

Sustainable Streets: 2013 and Beyond

New York City Department of Transportation



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Letter from the Mayor

Dear Friends:



This progress report from the New York City Department of Transportation caps a remarkable period of progress and innovation. I want to thank and congratulate Commissioner Sadik-Khan and the entire DOT workforce for their untiring efforts to provide safe, attractive streets and to keep New Yorkers moving.

The city enjoyed rapid growth and development in the 2000s and has weathered the Great Recession better than much of our country. We have a bright, prosperous future ahead, in part because we have striven to manage growth in ways that improve our quality of life and reduce congestion. That is why our long-range plan for sustainable development, PlaNYC, called for new priorities in transportation, which the Department of Transportation has delivered.

New York cannot grow without becoming more efficient, and the good news is that public transit has accommodated most of our growth in travel over the past decade. We need to ensure that this trend continues, and that we continue to develop travel options that take maximum advantage of the city's density. Our Select Bus Service is speeding travel and attracting riders in all five boroughs, at relatively low cost. Local bike lanes and CitiBike stations expand the reach of public transit—bike parking demand is heavy at many subway stations, and about half of CitiBike users say they ride to or from a transit stop. A transportation system that offers more choices and allows New Yorkers to better tailor the means of travel to the trips they need to make creates a more efficient, attractive, and stronger city.

The economic case for safer, more attractive, and functional streetscapes could not be stronger, as the extensive documentation developed by DOT around its projects makes clear. Creating more attractive city streets adds value—retail rents in Times Square, for example, have more than doubled since we created major new public spaces there in 2009. DOT has shown that this is equally true in other areas where we have implemented better bus service, safe cycling networks, and new public spaces.

The innovations launched by DOT are now seen around the world. Chicago has fully adopted our design for protected bike lanes. Buenos Aires uses our techniques for making intersections safer and simpler. “Overnight” pedestrian plazas can be found in Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Mexico City. If all the world's a stage, New York is certainly at its center. As this report makes clear, the Department of Transportation has helped position New York City as a global leader in the growing effort to create thriving, livable, and sustainable 21st century cities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael R. Bloomberg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "g".

Michael R. Bloomberg
Mayor

Commissioner's Introduction

Dear fellow New Yorkers:

It has been a unique honor to serve as the City's Transportation Commissioner for the past six and a half years. At the Department of Transportation, we have sustained and expanded the never-ending work to repair streets, sidewalks, bridges and ferries. We have also implemented extensive changes in City policy, remaking streets and intersections for greater safety, providing efficient right-of-way for buses and bicyclists, and treating streets as places whose design and appearance matter.

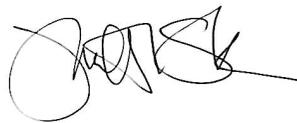
I want to offer my profound gratitude, admiration and respect for the men and women of the Department of Transportation who have brought these efforts and innovations to life, and made New York City a better place. From superstorm Sandy to CitiBike, from the Staten Island Ferry to the safest streets in the City's history, every division and unit within DOT has overcome tough challenges, delivered world-class projects and kept the City moving each and every day.

The innovative work we have done together has been widely acknowledged and acclaimed. One of the greatest testaments to our success is the large number of cities across the country and world adopting New York's designs for city streets, and our techniques for implementing changes quickly. Indeed, methods pioneered in the five boroughs are the foundation for a new urban street design guide issued by America's 15 largest cities.

Most importantly, New Yorkers themselves have embraced and adopted the policies and programs delivering safe streets, new public spaces, Select Bus and the bike lane network. They have made CitiBike their own, generating some of the world's highest bike share usage rates just a few months after the system's launch. Nothing happens in New York without vigorous conversation and some degree of contention, but all indicators, from the heavy use of new space and travel options to the number of applications and requests for projects and survey after survey of New Yorkers' views of our policies, shows very high support.

This book chronicles the implementation and the effects of these popular NYCDOT programs, and looks ahead to how they can be extended and strengthened in the future. We have made a tremendous start in forging a 21st Century streetscape and transportation system. If the past six years are any indication, New York's future is unquestionably bright.

Sincerely,



Janette Sadik-Khan
Commissioner





WRONG WAY

ONE WAY

NO STOPPING ANYTIME

Introduction



44

acres red painted
bus lanes since 2007



141

acres of bike
lanes since 2007



39

acres of road
repurposed for plazas,
public seating, refuge
islands, painted
extensions, medians,
and bulb outs since
2007

NYCDOT's 2008 Sustainable Streets Strategic Plan promised an innovative transportation policy that would deliver more varied and safer streets, improved mobility, more travel choices and progress on environmental sustainability. DOT's plan elaborated on Mayor Bloomberg's call in PlaNYC 2030 for a thriving, world-class 21st Century city based in part on more efficient transportation and a revitalized public realm.

DOT has not only delivered on this promise, it has created a new template for transportation policy that is being discussed and emulated across the world. During the past six years, NYC DOT has undertaken and implemented the most thorough rethinking and implementation of urban transportation priorities and streetscape design in a large American city in several generations.

Major achievements of this effort have been the reduction of annual traffic fatalities to the lowest levels ever seen in New York City, repurposing of extensive roadway area into public space, traffic calming features and additional room for pedestrians, creation of a new model of city bus service and large-scale expansion of bicycle transportation, as well as unprecedented levels of investment in the city's basic roadway, bridge and ferry infrastructure.

NYCDOT's initiatives have generated a heightened public conversation about street design and transportation policy. Ultimately, New Yorkers have embraced them with



tremendously positive responses. Demand for new public space and additional street safety improvements by elected officials and local stakeholders has filled project pipelines to overflowing. New public spaces are heavily used throughout the Five Boroughs, as is Select Bus Service wherever it has been implemented. Bicycle lanes are heavily used, with new routes in demand in many districts. Where professional pollsters have asked New Yorkers to weigh in on new DOT initiatives, from pedestrianizing Times Square to CitiBike, they have without exception responded with large majorities in the affirmative.

A major factor in winning public support has been DOT's innovative delivery of streetscape changes in the infrastructure equivalent of real time. Where traditional practice wades through years or even decades of planning studies and trial balloons which take the public completely out of the project development process, NYC DOT has pioneered the use of paint, planters and stone blocks to redefine street spaces virtually overnight. The proof of concept is not a computer model or engineering study, but real world performance that can be observed, debated, refined and adjusted before being built-out with permanent materials. This approach has changed urban street planning and practice forever, in both rich and poor cities. Today, one can find painted road-beds transformed into plazas or pedestrian safety areas in over a dozen U.S. cities, from Philadelphia to Los Angeles.

Addressing transportation, traffic safety and other challenges on New York City streets is a set of tasks with no beginning or end. In addition to chronicling the changes and successes of NYC transportation programs since the release of PlaNYC, this report looks ahead to future needs and issues. For example, as traffic fatalities and severe crashes become fewer in number, finding patterns that DOT can address with its programs becomes a greater challenge. Public demand for improvements like Select Bus routes, slow speed school and residential zones, public plazas, bicycle lanes and greater coverage for the CitiBike program are increasing. Infrastructure funding, including resources to replace temporarily defined street-space with permanent materials, is likely to be a persistent challenge, as the federal government continues its general retreat from its historic role as a major source of investment for roadways, bridges and mass transit, and as the City adds disaster resiliency to its already considerable list of priorities.

The Bloomberg Administration and NYC DOT have shown that updating and refocusing a large city's transportation policy is possible and need not to take decades to carry out. This report presents the methods, practices, designs and results from the street policies implemented in New York from 2007 to 2013. We believe these methods are highly replicable or adaptable to a wide variety of urban contexts around the world, and invite the reader to consider the content here in that vein.

In addition to the content presented in this document, DOT's accomplishments can be viewed online at nyc.gov/dot and, in map format, at sustainablestreets.info.