

DAILY NEWS

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A highway that hurts NYC

Why do we have too many cars in Manhattan? Because we spend billions to encourage people to drive in. And these cars are killing us.

More than 40,000 Americans die in traffic collisions every year, many of them because of bad driving by others. That includes 6,283 pedestrians killed last year, or one every 84 minutes.

Sitting in our cars while we drive everywhere is killing us too, with obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Pollution from our cars is killing us and the planet. Forty percent of America's carbon greenhouse gases comes from cars and trucks.

These are just some of the reasons why Manhattan will have a congestion zone south of 60th St. in 2021. So why are we talking about \$4 to \$8 billion to rebuild the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway where it meets the Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges, pumping cars into the future congestion zone like an open fire hydrant? The BQE should stop at the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel and resume at the Kosciuszko Bridge. In between, traffic should go on city streets.

Studies show that when city high-

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ways disappear, a lot of traffic disappears with them. Look at the traffic reduction on the cross-streets north and south of Manhattan's new 14th St. busway. Opponents of the plan predicted the busway would cause a Carapocalypse. They were wrong.

In recent decades, cities all over the world removed expressways, and in every instance, traffic distribution improved. San Francisco, Portland, Oregon, Paris, Seoul, Chattanooga and Milwaukee took down highways, improving each city.

Removing the BQE between the Battery Tunnel and the Kosciuszko Bridge would save billions of dollars, reduce traffic going into Manhattan, and reduce traffic and pollution in Brooklyn. The worst air quality in the city is always found near major roads and highways.

But let's be clear: This is about much more than reducing traffic, traffic deaths and pollution, as good as that all

would be. When Robert Moses built the BQE, he demolished the buildings on the blocks around the Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges. That contributed to the decline of what is now called Dumbo.

Six decades later, the luxury housing there makes the land taken up by highway ramps and befouled by traffic valuable too.

If we removed the ramps and reduced the number of cars, New York City would own several new blocks of land for affordable housing in one of the highest-priced parts of Brooklyn.

On the Manhattan side of the Brooklyn Bridge, Chambers St. used to go through the Municipal Building to a dense urban neighborhood. Now the gateway to Manhattan is a 24-hour mass of irritated drivers honking at pedestrians trying to get from the subway to City Hall Park. There are enough existing ramps that all the cars could be redirected back towards Water St. and the FDR Drive. That would free up the no-man's land between Park St. and Centre St. for a great new public space at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Why stop there, though? There are three ways for cars to cross the Hudson River into Manhattan. There are 16 car routes between Manhattan and the other boroughs. If we're trying to reduce traffic — and we are — it's crazy to have so many ways in.

Of all the bridges into Manhattan, the Brooklyn Bridge is the most popular for cyclists and pedestrians, and easily the most invigorating experience.

How great would it be to close it permanently to everyone but people on foot and on bikes? The nearby Battery Tunnel and Manhattan Bridge, combined with the other five bridges and tunnels just below 60th St., can still bring far more cars than we want in lower Manhattan.

If New York City is going to spend billions of dollars on infrastructure at this time in our history, it should not spend the money on cars. The pending collapse of the BQE is an opportunity to go in a better direction for all.

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