

WHOSE STREETS? OUR STREETS!

As a city that prides itself on diversity, New Yorkers embrace and encourage different cultures, beliefs, and practices. For a city as populated as New York, we should also encourage diversity in our transportation methods.

I believe that the City of New York has an obligation to promote cycling as a transportation method that is healthy, environmentally friendly and takes up less space in our congested city. Cycling should not be treated as a second-class mode of transportation. No one should be harassed or discriminated against for riding a bike, nor should they be at higher risk for death or injury.

Unfortunately, New York cyclists contend with speeding drivers, jaywalking pedestrians, and crater-sized potholes. Our limited number of bicycle lanes forces riders into the middle of traffic, and our current bike lanes subject them to being “doored” or hit by a hailed cab. When a bicyclist makes it to their destination safely, there is often no secure bicycle parking for them to use—a frustrating and discouraging end to their commute. When bicyclists join together to ride in protest of these poor conditions, which is their right guaranteed by the Constitution, they are harassed and arrested for parading without a permit, irrespective of whether or not they abide by traffic laws. Since the 2004 Republican Convention, the NYPD has acted with a systematic intolerance for protestors and people riding en masse, reflecting an anti-bicycle policy. New York’s future depends on sustainability, so the last thing the city should do is continue to discourage and intimidate riders.

With that in mind, it is critical that the City Council pass Intro 199, a bill that would change the way we measure traffic conditions. My hope is that an increase in knowledge of traffic congestion’s effect on our quality of life will lead to greater investment in alternative modes of transportation, safer streets for everyone, and a cleaner, healthier city. We also need to pass Intros 38 and 234, which together would require buildings to provide bicycle storage and allow a 36-hour grace period for abandoned bikes. Passage of these bills would remove some of the barriers many would-be cyclists face in taking their wheels to work and school.

The City Council must also pass legislation to safeguard everyone’s right to assemble whether practiced by participants in Critical Mass rides or recreational bike tours. The NYPD cannot use public safety as a pretext to infringe on our constitutional rights.

I recognize and commend the steps the city has taken to improve road conditions for everyone (pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers of automobiles), but we must do more to make it easier and safer for residents to ride. As a strong supporter of cyclists and a proponent of cycling, I cannot stress enough the important role that bicycles should play in the city’s future. In order to make this city sustainable and its residents healthy—as has been encouraged by the Mayor—we must factor in the use of bicycles as a first-class mode of transportation in future city planning. Whose streets? Our streets!

Councilmember Rosie Mendez represents District 2 in New York City, which includes parts of Manhattan’s Lower East Side, East Village, Gramercy Park, Kips Bay, and Murray Hill. A lifelong New Yorker, Rosie grew up in Williamsburg Houses, a NYC Housing Authority development. She is the child of Puerto Rican immigrant parents, and she attended New York City public schools from elementary through high school. She graduated from New York University with a degree in Metropolitan Studies.

To make this city sustainable and its residents healthy—as has been encouraged by the Mayor—we must see bicycles as a first-class mode of transportation.