

New York Activists Want Traffic Relief

By Marlene Peralta

Activists representing the five boroughs gathered on the steps of City Hall on November 14 to demand traffic reduction and the improvement of traffic alternatives. The activists form the Citywide Coalition for Traffic Relief, which is part of Transportation Alternatives, a non-profit traffic relief advocacy group.

The coalition wants Mayor Bloomberg to develop an extensive plan to reduce traffic 15 percent by 2009. It is a model they said has been effectively done in London, England.

Sandra Garcia, member of the Sustainable South Bronx, is one of the activists asking for better traffic alternatives.

"Hunts Points Market requires for many trucks to go through the streets and the neighborhoods," she said, mentioning that the crossing between Hunts Points and the Bruckner Expressway is one of the worst points in New York City.

Paul Steely White from Transportation Alternatives said there have been at least three studies done looking at pedestrian safety and high traffic volume, but the traffic problem still continues.

"We know that 40% of the traffic going to the neighborhoods of downtown Brooklyn is simply through traffic," he said.

He explained the coalition is calling for the mayor to complete a feasibility study to alleviate traffic that could reduce problems like the ones caused by

through traffic and traffic coming from bridges.

The Department of Transportation has created a rapid transit initiative, which includes giving buses their own lanes.

It has also introduced 200 miles of new bike lanes. But the organization insists there is more to be done, such as the enforcement on parking policies.

The City Council has introduced The Traffic Information Relief Bill that seeks to work the traffic problems mentioned. A hearing is scheduled for January 2007.



Paul Steely White from Transportation Alternatives speaks at a rally on the issue of traffic in the city. (Photo by Marlene Peralta)

PR Economy Forces Professionals to Migrate Stateside for Better Jobs

By Robert Waddell

Many educated and professional Puerto Ricans are experiencing a "brain drain" on the island. They have the brains for jobs but the poor economic condition of the island has drained them to the United States.

They are coming to New York now, but for a short, transitory period of time.

Professional Puerto Ricans come to New York for a while with intentions of either settling into New York, moving back to the island or moving on. Earlier this year, *Tiempo New York* reported on a group of Puerto Rican teachers who came to teach in New York City public schools.

They were recruited by the Alianza Pedagógica Puertorriqueña or the Puerto Rican Teachers Alliance headed by Alice Hernandez.

"Our teachers spend a short amount of time then go to another state," said Hernandez. "They can't handle the culture shock, the demands and they still have those patriotic feelings."

Many Puerto Ricans earn bachelors and other degrees but can't find much more than minimum wage jobs, so they are economically forced to leave the island. Many Puerto Ricans live pay check to pay check.

Hernandez said that this is also a problem in the nursing industry, where nurses from the island are lured to better paying jobs stateside. She called it all a "forced exile."

Historically, with Operation Bootstrap, up until the mid to late 1950s, boricuas migrated to New York City by boats and then by plane. They would settle in El Barrio, the Lower East Side, the Bronx, Brooklyn and Jersey City; they would work and help build New York.

Now, Puerto Ricans are leaving New York and new migrants are using New York as a hub to other destinations like

Tampa and Orlando in Florida, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and upstate New York.

"Puerto Ricans are becoming very transitory," said Felix Romero, producer of the documentary "Politics Con Sabor." "Puerto Ricans are spreading around. They're moving around to places similar to Puerto Rico but not as dangerous."

Romero said that Puerto Ricans from the island have feared crime, drugs, violence and AIDS. They have been looking for safer areas to live and raise their children.

Today, however, it is the professional who suffers a great financial burden on the island and many times is forced to leave.

"There's a tremendous fiscal crisis on the island with repercussions," said Sheila Candelario who came to New York to study in 1991. "There's a wave of people leaving the island."

While she remained in New York, her sister moved to Florida and another sister is on the island.

The sister who is in Puerto Rico is worried that one day she will also have to leave because of financial issues.

She hinted that the government and the politics of Puerto Rico were partly to blame for the economic problems of its people, which make Puerto Ricans who leave, political refugees, but not in the traditional sense of refugees.

"There are patterns and preconceived notions of migration," said Candelario who teaches literature at Fordham and Rutgers universities. "It's all linked to the politics and to the money."

"The infrastructure of the colonial system wasn't made to handle a population without migration," she said. "Migration was designed as part of that colonial economic model. As much as we want to be on the island, it cannot take us."



Keep the Fields Open

Raymond Pichardo, Matthew Fermin, Edwin Rodriguez, and Mario Gurrastegui, students from the Community School for Justice in the Bronx, attended a hearing at City Hall November 2. They testified against the city's push to sell the right to exclusive use of sports fields on Randalls Island to a group of elite private schools every weekday afternoon for the next 30 years. The students, who play in their school's baseball team, said it is important to keep the fields open to the public because the park offers young people a positive place to go to play baseball and stay out of trouble in the streets. (Photo by Ismael Nunez)

Residents Complain of Increase in Violence in East Harlem

By Tanzina Vega

Right off the corner of 117 Street and First Avenue is a makeshift memorial for Lesenia Figueroa, or Che Che, as her friends used to call her.

A nylon tent that would have been used for a backyard party protects a wooden altar that houses slightly wilted flowers and over a dozen lit candles. Messages from loved ones are scrawled in black next to photographs showing this smiling young mother, not yet 30, who was shot by a stray bullet on the same corner a few months ago. Che Che is a tragic example of what some East Harlem residents and businesses are calling an increase in violence in East Harlem that needs to be addressed.

"She was just one that made the news, but others don't make the news," said Minnie Rivera, a community board member and restaurant owner. Rivera said there have been a number of recent violent incidents spanning the neighborhood from 100 to 119 streets that have community members concerned.

Rivera's dream of opening a neighborhood restaurant serving dishes like steak au poivre and offering live jazz was a way to bring the downtown scene uptown. "If this were happening on the Upper East Side, they wouldn't stand for it," she said.

Nadir Aslam, a resident of six years and community activist, asks, "Where are the police?"

Aslam is calling for local politicians, business owners, parents, and teenagers to work together to fight the violence. Community members say they need more beat cops.

According to police officials at the 25th Precinct, crime had risen 9.5 percent in October. A total of five shootings

plagued the area around 116 Street during the same month. The NYPD is deploying more officers to the area between 7 p.m. and 3 a.m. "There is crime, we can't deny that," said Chief Inspector Lenahan, "but to say we're not doing anything is not accurate."



Memorial for Lesenia Figueroa, or Che Che, as her friends used to call her

Generally, areas that are high crime are designated "high impact" and staffed with more police. The 25th Precinct, however, has since lost that designation along with eight percent of its force. "We need more cops," Lenahan said.

Council Member Melissa Mark Viverito said, "We need to send a message to our community that we are not going to tolerate this behavior."

She pledged to work on creating a task force to include Community Board 11, the local precincts and her office. "I want to work to facilitate that and turn it into action," she said.

Borough President Scott Stringer has also urged the community to start organizing.

The Public Safety Commission of Community Board 11 is held the first Tuesday of every month.