

## Seniors need a safer Queens Boulevard

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Here is the op-ed just published in the Queens Times Ledger on just this important topic. Vision Zero, the City's initiative to eliminate traffic deaths and injuries must always include the concerns of older persons. Please read our op-ed. We'd really like to hear your comments. Please respond both to the Queens Times Ledger directly, to your City Council members, and of course to us.

Congratulations to our 2015 summer interns, Brendan Birth and Florence Shen, who (in collaboration with Jack Kupferman) created and executed this important survey of seniors along Queens Boulevard to hear their views on improving pedestrian safety along this overused corridor.



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Wide streets with fast-moving vehicle traffic make it dangerous for seniors to navigate their own neighborhoods. Older New Yorkers are one of the groups most at risk of being injured or killed in traffic crashes. This is a significant problem in Queens, where seniors are 13 percent of the population (and growing) but make up 35 percent of pedestrian fatalities. The New York City Chapter of the Gray Panthers ([www.graypanthersnyc.org](http://www.graypanthersnyc.org)) has made it a priority to work on challenging what we call the ageism of our streetscapes—that is to say, the lack of consideration officials show for seniors when they formulate transportation policies.

As an advocacy organization of young people and seniors working together to end ageism throughout our city, we are particularly concerned about Queens Boulevard and its current street design. Last month, we teamed up with Transportation Alternatives ([www.TransAlt.org](http://www.TransAlt.org)) to conduct a survey of seniors along the boulevard. We asked them about pedestrian safety, and confirmed that the infamous “Boulevard of Death” is an incredibly hostile place for seniors.

We spoke with more than 30 seniors, and their top concerns were clear: short traffic light cycles, long crossing distances, all of which make Queens Boulevard a hazardous street to cross. Even in our small sample, one interviewee had been injured while crossing the boulevard, and another told us that her friend was one of the people killed while crossing the intersection of Queens Boulevard and 63rd Drive.

Long known as one of the most deadly streets in New York City, Queens Boulevard is currently being redesigned in several phases. Phase one, being implemented right now between Roosevelt Avenue and 73rd Street, includes expanded pedestrian space, longer light phases, and protected bike lanes (a redesign known as a “complete street,” which has been found to reduce injuries and fatalities for all users by as much as 40 percent). These changes represent a big step in the right direction.

Judging from our conversations, the next phases of the Queens Boulevard project east of 73rd Street need to be implemented just as quickly, with

similar improvements to give pedestrians—especially seniors—the time and space they need to cross safely. As the project moves forward through hearings and workshops, the goal of the entire redesign should remain the same: to make Queens Boulevard a safe, complete street that helps reduce injuries and fatalities.

While we understand that no solution will prevent all dangerous driving, we urge those involved in the redesign of Queens Boulevard to take note of the suggestions seniors are making to improve this hazardous corridor. If the city’s vision to create a “Boulevard of Life” is to meet the needs of pedestrians and motorists alike, designers will need to consider the suggestions from some of the people they intend to serve.

Here’s our note to the designers of Queens Boulevard—Save our seniors! Listen to our voices! Safety first! We’re eager to speak with all involved to achieve our goal—Zero fatalities or injuries along Queens Boulevard.

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Brendan Birth, Gray Panthers, NYC Network

[http://www.timesledger.com/stories/2015/40/kupferman\\_2015\\_10\\_02\\_q.html](http://www.timesledger.com/stories/2015/40/kupferman_2015_10_02_q.html)