

April 8, 2020

Mayor James Kenney  
City of Philadelphia  
City Hall, Office 215  
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Cc: Managing Director Brian Abernathy, Commissioner Kathryn Ott Lovell, Deputy Managing Director Michael Carroll, Director Anne Fadullon

Mayor Kenney,

We are writing to express our support, on behalf of our constituents, to open more streets in Philadelphia to bicycles and pedestrians, as part of a strategy to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Social distancing is widely recognized as one of the most effective ways to slow the spread of this virus, and while people will continue to need to go outdoors to shop for food, walk their pets, and get periodic exercise, more space is needed to do so safely.

We applaud all of the efforts the City's administration is making to protect our constituents from the COVID-19 pandemic, and we know the administration is working through a long list of priorities for dealing with the spread of the virus. We thank the Mayor and Managing Director's Office for closing Martin Luther King Jr. Drive to vehicles last month. We believe this showed national leadership towards an effective strategy that is now being replicated in other cities.

Unfortunately, MLK Jr. Drive is not enough to protect all our citizens. While MLK Drive is a centrally-located corridor in Philadelphia, it's not accessible to folks in neighborhoods around Philadelphia, all of whom need space to socially distance as they head outside.

Our parks and sidewalks throughout the city continue to be overcrowded and more action is needed. We believe now is the time to take that action. [INRIX data](#) shows that vehicle volume is down 37% in Philadelphia since the beginning of stay at home orders, creating the opportunity to continue this successful strategy and close more roads to vehicles. This will give people the space they critically need during this pandemic to practice social distancing. Anecdotally, we have heard of our residents walking in neighborhood streets with motor vehicle traffic to effectively distance themselves from others. This is not acceptable.

Parks and sidewalks in every neighborhood are packed full of people needing to exercise and enjoy the physical and mental health benefits of being outside during this difficult time. Commercial corridors with narrow sidewalks are overcrowded as people access essential items like food. Some of the roads we suggest closing include roads through FDR Park, Hunting Park, and West Fairmount Park; Kelly Drive; Ben Franklin Parkway's outer lanes; and 9th Street in the

Italian Market. All of these roads are closed regularly for events throughout the year, so closing them in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19 should be achievable without stressing resources too thin.

As you know, quick and decisive steps to flatten the curve and promote social distancing are crucial. We are urging the City of Philadelphia to open more roadways to pedestrians across the City to relieve the stress put on its parks, and allow people to spread out and practice social distancing in a safe and healthy manner. Already, New York City has closed a number of streets in each borough to motor vehicles. “Street openings come after Gov. Cuomo on Sunday asked de Blasio and City Council Speaker Corey Johnson to come up with a plan to reduce density in public areas across the city — including opening up some streets to pedestrians,” noted the New York Daily News.

We see no reason Philadelphia can’t do the same for the health of our citizens.

We hope to work with the administration to find as many solutions as possible to protect public health during the COVID-19 crisis. We believe that allowing space for people when they need to be outside their homes is a critical piece of that work.

We understand the stress these measures can put on City government, but have looked strategically at the corridors mentioned above, believing these streets can be closed to motor vehicles using few city resources.

We also believe this plan can be implemented in a way that is low on costs (including with barriers but no active police presence, as is done for street closures regularly) and is an important part of any effective strategy to limit the spread of the virus.

Sincerely,

Darrell Clarke  
Council President, 5th District

Kenyatta Johnson  
Councilmember, 2nd District

Jamie Gauthier  
Councilmember, 3rd District

Helen Gym  
Councilmember At-Large

Derek Green  
Councilmember At-Large

