

WEST SIDE URGES WIDER SIDEWALKS

Would Narrow Streets to Provide Promenades

The West Side is fighting to recover some of its sidewalks and to challenge a basic city policy.

At issue are 97th and 100th Streets, between Central Park West and Amsterdam Avenue, five-lane thoroughfares that the Borough President's Planning Board No. 7 feels are both a hazard and a waste of valuable space.

It wants the city to narrow the streets and widen the sidewalks to permit the creation of broad, tree-lined promenades dotted with flowerbeds, benches and sandboxes.

The streets were widened four years ago when the construction of Park West Village did away with 98th and 99th Streets, between Central Park West and Amsterdam Avenue. The city's policy has been to widen bordering streets when a development closes internal streets.

However, the board feels that the city went "overboard," widening 97th Street from 30 to 72 feet and creating what some residents call "the 97th Street speedway," "the West Side's dragstrip" and "the great divide."

Cars can be observed being gunned at the red light at the Central Park 97th Street transverse exit. When the light turns green, they race west down the one-way street, apparently in an attempt to make the lights at Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues.

"I don't even try to make it across," said a young mother pushing a stroller along the south side of the street. "There's a good supermarket and some nice play areas in Park West Village that I would like to go to, but I don't want to risk it."

Barry Benepe, a member of the Streets, Traffic and Transit Committee of the board, said that at peak times 800 cars an hour use 97th Street. He said that the average flow on the street was about 400 an hour.

The board is proposing that 97th Street be narrowed to three lanes, which it feels will be more than adequate. One lane can handle 500 cars an hour.

There is no similar traffic problem on 100th Street, where the peak is 180 cars an hour and the average 150 cars. The committee proposes that the

street be narrowed to two lanes.

Another committee argument for narrowing the street is that there is a cluster of city facilities, including a library, a health clinic and a police and fire station on the block. They were built there by the city to create a village atmosphere for the development-marked area.

"The street is like a major highway through the area, destroying any village atmosphere the city hoped to create," said Alan Randall, chairman of the committee.