



**Public Hearing
Amendments to Traffic Rules Relating to the Theatre District Zone
November 29, 2021**

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Sanne Wright and I am the External Affairs Manager at the Times Square Alliance. I would like to express my support for the proposed Theater District Zone rules. I am grateful to the Department of Transportation for issuing these rules, which will enhance pedestrian safety and improve the Times Square experience for the millions of people who work, live, or visit Times Square every year.

The recovery of Times Square is vital to the recovery of New York. Ensuring that employees, tourists, and theatergoers can feel safe and welcome as they return is integral to our recovery. I believe these rules represent real progress towards that goal.

Ten years ago, the City created the Broadway pedestrian plazas as an experiment to manage increased congestion overburdening our sidewalks. The plazas were a tremendous success; tourists, local employees, and residents could navigate Times Square safely and have a place to sit, relax and enjoy public programming. By 2020, before COVID-19 hit, the plazas welcomed over 400,000 people a day, a level of use which requires us to balance competing demands for space.

In 2016, in response to this, the Council passed common sense regulations to balance the multiple demands for use of our public spaces with pedestrian safety. These rules aimed to preserve mobility on the plazas and maintain individuals' right to engage in commercial activity in the public realm by creating flow zones and designated activity zones. Designated Activity Zones allowed for ticket selling, street performances, costumed characters posing for photos or other activities offered with an expectation of a fee or tip.

The City's interpretation of the rule has left passersby open to unwanted solicitations outside of the zones. Further, the rules did not address the displacement of designated activities to adjacent, and often overcrowded, streets that include subway and theater entrances and bus stops. In fact, in 2019, well after Local Law 53's passage, 47% of New Yorkers surveyed had an unpleasant interaction with a costumed character. Among those who work and live in Times Square, 60% reported an unpleasant interaction, and a quarter of those folks reported being touched without consent, the impact of which is even more serious post-pandemic.

We are very pleased to see Times Square is coming back. Our pedestrian counts are now close to 250,000 people per day, and over a million people have attended a Broadway show since theaters reopened last month. On weekends, our hotels are over 80% occupied. With the return of international travel, we anticipate that these numbers will continue to grow, and we hope to see a holiday season much like pre-pandemic years, when Times Square overflowed with visitors.

These new rules designate the most heavily trafficked blocks of Seventh Avenue, Broadway, and 42nd Street as flow zones, while providing additional designated activity zones with updated rules. By clarifying that the entire designated activity must take place in the designated activity zone, these rules allow us to better ensure pedestrian safety and provide the best possible experience for our returning visitors and workers.

Today, more than ever, it is essential that we proactively ensure the safety of those who visit Times Square. If visitors feel safe in Times Square, the busiest crossroads of the world, they will feel safe across the City. Adopting these rules puts us further along the path to recovery and lets the world know that New York City is a safe and exciting place to return to.

TIMES
SQUARE
ALLIANCE