agency released in February, which called for consideration of abandoning restrictions that prevent commercial vehicles from using the Henry Hudson.

Truck traffic is the bane of such neighborhoods as Hunts Point, Maspeth and the rapidly-gentrifying Brooklyn neighborhoods of Williamsburg and Greenpoint. The DOT study says opening a portion of the Grand Central Parkway to commercial traffic has succeeded in relieving local streets of a burden.

But does shifting a burden to Riverdale make sense? The parkway runs through the center of our community; it is lined with apartment buildings, in which more than half of all the residents of Riverdale live. They will find themselves breathing the fumes and coping with the noise of heightened traffic.

The new DOT study calls for vocal opposition from Riverdalians and for making common cause with the residents of Inwood, Washington Heights and the Upper West Side. Even if the DOT were to decide to lift restrictions on trucks only in Manhattan, the backwash would be likely to clog our portion of the parkway.

The DOT's plan also demonstrates how important it is to complete the work of designating the Henry Hudson Parkway as a scenic byway.

The advocacy organization Transportation Alternatives, which is lobbying to open the parkways to truck traffic, has told the DOT that "the mid-20th Century notion of 'parkways' as idyllic greenways for motorists has long been rendered obsolete by the sheer volume of New York City traffic, and by changes to those roads over time that have made them little different than the city's 'expressways.'" That cynical judgment can be proved wrong.

Instead of conceding that a degraded parkway is inevitable, Riverdalians can come together to show that a thoughtfully planted, sensitively designed, park-like Henry Hudson has great value to the environment and to the community through which it passes.