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September 9, 2022

South Bronx Unite brings together neighborhood residents, community organizations, academic institutions, and allies to improve and protect the social, environmental, and economic future of Mott Haven and Port Morris. We work on environmental justice, public health equity, community-focused development, public space equity and arts & cultural equity. See *Taking Back the Bronx* about our community and our work<sup>1</sup>.

Our Mott Haven-Port Morris community is 98% BIPOC, has an average median household income of \$23,337, and is home to seventeen NYCHA developments. Our community is an epicenter for environmental injustice and broken promises formed by decades of policies that have encircled our two square mile community with three highways and five bridges, and zoned our neighborhood for 850 acres of industrial contamination alongside one of the lowest per capita rates of access to green space<sup>2</sup>. We are routinely mandated into shouldering disproportionate environmental burdens. Saturating our community are four natural gas power plants; multiple waste transfer stations that process all of the Bronx DSNY waste, all of the Bronx NYCHA waste, and substantial private waste; and over 100 acres of public waterfront land leased to a private entity that abandoned public benefit uses in favor of subleasing to multiple diesel truck-intensive businesses.

The health impact is staggering. See *Asthma Alley*<sup>3</sup>. The South Bronx has one of the highest death and disease rates from asthma in the country<sup>4</sup>. One in five of our school-aged children has asthma; asthma hospitalization rates in our community stand nearly 20 times that of other NYC communities<sup>5</sup>; and our respiratory health crisis is exacerbated by the “heat island effect” we are documenting in collaboration with Columbia University<sup>6</sup>. In addition, our traffic-related pedestrian injury hospitalizations are nearly double the city-wide rate.

Our condition is not new and is well-known worldwide.

Twenty years ago, then Congressman José Serrano sponsored, and the U.S. EPA administered, the “South Bronx Environmental Health and Policy Study,” in which NYU researchers had 40 students from South Bronx schools located near major highways and industrial facilities wear backpacks capable of monitoring diesel soot from air samples. They found that:

- (1) On every third day particulate matter exceeded the federal limits, the National Ambient Air Quality Standard of 35 micrograms per cubic meter levels;
- (2) The levels of asthma in the South Bronx were significantly contributed to by diesel truck emissions from the area’s highway and industrial facility saturation; and
- (3) The solution to this problem was to reduce the already overburdened rates of truck traffic in the community and to provide for more open space.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tDdfuFS76GQ>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.ny4p.org/client-uploads/pdf/OSI/NY4P\\_Mott\\_Haven\\_Open\\_Space\\_Index.pdf](http://www.ny4p.org/client-uploads/pdf/OSI/NY4P_Mott_Haven_Open_Space_Index.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.southbronxunite.org/press-and-media/documentary-asthma-alley-short-film>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/research/columbia-center-childrens-environmental-health/asthma>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/epi/databrief126.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2021/08/26/study-maps-urban-heat-islands-with-focus-on-environmental-justice/>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.icisnyu.org/south\\_bronx/admin/files/SouthBronxBrochure.pdf](http://www.icisnyu.org/south_bronx/admin/files/SouthBronxBrochure.pdf)



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In 2014, South Bronx Unite proposed the Mott Haven-Port Morris Waterfront Plan<sup>8</sup>, a partial rezoning of the South Bronx Significant Maritime Industrial Area in favor of pockets of an environmentally-sound, publicly-accessible waterfront to mitigate against storm surge. The plan was recognized by the City and the State but continues to lie dormant and unfulfilled.

That same year, New York State and City provided online grocer FreshDirect more than \$150 million in subsidies to relocate their diesel trucking warehouse to the South Bronx waterfront, bringing 1,000 diesel truck trips through our community every day. They promised electric trucks (unfulfilled) and no adverse impact. In response, South Bronx Unite partnered with Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health to measure air and noise pollution directly related to the relocation of the grocery warehouse<sup>9</sup>. The peer reviewed and published study<sup>10</sup> found an overall traffic increase between 10%-40% and increases in noise and atmospheric black carbon as a result of the grocery warehouse. A follow up study<sup>11</sup>, published in *Environmental Science and Policy*, analyzed additional traffic data from 2017-2019 and found worsening increases in traffic congestion with significant health and safety concerns.

This is the local context of our South Bronx environmental justice community into which New York's Central Business District (CBD) Tolling Program, under ever single scenario envisioned, stands to add disproportionately high and adverse effects on traffic, air quality and noise.

The CBD Tolling Program Environmental Assessment<sup>12</sup> analyzed air quality pollutants, including carbon monoxide (CO); nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>); ozone (O<sub>3</sub>); PM (PM<sub>2.5</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub>); sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>); and lead (Pb); and found that the CBD Tolling Program would *increase* all pollutants in Bronx County while New York County, Kings County and Queens County would experience *decreases*.

The assessment also found that the CBD Tolling Program would result in traffic diversions...into the Bronx” and that “these diversions would be most pronounced...across the South Bronx”. Across seven different scenarios being assessed, the Cross Bronx Expressway would experience a daily increase of up to 700 additional trucks, and the Robert F. Kennedy Bridge (which flows directly into the heart of our community) would experience upwards of 4,000 additional trucks every day.

Research has documented the gravity of diesel exhaust, particularly in vulnerable environmental justice communities like the South Bronx. Diesel exhaust contains carcinogens which have been linked to lymphomas,<sup>13, 14</sup> leukemias<sup>1, 2</sup> and lung,<sup>15, 16</sup> larynx, bladder and stomach cancers. Diesel

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.southbronxunite.org/mott-havenport-morris-waterfront-plan>

<sup>9</sup> <https://bit.ly/3D5La1V>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/17/9/3208>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/public-health-now/news/south-bronx-traffic-congestion-worsens-raising-health-and-safety-concerns>

<sup>12</sup> <https://new.mta.info/project/CBDTP/environmental-assessment>

<sup>13</sup> Frumkin H, TThun MJ. Diesel exhaust. *CA Cancer J Clin* 2001;51:193-8.4

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.cancer.org/Cancer/CancerCauses/OtherCarcinogens/Pollution/dieselexhaust>

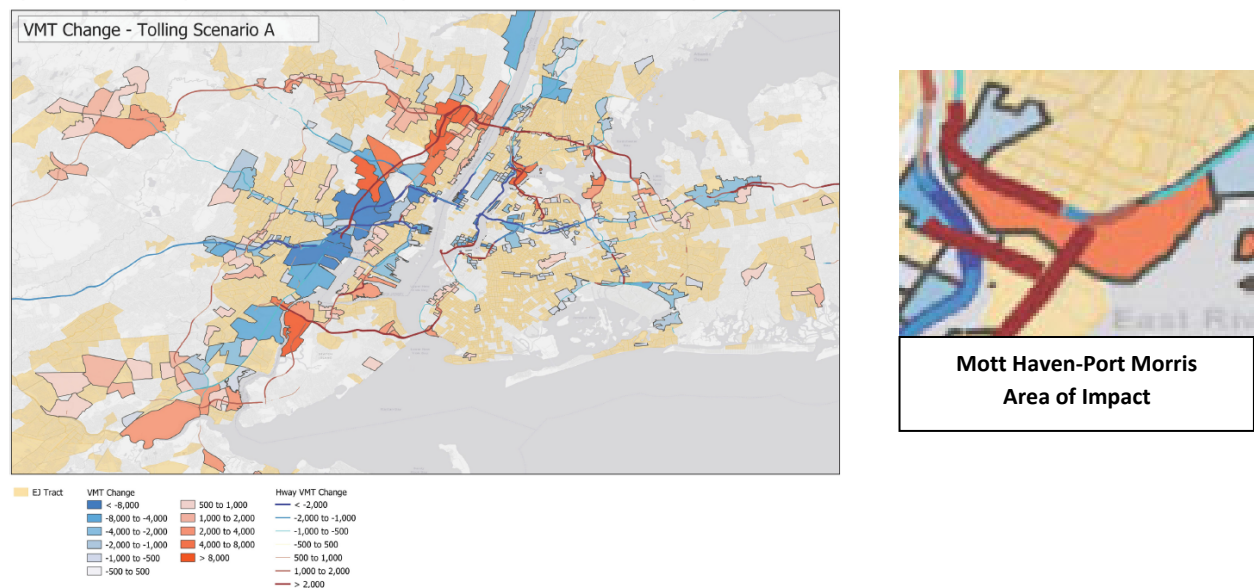
<sup>15</sup> Garshick E, Schenker MB, Munoz A, et al. A case-control study of lung cancer and disease exhaust exposure in railroad workers. *Am Rev Respir Dis* 1987;135:1242-8.2.

<sup>16</sup> Parent ME, Rousseau MC, Boffetta P, Cohen A, Siemiatycki J. Exposure to diesel and gasoline engine emissions and the risk of lung cancers. *American Journal of Epidemiology* 2007;165:53-62

exhaust also increases fine particulate pollution, especially that of PM 2.5.<sup>17</sup> PM 2.5 is a complex mixture of small particles and liquid droplets, less than 2.5 microns in size, made up of acids (nitrates and sulfates), organic chemicals, metals, and dust particles that reach the lung's alveolar spaces, penetrate the blood and cause systemic effects. These systemic effects include but are not limited to asthma, coughing, difficulty breathing, decreased lung function, delayed and stunted fetal growth and premature death in people with heart or lung disease.<sup>5, 18, 19, 20</sup> PM 2.5's effect on human health is not linear. Even small increases of this particle in the environment have very significant impact and exponential cumulative effect on human health.<sup>21, 22</sup>

The impact of traffic diversions in, across and through our South Bronx community also result in the city's highest impact level of vehicle-miles traveled (VMT). Three scenarios highlighted in the Environmental Justice section of the report show more than 8,000 VMT disproportionately impacting our Mott Haven-Port Morris community - along the Major Deegan Expressway (which moves across the heart of our community), throughout the Harlem River Yards (which lines the entire south of our community); and across the Robert F. Kennedy Bridge (which flows directly into our community).

Figure 17-7. Predicted Changes in Vehicle-Miles Traveled in Tolling Scenario A Relative to Environmental Justice Neighborhoods



<sup>17</sup> <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/60582.html>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.epa.gov/air/particlepollution/index.html>

<sup>19</sup> Tecer LH, Alagha O, Karaca F, Tuncel G, Eldes N. Particulate matter (PM (2.5), PM(10-2.5), and PM(10)) and children's hospital admissions for asthma and respiratory diseases: a bidirectional case-crossover study. *J Toxicol Environ Health A* 2008;71:512-20.7.

<sup>20</sup> Rich DQ, Demissie K, Lu SE, Kamat L, Wartenberg D, Rhoads GG. Ambient air pollutant concentrations during pregnancy and the risk of fetal growth restrictions. *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2009;63:488-96.8.

<sup>21</sup> Dominici F, Peng RD, Bell ML, et al. Fine particulate air pollution and hospital admission for cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. *JAMA* 2006;295:1127-34.

<sup>22</sup> Pope CA, 3rd, Burnett RT, Thun MJ, et al. Lung cancer, cardiopulmonary mortality, and long-term exposure to fine particulate air pollution. *JAMA* 2002; 287:1132-41.10.



Figure 17-8. Predicted Changes in Vehicle-Miles Traveled in Tolling Scenario D Relative to Environmental Justice Neighborhoods

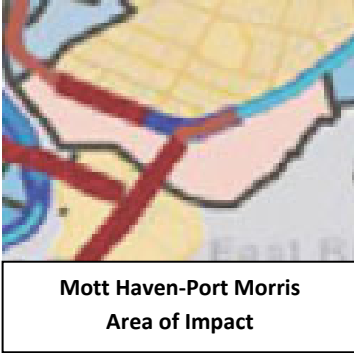
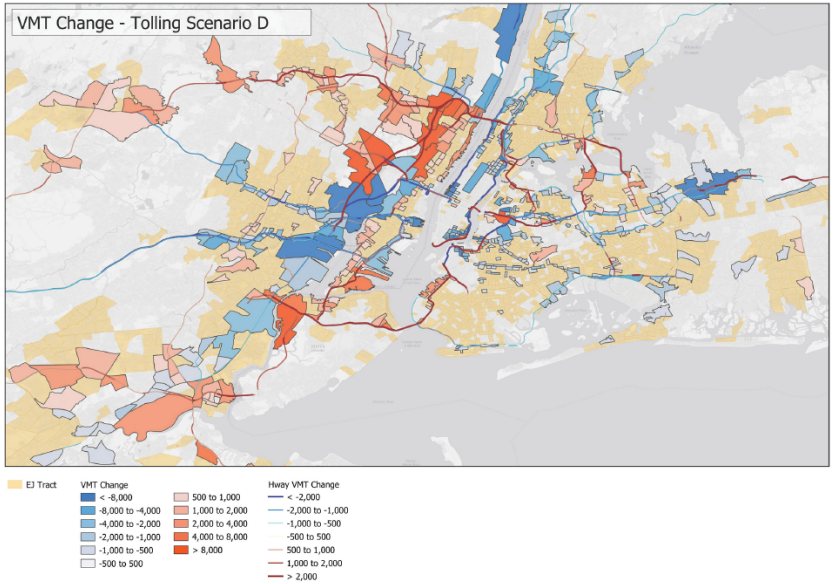
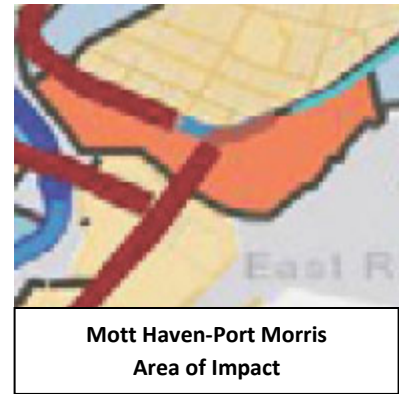
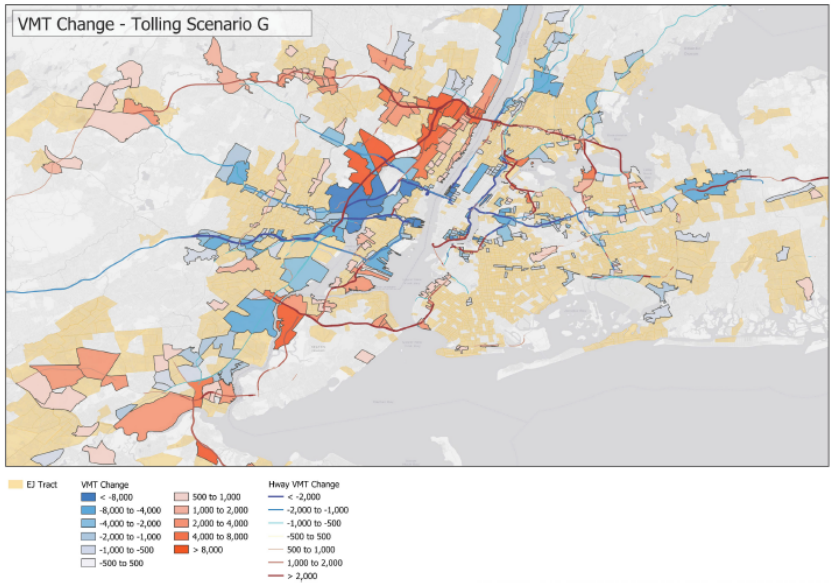


Figure 17-9. Predicted Changes in Vehicle-Miles Traveled in Tolling Scenario G Relative to Environmental Justice Neighborhoods



Section 7(3) of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act requires that the State pursue climate change interventions that reduce disproportionate burden. By increasing pollution in our disadvantaged community (DAC), the State will be violating Section 7(3).

It is for these reasons, among others, that we vehemently oppose all current Central Business District (CBD) Tolling Program scenarios set forth as each one would exacerbate our environmental crisis in the South Bronx by adding additional trucks to our already overburdened community. Additional air quality monitoring and zero-emission buses will not mitigate the egregious and unconscionable harm South Bronx residents stand to face if any of the current CBD Tolling Program scenarios are approved.