

BOROUGH OF FORT LEE

Office of the Mayor

309 Main Street
Fort Lee, New Jersey 07024-4799

Telephone (201) 592-3500 -Ext. 1003 Facsimile (201) 592-1657
E-mail: mayor@fortleenj.org

Mark J. Sokolich
Mayor

Via Facsimile 212-435-6489 & Regular Mail:

November 9, 2010

Mr. William Baroni
Deputy Director
Port Authority of New York & New Jersey
225 Park Avenue South, 15th Floor
New York, New York 10003

Re: PROPOSED SHUT-DOWN OF FORT LEE ROADWAYS

Dear Director Baroni:

I preface the following correspondence to you by conceding we are all very frustrated here in Fort Lee and we are hopeful that the Port Authority will intervene and assist our community with our day-to-day battle with crippling traffic gridlock that we experience. Fort Lee has always had to deal with the extraordinary traffic burdens caused by the George Washington Bridge ("GWB"); however, lately the traffic has reached unbearable status and without some assistance from the Port Authority, Fort Lee will be in a perpetual state of emergency.

As you may recall, we met on September 16, 2010 to discuss various issues regarding the Port Authority, the Borough of Fort Lee and the promotion of an open-line communication. While we here in Fort Lee undertake to handle as many problems internally as possible utilizing all resources available to us, we have unfortunately reached a point where we are considering taking extraordinary measures to address the regular traffic shut-down and gridlock occurring in our Borough. Please permit me to elaborate.

On approximately 20 occasions over the last forty days, our Borough has been completely gridlocked. Traveling from the south to the north end of our Borough takes upwards of one hour. Our safety vehicles are unable to traverse our own thoroughfares to attend to emergencies which place our residents in harms way. Most recently, on October 30 through October 31, scheduled construction occurred on the lower level of the GWB which caused complete traffic gridlock in our Borough. Other causes of traffic shut-down include unscheduled and unanticipated events such as vehicular accidents, holiday and event traffic and even modest vehicle break-downs on the Cross Bronx Expressway.

The traffic caused by these events, and others too numerous to mention, cripples our entire community holding our residents hostage until the traffic subsides. I continue to meet with our Chief of Police, our Traffic Department and our engaged Traffic Consultants to determine how and if these ongoing gridlocks can be avoided or at least somewhat abated. There is one conclusion that we have all reached which is that this regular traffic shut-down in our Borough must somehow be alleviated.

We concede that there are many circumstances which contribute to the traffic problems that we face in Fort Lee. There is, however, a contributing factor which is easily addressed. On each and every occasion when complete and crippling traffic gridlock occurs, we contact the Port Authority Police Department and request the ranking officer to dispatch officers to the intersections committed to be manned by the Port Authority and otherwise facilitate the flow of traffic and to prohibit vehicles from "blocking the box". Vehicles which "block" the box are a direct and proximate cause of the complete traffic shut-down in our Borough. Prohibiting vehicles from blocking the intersections will certainly not cure or completely abate the traffic; however, it will at the very least allow our residents to drive through their own community to get to work, school, doctor's appointments so forth and so on. On limited occasion, the Port Authority Police Department will comply with our requests to assist our local department due to what we are told is a severe shortage of manpower. With no other alternative, we in Fort Lee dispatch our own officers to man the posts that the Port Authority is required to man, thereby depleting our resources to attend to other responsibilities required by our officers during these regular gridlock events. Consequently, we recall officers who are off-duty to assist at exorbitant expense to the Borough. Essentially, rarely is our Borough provided with assistance from the Port Authority during periods when we are most in need of assistance.

In order to personally understand and appreciate the hundreds of complaints that I have received, I have taken my children to Fort Lee High School in the morning as opposed to utilizing the public school bus service. Essentially, each and every morning I ultimately arrive at the intersection of Lemoine Avenue and Bridge Plaza South and remain at a complete standstill for approximately 30 minutes solely as a result of four or five vehicles which sit in the intersection and "block the box". Accordingly, I along with a line of hundreds of other vehicles extending back to the southernmost end of Fort Lee remain at a complete standstill. By merely preventing vehicles from blocking the intersection, hundreds of vehicles would be free to travel through the intersection to their ultimate destination and help relieve our community. This circumstance occurs at several other critical intersections in Fort Lee and are a direct cause of the regular traffic gridlock that we experience. The mere dispatching of Port Authority Police Officers to these critical intersections would substantially alleviate the problems that we face on virtually a daily basis.

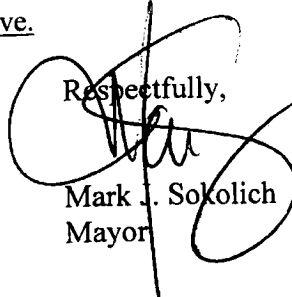
Another circumstance that is readily rectifiable and the cause of regular and avoidable traffic gridlock is the Port Authority's election to substantially reduce the number of toll booth workers and resultant reduction in toll lanes on Saturday and Sunday of each week. Consequently, many vehicles exit the major approach roads and utilize our local thoroughfares as a "short-cut" in search of available toll booths. Accordingly, even weekends no longer provide a respite from traffic and gridlock on our roadways.

Please remain assured that our community has not given up hope and has tried to cope with the daily traffic onslaught and increased frequency of complete gridlock traffic events. We offer free (borough-subsidized) bus service to the local ferry system in Edgewater, we have installed a new state-of-the-art camera system to monitor all intersections impacted by the GWB to better and more quickly dispatch our officers, we now offer a "real-time" traffic alert system advising all subscribers of traffic events and alternate routes which is accessible through our webpage which is known as "NIXLE" (see www.fortleenj.org). Most telling and based on a recent study commissioned by the Borough of Fort Lee, we employ approximately fifteen police officers directly as a result of our proximity to the George Washington Bridge and the traffic it generates on our local thoroughfares. We estimate that our Borough expends in excess \$3.5 Million per year between alternative transportation initiatives, salaries (inclusive of benefits and pension contributions) and infrastructure maintenance and replacement which would not otherwise be required. In other words, Fort Lee has and is doing more than its part to address the extraordinary burden placed on our community and we respectfully request the Port Authority to likewise make an effort.

You had indicated in our meeting that you would be our contact to address any concerns or grievances that our Borough had and I implore you to intervene in this matter. We are host community to the George Washington Bridge and respectfully request attention to the critical issues raised herein. Absent some form of relief, we find ourselves with no other alternative other than to direct the Chief of Police to completely close off our local roads over which we maintain exclusive jurisdiction to avoid Fort Lee from becoming a parking lot in the future and thereby require all vehicles to remain on the major approach thoroughfares (i.e., Route 46, Route 4, Route 80, I-95, etc.) and not otherwise meander through our local thoroughfares which causes safety concerns (especially for children) and complete traffic shut-down for all of our residents. This is an action that I would rather not take; however, we find ourselves with no other alternative.

Please contact me as soon as possible with regard to this matter. I am available to meet with you and your representatives at any time to discuss the issues raised in this correspondence and establish a protocol going forward to address the ongoing traffic shutdowns we experience here in Fort Lee and avoid the extraordinary step of closing down access to our roads. We simply have no other alternative.

Respectfully,


Mark J. Sokolich
Mayor

MJS:ml

cc: Borough Council
Borough Administrator
Police Chief Thomas O. Ripoli
William Young, Port Authority Client Manager