



## Wanted: Visionary Leader for NYC DOT

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After seven years as Commissioner of the NYC Department of Transportation, [Iris Weinshall has resigned](#) and [decided to move](#) on to be a Vice Chancellor at the City University of New York (CUNY). While it is generally agreed that Weinshall provided excellent administrative skills in professionalizing an agency that had corruption and performance issues before her tenure, she failed to lead the agency into the new century and embrace policies of innovation around creating real pedestrian and bike friendly infrastructure.

New York needs leaders that can do more than simply fill potholes and keep cars moving on the roads.

*Photo by [Geofffox](#)*

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It also needs thoughtful leaders that recognize the potential of the city's streets (both road and sidewalk) as public spaces that serve the community around them, not just those passing through in automobiles.

Mayor Bloomberg has launched his sustainability drive, looking at ways to transform NYC's infrastructure (not society or people, just the physical plant around us) to become more sustainable. There is no greater potential to improve New York's sustainability than to transform the way streets are designed. Just before Weinshall's resignation, there was a fairly apt [NY Times opinion piece](#) that discussed how NYC was losing it's innovative edge when it came to creating a walkable city to stereotypical auto-centric cities like Grand Rapids, Atlanta and Indianapolis.

It is up to Mayor Bloomberg and Deputy Mayor Doctoroff to find a new DOT leader who can bring the agency into step with the sustainability initiative and bring NYC's streets and bridges into the 21st Century.

Wasting no time in staking out what a new DOT Commissioner should focus on, Transportation Alternatives released [a statement](#) late today titled: "Iris Weinshall upheld the cars-first status quo at a time when New York City streets desperately needed innovation and change."

Here is the full press release from TA:

Iris Weinshall upheld the cars-first status quo at a time when New York City streets desperately needed innovation and change.

To her credit, Commissioner Weinshall stabilized an embattled agency that just prior to her arrival had seen four commissioners in a period of six years. Commissioner Weinshall filled potholes better than her predecessors, and made pedestrian safety improvements to some of the city's most dangerous streets. But these successes were

eclipsed by Commissioner Weinshall's failure to redress the enormous economic, health and quality of life costs imposed by the City's outdated car-based surface transportation system.

To reduce the cost of congestion and meet the challenges of growth and global warming, New York City needs a new cadre of expert transportation planners led by a progressive-minded DOT Commissioner who can institutionalize and apply modern street management practices that will shift driving trips to cleaner more space efficient modes. The Mayor should look to London and other big cities for the right candidates.

Road pricing, parking reforms and streets redesigned to maximize walking, biking and surface transit are solutions that the new commissioner needs to make happen if New York City's 6,000 miles of streets are going to perform better for residents and business alike. Tasks that the Commissioner should tackle:

- \* Adopt new universal street design standards that would make traffic calming, pedestrian, bicycle and bus improvements the routine rule, not the ad hoc exception
- \* Expand annual data collection to better understand how New Yorkers travel, and what they need to drive less and walk, bike and take transit more.
- \* Begin a comprehensive study of how variable road pricing can be effectively and fairly applied
- \* Reform on-street and off-street parking policies to reduce unnecessary driving and traffic
- \* Improve community based planning and outreach to make streets work for residents first and through-traffic second.

Says Paul Steely White, Executive Director of Transportation Alternatives, "New York City needs a new DOT commissioner with a new mandate. The old mandate was to move as many cars as quickly as possible. The new DOT commissioner must figure out how to move the most people around the city, using all of the available tools including mass transit, walking and bicycling."

I would add that every bridge and tunnel in the City should be evaluated for its potential for either light rail, trolleys or dedicated bus lanes. This would bring these bridges back to the capacity for moving people back to levels [not seen since the early 20th Century](#).



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