



Mayor Eric Adams  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

April 24, 2024

Dear Mayor Adams,

As dedicated advocates who believe in the limitless potential of New York City and your “get stuff done” philosophy, we write to urge your administration to seize the opportunity to transform the Downtown Manhattan Heliport into a first-of-its-kind, 21st century hub for sustainable marine freight. Doing so would truly establish New York as a global leader in creating a system of “blue highways” to move cargo more sustainably – in this case from various ports in New Jersey, the Hudson Valley, the NY State Canal System, and along the East Coast, to the five boroughs of New York City, starting with Lower Manhattan.

In 2022, in collaboration with Governor Hochul, you announced the recommendations of the "New" New York Blue Ribbon Panel, that included a visionary proposal for water and micro-mobility-based cargo transport that promises to create jobs, remove thousands of trucks from city streets, reduce pollution and asthma, improve street safety, and reaffirm New York City as a global leader in the fight against climate change. That visionary proposal was a commitment of investment in what are known as “blue highways” and the infrastructure required to support them.

Originally built to service maritime freight, today Pier 6 (a.k.a. the Downtown Manhattan Heliport) is where 30,000 mostly tourist and luxury charter helicopter flights take off and land each year. Beyond a miniscule contribution to the city’s coffers, this city managed waterfront asset contributes little to our city – besides significant pollution, unrelenting and distressing levels of unwanted noise, and serious health and safety impacts for millions of New Yorkers – and virtually no benefit to the public that owns it.

We – a maritime, transportation and environment focused coalition – are aware that the New York City Economic Development Corporation (“EDC”) is weighing future options for the heliport. While we sincerely appreciate the pilot project thinking behind the 10% nod to maritime freight, we firmly believe the city should instead convert this maritime asset into a predominantly “green” freight facility. Under this scenario, all non-essential helicopter flights would be phased out over the next five years, as maritime freight companies, routes and terminals get established and the movement of cargo by water and micro-mobility starts to gain traction. Instead, the EDC’s RFP makes clear the City intends to continue the status quo of private helicopter operations for another 20 years.

Traffic has plagued New Yorkers for too long and has gotten orders of magnitude worse in recent years due to the proliferation of online shopping, serviced by a proliferation of gas-powered delivery trucks and vans. By our estimates, reactivating Pier 6 predominantly as a marine freight terminal, connected to a micro-mobility network of zero emission human-scale vehicles, would transport an estimated 11,000 tons of cargo and remove as many as 1,000 trucks from city roads, per day – creating hundreds of new jobs in the process. To do the opposite – allow this publicly owned and rare maritime asset to be used, almost exclusively, to benefit wealthy elites at the expense of every day New Yorkers – would be a grave injustice and colossal error.



Your administration, to its credit, has done more than previous administrations to move the city a little bit closer to making this transition to “blue highways” a reality. But at the current pace, it will be years before New York City can boast a fully-fledged green freight system. Nearly daily evidence of a rapidly changing climate demonstrates that time is not our friend, especially with cargo volumes expected to increase by an estimated 50% by 2050, notwithstanding NYC EDC’s Blue Highways aspirations. Likewise, Manhattan has few maritime piers left and Pier 6 is ideally situated and sized to establish the City’s first permanent, carbon-neutral, freight terminal.

Mayor Adams, you have a unique opportunity to be the first mayor to go beyond mere talk and the aspirational declarations by firmly establishing a sustainable, water based, freight industry in New York City, and in doing so, setting an example for the world. Literally within a year, we could see new routes established and refurbished ships and ferries moving cargo freight from around the region to Lower Manhattan, distributed to their ultimate destinations via a system of micro-mobility “vehicles.”

Presently, and for several decades now, Pier 6, in the form of the Downtown Manhattan Heliport, has been a major environmental liability for the City – with no benefit to the public and enormous social and environmental harm perpetrated on all of us. You have an opportunity to turn this liability into a significant environmental asset, with huge benefits for all New Yorkers and for our shared climate. We stand ready to get behind you to bring it to life.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alex Matthiessen".

Alex Matthiessen  
Move NY

*On behalf of:*

Julie Tighe  
NY League of Conservation Voters

Rena Reynolds  
Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Betsy Plum  
Riders Alliance

Tracy Brown  
Riverkeeper

Andrew Willner  
Center for Post Carbon Logistics



Melissa Elstein  
Stop the Chop

Greg Remaud  
NY/NJ Baykeeper

Carolina Salguero  
PortSide

Melissa Everett  
Sustainable Hudson Valley

Gregg Zuman  
REVX

David Borton  
Solar Sal Boats

p.s. We understand your administration believes eVTOLS are the answer to a more sustainable DMH, but eVTOLS are years away from commercial viability. Furthermore, even if they are a bit less noisy, they won't address the fact that a publicly owned maritime asset is neither hosting a "water dependent" use, nor benefiting the public. Moreover, until we have a carbon-free power grid, we should be devoting our fossil fuel "energy budget" to zero-emission freight vessels that provide enormous public benefit, rather than wasting it on private helicopter tours that provide none. To the extent that eVTOLS could be used to move cargo, as the EDC's RFP anticipates, that's better but relatively meaningless. Per Kw of electric battery, eVTOLS will move pounds of cargo compared to the tons that could be transported by water. In any case, we don't believe New Yorkers want our skies filled with helicopters buzzing around like flies. Quieter or not, they would continue to be a nuisance.

Cc: Andrew Kimball, NYCEDC  
Ann C. Phillips, MARAD  
Beth Ann Rooney, Port Authority of NY/NJ  
Capt. John Andrechik, U.S. Coast Guard–New York