



DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING
CITY OF NEW YORK

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

April 19, 1999

Honorable Thomas K. Duane
State Senator, 27th District
275 7th Avenue
New York, New York 10001

AB -
the happy family

Dear Senator ^{Tom} Duane:

Thank you for your letter regarding the reconfiguration of Columbus Circle. As you noted, we are in agreement that Columbus Circle is one of the city's most critical junctures because of the variety of important functions it provides: a defining link between the diverse neighborhoods of Midtown, the Upper West Side, Clinton, and Central Park; a complex intersection of some of the city's busiest vehicular thoroughfares, a vital pedestrian crossroads and public transit node; a destination for tourists from around the world; and potentially one of New York City's signature civic spaces.

We also agree that the Circle has failed to live up to its potential in several of these areas. For this reason, the Department of City Planning initiated the project to reconfigure the Circle several years ago, and we are proud of the progress we have made to date. With the help of our partners in City government, the Department of Transportation, Department of Parks and Recreation, Department of Design and Construction, the Police Department, and several other agencies, we have transformed the project from an ambitious plan to an exciting work-in-progress.

We are also in agreement that the future use of 2 Columbus Circle, as well as the Coliseum, must be carefully coordinated with the reconfiguration of the Circle. Since the beginning we have approached all of these individual projects as pieces of a comprehensive strategy for the area.

We are also very proud of the process the project has followed. At every stage, we have met with members of the Tri-Board Task Force, Municipal Art Society, and numerous other civic groups and elected officials, as well as presented plans at community board meetings several



Honorable Thomas K. Duane
April 19, 1999
Page 2

times. Public comments have been incorporated into the plans whenever feasible. This involvement will continue when we present an update at another meeting with the three community boards on April 29th at 7:00 PM.

During these meetings, the desire for an additional crosswalk into the eastern section of the circle has been expressed, and this will be incorporated into the final design. In the final Design Request for Proposals, the selected consultant is directed to develop designs according to a schematic which includes a crosswalk from the center circle to Central Park South (see attached graphic) if feasible. You should know that once the team is selected, they will have one year to develop the permanent design, and more community input will occur.

We would also like to address your concern that low pedestrian volumes into the center space during the test might be wrongly interpreted as a lack of desire to use the center space. Despite the presence of jersey barriers and no eastern crosswalk, pedestrian volumes have increased since the reconfiguration. This is most likely the result of the two new, safe crossings into the circle installed for the test where there had been none before, and the large new public space surrounding the monument, where there had been a series of traffic islands and motorcycle parking.

We also expect pedestrian use of the center space to increase significantly in the next few months as we construct interim design improvements to the center space, including additional trees, plantings, and other pedestrian amenities. These improvements will help beautify the space until the final design is constructed and should establish the center as a vital public space. These plans have received strong community support and will be presented in detail to the community boards on April 29th. We should see the additional greenery you requested, with special care given to preserving site lines and ensuring both pedestrian and vehicular safety.

Another concern you expressed was with the visibility of traffic signals and sight lines along streets radiating from the circle. Thanks in part to a public outreach phone number we have displayed in the circle, we became aware of some of these problems during the test period. As issues were identified, we have made adjustments to correct them, with swift response from DOT. If you are aware of any specific locations with ongoing problems, please let us know so that they can be addressed.

Honorable Thomas K. Duane
April 19, 1999
Page 3

We appreciate your letter and interest in our work in Columbus Circle, and we welcome your continued involvement.

Sincerely,

Joseph B. Rose

c: Wilbur Chapman, Commissioner, NYC DOT
Charles Millard, President, NYC EDC
Luis Tormenta, Commissioner, NYC DDC
Assemblymember Richard Gottfried
City Councilmember Ronnie Eldridge
Community Board 4
Community Board 5
Community Board 7
Coalition for a Livable West Side
Coalition for Environmentally Sound Development
Landmarks West