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For Fifth Avenue by the Park, 2 East Sides

By **MICHAEL M. GRYNBAUM**

Fifth Avenue has never divided the city quite like this.

A geographic tiff broke out last week after Scott M. Stringer, Manhattan's borough president, noted that [the bus signs](#) along Central Park on Fifth Avenue identified the streets as west, not east.

This seemed peculiar for an area normally known as the Upper East Side. But students of the street grid insisted that the signs, on the western side of the avenue, were correct: anything west of Fifth Avenue, after all, is technically the West Side of Manhattan.

On Thursday, an official verdict was issued: East it is!

Along the 50 blocks of Fifth Avenue that border the park, "there are no intersections with streets having the prefix 'West,'" the city's transportation commissioner, [Janette Sadik-Khan](#), wrote in a letter to Mr. Stringer.

Ms. Sadik-Khan conceded that the signs had "incorrectly" identified the cross streets, and she pledged that the proper prefix, "East" would appear by the end of April.

Mr. Stringer, reached by telephone on Thursday, declared himself pleased.

"There was a real contradiction on the streets," he said, noting that some blocks had multiple signs that read both East and West. "It made sense to clarify what was west and what was east."

But told of East's triumph, some grid purists cried foul.

"The D.O.T. can put up whatever signs it wants," said Samuel I. Schwartz, a former transportation commissioner and the traffic engineer believed by many to have coined the term gridlock. "I will always refer to the west side of Fifth Avenue as the West Side of

Manhattan. This won't change a thing in my mind.”

The Transportation Department has received tens of thousands of service requests from the public since the signs first went up in 1997, but, Ms. Sadik-Khan wrote, “We are unaware of previous requests to make this particular change.”

One prominent New Yorkologist observed that, in this case, the city may have taken the more pragmatic approach.

“The Department of Transportation is putting practice above principle,” said Mitchell L. Moss, director of the Rudin Center for Transportation at New York University. “This reflects the way New Yorkers perceive the city, not the rules of the grid.”

“The Constitution is subject to interpretation,” Mr. Moss added, “and so is the street grid of New York.”