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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO ANNOUNCES COMPLETION OF FDR HIGHWAY
RESURFACING, URGES DRIVERS TO SLOW DOWN IN WORK ZONES**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Alright. Well, it is a pleasure to be here to recognize some of the city's true unsung heroes – the men and women of the DOT Roadway Repair and Maintenance division, who do extraordinary work for this city every day.

I have to tell you – these are folks who work very, very hard; who have the pleasure of knowing that their work makes a very tangible impact on people's lives. You make people's lives better every day. You make people's lives safer. And the people who benefit don't necessarily get to meet you and say thank you, but we're here today to say thank you, because you have done something great for this city.

[Applause]

Now, to our friends in the media, prepare for some amazing facts that will astound you. This effort to repave a huge swath of the FDR started in July and finishes tomorrow night. They've done all this in less than six months.

And this crew and crews like them have literally done something that has never been done before. They approached the FDR as a single unit; they went at the whole thing simultaneously in less than six months. And what they did is extraordinary – repaving 35 lane miles – look at every one of those lanes out there; think about a whole mile of one lane – 35 lane miles, all in less than six months. That's never been attempted before in the history of this city – certainly never been achieved before. These folks did it, along with their colleagues. And for so many New Yorkers now, the drive around this city is better because of this extraordinary effort.

35 lane miles – would you like a visualization? It's as if you created a road from Co-Op City in the Bronx to Tottenville in Staten Island. If you went that whole distance, a single road, that's how far what these folks did – that's how far it would be.

And here's an even more remarkable fact. This project came in ahead of schedule and under budget. Let's give them a round of applause for that.

[Applause]

Now, this was made possible by an investment of \$7.1 million dollars by the city, and we made this a priority. It's obviously one of our most intensely used highways, one of the gateways to the city for people from all over the world. It was very, very important that this highway be made better for everyone, and this crew and the other crews did it. Now – and the crew right here, part of an 85-member crew. Together, they have more than a thousand years of experience.

Don't feel old, everyone – it's okay.

[Laughter]

A thousand years of experience that they brought to this effort, which is why they were able to do it so quickly and so well.

This is not easy work. Let me affirm – it is not easy work. It's long hours. This started in the heat of summer. You can imagine what it's like doing the work now, as it's starting to become winter. Doesn't matter if it's raining, doesn't matter how cold or hot – they are out there. And they have to worry all the time about the traffic moving past them, especially on the overnight hours, when visibility is low.

We are focused on the safety of the people who do this work. We want to make sure each and every one of them gets home to their families each day. So a very big part of what DOT does is ensuring the safety of the people who make our roads better.

And it's always important we send a message to drivers in this city – whenever you see a work crew, slow down. When you see people working on the road, slow down. Remember, they are people doing a lot for all of us; they have families they need to get home to.

We also help drivers to know when roads are going to be paved so they can make adjustments. There's paving updates provided to the media and to the public.

And we make sure that any motorist who violates the rules in a work zone pays for it. We have increased the fine for motorists who speed in work zones, and we will aggressively enforce those laws.

So, we are here today to talk about the very good work that this group has done, necessary work, courageous work that makes the lives of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers better every year. And I just want to say something simple to folks here, on behalf of almost eight and a half million New Yorkers: thank you for the tremendous work you've done.

[Applause]

Just to give you a sense of the magnitude, 150,000 drivers travel this road every day, and they all are feeling the difference of this work. And this is one part – one part – of a much bigger effort to resurface 2,500 lane miles over the next 18 months, all over this city – 2,500 lane miles.

Would you like a visualization of that? That's as if – DOT is resurfacing 2,500 lane miles all over the city. That's as much distance as going from New York City to Las Vegas – that is how much they are doing in the next year and a half. We're investing \$1.6 billion dollars in city funds over the next decade to resurface roads all over the city.

And it goes without saying – the money is important, but the people power is what matters the most – these good men and women who make the work happen every day.

Just quickly in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, the woman who leads the operation, and she does it with great energy, great focus. When Polly and I talked about making this happen, she knew it was a daunting task but she brought a great can-do attitude to it, with all the leadership of DOT. They said they knew it would be tough, but they were going to get it done. And Polly, you were good to your word – our Transportation Commissioner Polly Trottenberg.

[Applause]

[...]

Mayor: Alright, we're going to take questions on this topic and then we'll go to off-topic. On this topic first. Michael.

Question: Mr. Mayor, when did you first approach your commissioner about the repaving project and I was wondering why the FDR was chosen as the first, sort of – the pilot?

Mayor: Well, you know, we had, for a long time – I think many of us had heard complaints about the FDR. I certainly experienced it constantly, seeing how it just wasn't in an acceptable state of repair for the greatest city in the world and, you know, as you heard, one of the very busiest highways in all of New York City, and one that is one of our gateways. And I think it was important to really put a focus on it. So, I think the conversation probably started late last year, if I remember correctly, in going into the budget process. I like to give Polly reports from where I am around the city of what I'm seeing and I certainly call her when I hit the – hit the bump in the road. I tell her exactly where it is, so she can follow up and call her from different places. But this has been one I think we had the most complaints about and the most concern about for a long time.

On this topic –

Question: So, with the repaving, how does that kind of help the East Side [inaudible] –

Mayor: How does it –

Question: -- flooding and other concerns, because of the, you know – because of the climate change?

Mayor: The flooding concerns? You mean on the FDR? Let's let Polly speak to that.

Commissioner Polly Trottenberg, Department of Transportation: Well, as I had mentioned, one of our partners in this project listed environment – the Department of Environmental Protection. And one of the things we did is we always fixed all the catch-basins on the FDR Drive that had not also been replaced, we think, for an equal number of decades. So, we're thinking that's going to help a lot with the drainage and the flooding problems on the FDR. They've been great partners on that.

Mayor: On this topic –

Question: So, Mr. Mayor –

Mayor: You can do it, come out from concealment. Show yourself.

[Laughter]

Question: So, the route to and from City Hall and Gracie Mansion, wouldn't have anything to do with the fact that this was the project –

Mayor: Oh, I've certainly experienced it but again we've heard complaints about this one for a long, long time and it's, again, for one of our very busiest roads, absolutely, was well beyond the point that it needed a major overhaul. And, I think that's what is part of this entire concept of this repaving program. We're going to go to the most important roads in each borough, as you heard Polly delineate them – the ones we've done this year, the ones we're doing next year. This is a very large scale repaving program – and in the case of the FDR, a unprecedented one – because it's one of the most important quality of life issues to New Yorkers and, of course, it's a matter of safety as well. So, this is exactly what government should be focused on. When I was out in Staten Island, on the South Shore with Polly, a few months back – very different weather – this is one of the things people there said was one of their number one concerns, that they had roads that were dangerous and constantly, they're being jostled in their cars, and if government could do one thing, they wanted us to repave the roads right. So, we're really focused on repaving and getting it right all over the city.

In the back –

Question: [Inaudible] the FDR all the way up to the George Washington [inaudible] –

Mayor: Define exactly what we're – go ahead –

Commissioner Trottenberg: We went Brooklyn Bridge up to 125th.

Mayor: Yes, Michael.

Question: This is probably – this is probably the road you take most often now as Mayor. Do you – back in your driving days, as Public Advocate, did you – I wonder if you could talk a little bit about some of your frustrations as a driver, going up and down the FDR –

Mayor: Well, I would say – so, when I drove myself, which I remember fondly, I didn't – look I've delineated previous gatherings, the 'Roads from Hell' like the Cross-Bronx – which still is burned into my memory. So, it wasn't as bad as that because, yea, you got jostled around on the FDR but at least you got somewhere. But, no, this was always a bad road in terms of potholes, bumps, etc. But I do think it got worse in recent years and I noticed that increasingly over the years before holding this office. This one, I think, is partly because of the incessant wear-and-tear. And, as Polly said, I think, before, the assumption was you could only go at it a little bit of it at a time. So, some parts got really, really bad and when Polly and I started talking about it, I – I offered the concept I often say to my commissioners; what's it going to take to get it right? And to her credit, she and her team went back and said, look, there is a way, if we do everything at once, in a very concentrated fashion, we can actually change the reality fundamentally but it's going to cost real money and I have to say, it was money very well spent.

Last call on this and then we will get ready for off-topic – oh yes, please, in the back –

Question: [Inaudible] Harlem River Drive –

Mayor: Let's ask Polly Trottenberg.

Commissioner Trottenberg: Oh. Well, welcome to the complexity of New York City. Harlem River Drive is a state-owned roadway but – but I'm happy to say, I think the partnership we've had here – we are in a good dialogue with the state right now about working together on some of their roadway pieces, as well, so stay tuned on that one.

Mayor: Okay, last call on FDR and repaving. Going once, going twice – okay, off-topic it is, off topic. Yes, Marcia –

Question: [inaudible] special prosecutor that is investigating charges of grade-fixing at DeWitt Clinton High School, which, as you know, is one of the recovery schools – you're reaction to that and do you think that – you know, what else could be done to help this failing school?

Mayor: Well, two things. My Department of Education initiated that investigation. And that investigation will proceed promptly, and if we find any wrongdoing, there will be very serious consequences for the individual involved. The renewal schools effort is a major priority for us. We've put a lot of resources into it. What we're finding in renewal schools is increased attendance. We saw an improvement in test scores from the previous year to the last. We see the beginnings of real turnaround, but it's going to take a lot of work. We said from the beginning this would be a very tough effort, but worth it. But, anytime we see a problem, we're going to go right at it. If that requires an investigation, we'll do it.

Question: Mayor, just a follow up – do you think that the principal felt pressure to [inaudible] because it –

Mayor: This is an investigation. I don't know the details. That's – but again, the Department of Education initiated that investigation. If we see anything that concerns us, we're going to look into it immediately.

Question: Last week, before Thanksgiving, the Governor's Office said that they believed that you could not manage the city's homelessness crisis. What's your response to that? And do you have hope that you'll be able to work together on some kind of – the – the 30,000 or [inaudible] supportive housing units?

Mayor: Look, we are taking aggressive steps, including our commitment to 15,000 units of supportive housing. The fact is this city is dealing with a very tough challenge, but it's taking it head on and making the changes we need to address it. I refer you to an editorial in AM New York today that I think spoke volumes, about the fact that the city is doing what is necessary to address this crisis. The state needs to step up now. The city initiated 500 new safe haven beds to get people off the streets, and get them to the drug treatment and to the mental health services they need. The city put a billion dollars more into helping people get out of shelter, and doing the outreach work we need to keep people from going into shelter to begin with – plus a billion dollars on top of that in capital money for supportive housing that we recently announced. The city has gotten 20,000 people out of shelter and into housing in the last year and a half – that is handling the crisis. Now, it is a big problem, and it will take a long time to address it more fully, but I have said we're going to turn the tide on this. It's going to be person by person – because literally each homeless person has their own challenge – and we're going to go at each person – get them to housing one by one; get them to mental health services; get them to substance abuse support. The City of New York is doing this work. It's time for the state to step up.

Question: Just to follow up, the Governor's Office is personally criticizing your management skills [inaudible]

Mayor: You know, that's political posturing. It's just as simple as that. The City of New York is doing the work. It's time for the state to step up.

Question: Mayor, regarding what happened in Colorado Springs over the weekend, some of the officials from Planned Parenthood have said that it was toxic rhetoric by GOP presidential candidates that is partly responsible for what happened there. Do you agree with those officials and their statements?

Mayor: I would say it's two things at once. The toxic rhetoric is very bad for this country, and, I think, is unfair, doesn't represent the reality of Planned Parenthood, which is an extraordinary organization that this administration supports fully. I think the individual involved obviously is someone with real mental health problems, who committed an act of violence that was unacceptable by every measure. So I think we need to address the toxic environment because of what it means for policy, not because of an individual who did something horrendous. I think we need to address it because we have an attempt right now, to undermine Planned Parenthood. And Planned Parenthood, is necessary is necessary for the health and well-being of women all over this country.

Question: New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, [inaudible] union leader. A: Do you think it's a sign that he has momentum. And B: What do you think that, sort of, says about the [inaudible] state of the Republican –

Mayor: I – I'm not a political pundit. I think it's very early in this campaign, that's the only thing I'd say. People should not overrate anybody's momentum or movement, at this point.

Question: [inaudible] Queen's arsonist –

Mayor: No, I don't have an update on that but we'll get you later.

Question: [Inaudible] resistance to your affordable housing plan by borough boards [inaudible]. I was wondering your reaction to that and [inaudible].

Mayor: Look – and when I was a City Council member, I worked with community boards very closely and, obviously, the borough board in Brooklyn. They provide important feedback; they provide perspective that helps us as we’re shaping our plan. But everyone knows, in this city, community boards are part of a much bigger process that includes the City Council, the City Planning Commission, the Mayor’s Office – so, those advisory votes, are meaningful, but they’re not the final word. And, we also know that community boards are often negatively, you know – when it comes to anything that might be new development in a community – often negatively disposed. That’s not a news flash, we know that. What we’re talking about is a different approach to development and I don’t blame people who haven’t seen it before, for having tough questions. But we’re talking about demanding much more from developers, creating much more affordable housing that’s ever been create before; protecting people in communities with legal services to stop eviction and harassment – it’s a whole new approach and, of course, there’ll be doubting Thomases at first, but I think over time, we’ll be able to show people it works.

Okay, we’re coming right here. Rich –

Question: Mr. Mayor, you’re health commissioner has put up a new thing about salt, I guess trying to keep people –

Mayor: New thing about salt, Rich?

Question: Well, you know, I didn’t cover it –

Mayor: [inaudible] another word you could use.

[Laughter]

Question: How about your salt use –

Mayor: I thought you’d become a millennial right there –

[Laughter]

What about my salt usage? Is that what you’re asking?

Question: Yes, it is.

Mayor: I eat too much salt. I, too, have sinned, Rich. I have to say, in my ancestral cuisine, there’s a lot of salt. And I was brought up with a lot of salt. And I, luckily – Chirlane is very, very adamant about reducing the use of salt. So, my hand has been slapped many times. I’ve been stared down. The salt shaker has been moved to other side of the table. I’m on the pathway to becoming a better human being.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: Yes, I think there’s more to that story than was originally reported, from what we’re hearing. I think there are other considerations that went into it but the bottom line is: whenever there is quality-of-life problem, we’re going to go at it – that’s the 48 precinct; they’ve been deeply involved with the merchants along Arthur Avenue, and with the BID. I asked some very specific questions about that situation. It comes down to three homeless individuals, along the Arthur Avenue strip, who have been a problem and they’re know to the police, they’re known to the Department of Homeless Services, and they’re being addressed in a very forthright manner.

Question: Mr. Mayor, there’s a guy dressed up as Santa Claus outside of Macy’s – this is kind of the same inequality of life – I guess he’s charging tourists five dollars to pose for photos, kind of in the same way as

some of the Times Square hustlers. I was just wondering if you're aware of it and if it's causing you any concern –

Mayor: Look, if it's one individual and he's not harassing people or being menacing or breaking the law in any way, that's one individual. But, any violation of law will be dealt with by NYPD very aggressively.

Thanks everyone.

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