

DAILY NEWS EDITORIAL

Halftime underground

Gov. Cuomo's Fix NYC panel, recommending congestion pricing to curb traffic and fund the ailing subways, issued its report exactly five weeks ago, Jan. 19.

Exactly five weeks from now is April 1, the deadline for the state budget, the best and perhaps only legislative vehicle to get Albany to enact a fee for cars and trucks entering Manhattan.

So millions of daily subway riders are at the halfway mark between the report's hope of generating billions of needed funds to put the city's public transit system on sound footing and the reality of politicians having to step forward and sign onto a plan to save the trains by having drivers chip in.

Happily, there has been progress in the first half of this win-or-go-home game.

Cuomo, who has properly claimed responsibility for transit and made some smart moves in directing MTA Chairman Joe Lhota to fix the trains, has introduced elements of the blueprint into his executive budget. He could and should have added more, but as an opening bid, it's a strong start.

While not yet formally pushing for a fee on private vehicles entering Manhattan south of 60th St., Cuomo has submitted legislation to fight cars blocking the box. He also wants to combat the abuse of parking placards — overdue — and to study of the impact of buses on traffic.

Most significantly, the governor has advanced

the concept to charge every taxi, Uber and livery fare entering Manhattan south of 96th.

Keep going. Signals are green ahead.

Mayor de Blasio has also made some important strides. Gone is his trashing of congestion pricing as regressive and hurting the boroughs. The truth, to which he may be awakening, is that it is actually progressive, helping the poor by having those who are better off pay more. And it helps the boroughs by boosting subways there; 321 of 472 subway stations are outside Manhattan.

Even better, de Blasio agrees with Cuomo on slapping a small surcharge on taxis/Uber/liveries. He wants it put in place as soon as possible.

The mayor should have the TLC quickly produce a surcharge plan ready for Albany to okay. Let's start plowing the money — every dollar — into the Transit Authority, earmarked for urgent upgrades that make the trains run more reliably.

At the other end of City Hall, Council Speaker Corey Johnson backs congestion pricing and, unlike the mayor, wants the city to put up money for a rescue plan right away. Johnson needs to keep working on de Blasio to agree. There is a deal there.

While there is lots of progress on the ground in Albany and at City Hall, what hasn't made progress is the deplorable conditions underground. The subways remain in crisis.

To solve it will require big bucks — money that can only come from a congestion pricing fee.

They had one job

Law-enforcement officials cannot prevent every American crime. The temptation to cheaply point fingers in the wake of tragedy is powerful, and all too easy.

That important caveat aside, and the routine diligence and heroism of so many police officers duly acknowledged, we know enough about the Parkland massacre to say, without a doubt, that the ineptitude was legion.

Last fall, the Federal Bureau of Investigation got a tip that Nikolas Cruz had boasted in a YouTube comment, "Im going to be a professional school shooter" (sic, and sick). A Mississippi man told the FBI; it yielded no intervention with Cruz.

Last month, the FBI got a tip from someone close to Cruz, with info on Cruz's gun ownership, erratic behavior and disturbing social-media posts. A transcript of that call obtained by NBC

News Friday revealed that the tipster said: "I know he's, he's going to explode," adding that though Cruz had talked about killing himself, "now he has switched it to, he wants to kill people." No one followed up. Devastating.

Local authorities, if possible, were even more negligent. Since 2011, area police had filed more than 30 incident reports, many prompted by calls Cruz's mother made to police after her son's threats, violent outbursts and other bad behavior.

Not least, an armed sheriff's deputy failed utterly to do his job by staying outside Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School while Cruz was inside killing students and teachers. Local police officers that came to the scene waited outside, too.

The sheriff may have been mismatched against a young man with a death wish wielding an AR-15, but the job is to serve and protect. Too many professionals failed, and failed fatefully.

Govs vs. guns

With Republicans who control Congress failing so far even to pass a simple bill ensuring the federal background check system works as intended, much less requiring vetting of all gun sales, states are being forced to step into the breach.

Enter the Democratic governors of New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island and New Jersey — combined population 33 million — who Thursday launched a joint effort to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous and unstable people, one that will hopefully soon find far more partners.

Gov. Cuomo and his three allies will merge databases of prohibited purchasers to ensure that if

a person is barred in one state because of a felony conviction, or a record of domestic abuse, or a history of psychiatric problems, the buyer can't just step across state lines to get a firearm in another.

Additional coordination will improve tracking and seizure of illegal gun sales.

And a first-in-the-nation regional research consortium will crunch state-level data to reach sophisticated, scientific conclusions on how to save lives. That's exactly the job the Centers for Disease Control would be doing if Congress and the NRA hadn't cuffed its hands.

This is what counts as progress in a country paralyzed for a generation by the gun lobby.

De Blasio vs. NYC's historic buildings

BE OUR GUEST

BY ERIC UHLFELDER

Pastis was an authentic Parisian brasserie located on a once obscure corner in the West Village where 9th Ave., Little West 12th St. and Gansevoort St. collide. Even the intersection felt Parisian — a carrefour rarely found in New York. Then, in 2014, Keith McNally's popular café was pushed out by intensive redevelopment permitted by the city — redevelopment that has decimated the classic 19th century industrial design that Pastis so colorfully embraced.

Such is the vicious cycle now threatening beautiful buildings and places across the city. And the Landmarks Preservation Commission, the last line of defense for protecting historic New York, is rolling over rather than pushing back.

In the case of Pastis, because LPC allowed a developer to more than double the commercial space, the restaurant could no longer afford to occupy the corner. A new glass structure now perversely rises above the historic walls. Adjacent Gansevoort St. is also being ripped apart, despite being landmarked and listed on the New York State and National Registries of Historic Places.

This is a big deal because there are more than 140 historic districts across the five boroughs, and they could all be vulnerable to district-wrecking redevelopment. Those under the most pressure include those on the Upper West Side, Ladies' Mile, SoHo and in Greenwich Village.

Two key players are responsible for LPC contradicting its own mandate: Chairwoman Meenakshi Srinivasan — who openly questions the LPC's right to tell architects what to do — and Mayor de Blasio, who is promoting redevelopment at the cost of the city's architectural heritage.

A recent study commissioned by the New York Landmarks Conservancy showed the Landmarks Commission in a typical year approved more than 99.5% of all applications in historic districts.

In spite of having created several new landmark districts since taking over LPC in 2014, Srinivasan's commission is shepherding new design she thinks is compatible with existing historic areas. It is not.

Perhaps Srinivasan's failure has something to do with her background. De Blasio named her after a stint as chair and commissioner of the Board of Standards and Appeals, an agency known for granting zoning variances to expand development rights. Before that, she worked at the Department of City

Planning promoting development. Though an architect, she is not a preservationist. Strangely, only two such professionals sit on the commission.

One of Srinivasan's first actions upon taking over LPC, according to sources inside the commission, was instructing her staff to take off their preservation hats. The agency has since seen a significant exodus of experienced staff and landmarked areas compromised.

In the Greenwich Village Historic District, a post-modern mansion approved for 145 Perry St. — built by a billionaire hedge-fund manager — was approved, despite having nothing to do with the district. In the East Village, LPC ignored requests by preservationists to landmark a group of Beaux-Arts apartment buildings, permitting development of a new graceless hotel. And what is a glass tower doing on the riverfront in Dumbo, whose very character is 19th-century New York?

Determining appropriate design should be simple. A new building should share the rich aesthetic characteristics that led to district designation. That leaves plenty of options for any imaginative architect.

Landmarks is failing to preserve

Additional process problems: Many commissioners' day jobs require good relations with LPC, creating conflicts of interest; and LPC's chronic failure to acknowledge the value of ordinary buildings in districts. The commission often fails to look beyond a building's mere facade to uncover its historic worth.

LPC uses historic reports — some written more than 50 years ago — as guidance. But these reports never get updated, so LPC can't know when once abundant building types become rare due to widespread destruction. Example: the current demolition of the earliest pure purpose parking garage at 11 Jane St. in the Greenwich Village Historic District.

Early parking garages played an important role in the city's evolution. And 11 Jane was remarkable engineering for its day, which inspired a new generation of such structures.

Before we lose more of our architectural history, LPC needs to be made more independent — with leadership that's committed to preserving the less than 5% of the city under its watch, whose character made New York, New York.

Uhlfelder is author of books on finance and design, including "The Origins of Modern Architecture."