The politics to implement PlaNYC: A look through the eyes of the transportation policy

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This is a rough first draft that is missing sections and has not been reviewed. We are each writing sections from out own point of view, which together will tell the full story All feedback and a new title is welcomed.

Executive Summary and Findings (not drafted)

- Context in time
- Exploration into what made this different
- How Planyc changed the narrative - it was about the future of NY - not individual issues.
- Lessons Learned for other political efforts
- Investment in so much upfront outreach and true collaboration created a turning point for NYC that still remains today.
- plans changed the narrative - it was about the future of NY - not individual issues.
- Did this ever happen again?

Setting the stage for long term growth
By Amy

In late 2006, Mayor Bloomberg's relationship was tempestuous[1] with Albany. The highly public Mayoral control of schools fight in 2004[2], public debates over how to fill NYC's large budget gap weighing the political feasibility of a 25 percent property tax increase, and his wildly unpopular increase on the cigarette tax[3] did not win him many friends. The very public loss of New York City's Olympic bid in July 2005, which was killed by "three men in a room" (referring to the Assembly Speaker, Majority Leader and Governor), when a largely unknown Public Authorities ControlB Board in Albany in June 2005 rejected public funding for the construction of a West Side Stadium over Hudson Yards, the main venue for the games[4].Though his approval rating with voters was finally growing after a 2003 low[5].

However, he had also built credibility where his predecessors had not. Bloomberg's Solid Waste Management plan which, for the first time, equalized collection of waste across the five

[1] https://archive.nytimes.com/cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/01/26/bloomberg-uses-his-nice-self-in-albany/
[2] https://www.edweek.org/leadership/mayors-firm-hand-over-n-y-c-schools-sparks-new-debate/2004/03
[3] https://csts.ua.edu/btba/activism/bloomberg/
[4] https://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/07/nyregion/olympic-bid-hurt-as-new-york-fails-in-west-side-stadium-quest.html
[5] https://web.archive.org/web/20100529115141/https://www.quinnipiac.edu/x1302.xml?ReleaseID=1096

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boroughs, angering the City's most wealthy Upper West Siders, and fancy Greenwich Village celebrities including James Gandolfini and Kristen Dunst[6], centering the health disparities with the City's lower income, mostly black and brown population. The Administration recently had hired Eddie Bautista as the City's Deputy Director of City Legislative Affairs in 2006 who was an organizer at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, fighting for environmental justice in low-income neighborhoods,[7] and known as a peer advocate to many environmental justice organizations. This move foreshadowed many other advocates to join after the release of PlaNYC.

A look back at 2006 could also be a foreshadowing of 2026 - two decades later. Al Gore's movie An Inconvenient Truth was met with hostility[8] from naysayers and panned from the right (insert footnote). Senator Jim Inhofe, (R-OK) Chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works chaired a committee hearing the month after PlaNYC's release[9] examining Climate Change and the Media and was quoted for calling called climate change, "the greatest hoax perpetrated on the American people[10]" or worse, as he compared the documentary to Adolf Hitler's Mein Kampf[11].

When PlaNYC was conceived, it was also just a few years into the recovery from the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the many decisions around the rebuilding of the World Trade Center, in 2005 New Yorkers gave Mayor Bloomberg his second term with an overwhelming victory, gaining 59 percent of votes.[12] Now in his second term, he has more of a mandate from voters which he could use to build support for a bold vision, and a steady budget to implement his visions. In fact, the conditions were so good that one of the biggest concerns was that we were growing too fast to make room for all the new people flocking to the City.

Internally at City Hall, population growth became the framing for PlaNYC. How can New York accept more people, and keep it livable for all. During a trip to California, a known leader for the environment, in September 2006, Mayor Bloomberg joined Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to visit clean energy facilities,[13] Mayor Bloomberg announced the creation of a new Office of

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[6] https://www.nydailynews.com/2011/04/14/appeals-court-rejects-james-gandolfini-kirsten-dunst-backed-bid-to-block-sanitation-dept-garage/

[7] https://citylimits.org/the-citys-latest-hirings-firings-and-retirings-2/

[8] https://grist.org/feature/an-inconvenient-truth-oral-history/

[9] https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-109shrg52324/html/CHRG-109shrg52324.htm

[10] https://abcnews.com/Technology/WhosCounting/story?id=3119096&page=1

[11] https://www.mediamatters.org/new-york-times/ny-times-understated-inhofes-views-global-warming

[12] https://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/10/nyregion/metrocampaigns/mayor-crossed-ethnic-barriers-for-big-victory.html

[13] https://www.columbia.edu/~rta4/Rohit_T._Aggarwalas_homepage/Press_Releases_files/335-06%20%28Long-Term%20Planning%20%20Sustainability%29.pdf

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Long Term Planning and Sustainability[14] situated within the Mayor's Office of Operations, led by Rohit Aggarwala. That announcement was followed less than a week later with the convening of a new 17-member Sustainability Advisory Board, chaired by Deputy Mayor Daniel Doctorff[15] to help the City address long term growth with sustainability in mind[16]. The board was truly interdisciplinary and included a who-who of power in the City. It included representatives from the business, labor, environmental, academics, environmental justice and advocacy. It was highly unusual for these groups to be in the same room, and this was the key reason why PlaNYC had such broad support. The Board also included Council Member Jim Gennaro, Chair of the Committee of Environmental Protection. The advisory group was organized into working groups to help the office vet ideas and worked closely with an interagency task force who has been meeting for more than a year, to develop cross agency approaches

To put in perspective, nationally and internationally there wasn't a playbook to follow. Mayor Daly's Chicago's City Hall Green Roof was considered the highest standard for sustainability. However, leadership at City Hall, specifically Deputy Mayor Kevin Sheeky saw this as a potential political win, and one that could raise Mayor Bloomberg's reputation and home and abroad.

Even in our own NYC Council Members climate was not a priority nor a consensus. Knowing that we would need the Council for implementation, he invited committee staff into the tight advisory group's circle.

Developing an Outreach Strategy
By Amy
I joined the office in October 2006 as the Senior Policy Advisor responsible for intergovernmental, and community relationships. In my first interview, it was mentioned that Congestion Pricing could be an outcome of this plan though at that time I didn't think much of the politics of it, and was personally more focused on showing the administration, in the wake of losing the Olympic bid due to lack of community outreach, that the City could operate differently.

My background was in Community organizing. I began my career as a student activist with NYPIRG and then worked on issue-based campaigns including my time at M&R Strategic Services, where I organized against the City of New York. I had organized major events such as a Central Park rally with 30,000 people, and was responsible for the outreach for Listening to the City - the largest town hall in history. I was responsible for getting 5000 people to come to the Javits Center on a summer Saturday to discuss what should happen to the World Trade Center site. Thinking on a citywide scale was not new to me.

[14] https://www.columbia.edu/~rta4/Rohit_T._Aggarwalas_homepage/Press_Releases_files/335-06%20%28Long-Term%20Planning%20%20Sustainability%29.pdf
[15] https://www.archpaper.com/2006/11/new-yorks-policies-catch-up-to-sustainabilty/
[16] https://www.archpaper.com/2006/11/new-yorks-policies-catch-up-to-sustainabilty/

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In the wisdom of Jeff Kay, the head of the Mayor's Office of Operations, he believed and convinced the press office that the Mayor could not put out a solution to a problem that the public did not understand. Working with the Sustainability Advisory Board, in December 2006, with a big announcement at the Queens Museum, the Mayor released the 10 goals of PlaNYC which addressed challenges in six key areas: land, water, transportation, air, energy and climate change. The day after, the Daily News (???) inserted a pamphlet describing these goals into every home delivered newspaper, intended to kick off a public conversation, asking New Yorkers to submit ideas of how to reach those goals.

I designed a multi-tiered outreach approach that was approved by the head of the Mayor's Press office, communications, and key individuals at City Hall. The approach centered around who the New York Times could call for their opinion if they were for or against us and approached outreach in tiers - 1:1 meetings with most of the Advisory Board, organize issue-based meetings sector by sector, neighborhood leader meetings borough by borough, presentations to key non profit boards, public events and different ways that individual New Yorkers could submit their ideas. As far as I could tell, it was the first time that the City asked advocates for their ideas in such a way that, I believed, was critical for gaining support outside of government.

I began inviting sectorial leaders and advocates into City Hall, for which many had never stepped foot before. I tried to book one of the grandiose rooms so they would feel the weight of the government working for the people, and it truly worked. It brought about a level of respect which could not have been replicated in our small, dark, conference room across the street. Rit Aggarwala and I attended each issue-based meeting and took on the same approach. We would first ask them if they could have any policy they want, what would it be. Participants were always surprised by this question, and for the most part were able to rattle off policy that rightfully should be considered. We then followed it up by asking how they would pay for it, and ten out of ten times, the room went silent.

Typically for governments to invite feedback on a proposal, public hearings were always the relied upon outreach method of government, however, they are disingenuous. It used a hierarchical approach where the board would sit on a dias, often physically higher than the audience (think auditorium) and they would give respondents 3 minutes to speak by a microphone at the front of the room, and when time was up jumped immediately to the next person, never being put on the spot to answer or give feedback. Inevitably, the people with the power to make changes would look bored, would be clearly doing other work, and at worst, falling asleep.

The model designed for PlaNYC outreach was built on the America Speaks model which gives individuals a voice, at the same time as understanding cross cutting themes. The room is set up with round tables which each, ideally, had a facilitator. There was someone who ran the meeting, usually me, at the front who led the conversation.The meeting followed a relatively tight script and required that the participants share answers with one another at the table, before their table's answers were public. This allows participants to understand different perspectives

DRAFT

before theirs is final, and allows them to identify solutions together. Meetings happened from the New York Hall of Science to Brooklyn Borough Hall to Hunter College. All the feedback from each individual participant was logged into a database and analyzed. The City later used this same model to do outreach to identify station locations for Citi Bike.

The communications collateral was designed by Two Twelve - the same that designed the Olympic Bid, and it was gorgeous. With Power Point still a relatively new medium for the government to use, having beautifully designed slides to tell the story helped to show that we were serious. And we were. The rooms were filled with mostly community leaders and individuals who self-selected to spend a weeknight evening at a City-run meeting, so they could never solely represent the feeling of New Yorkers. However, their feedback was invaluable in framing and messaging the plan. For instance, incentivizing green roofs to address urban heat was an initiative with broad support inside the government, however when the public talked about green roofs, they did so to increase their recreation area. That became key to how we then talked about it - green roofs can lower energy costs *at the same time* as increasing recreation.

About half way through the outreach process we began to identify themes, and also had a sense of the political palatability of some of the ideas. At that point we had done so much outreach with the sectoral groups, agencies and advisory board that the new ideas slowed down, however these meetings were giving us very good insight into how we communicate the final recommendations.

To hear from New Yorkers who were not poised to make a meeting, we set up an email address for ideas submissions to address the ten PlaNYC goals. In the Outlook of the Deputy Mayor, Director, and a handful of other individuals including myself, we installed email responses to flow to an inbox. We got back hundreds of great ideas such as using subway turnstiles to harness energy - though out of scope with what we were able to accomplish.

A few weeks before the end of the outreach we began overtly testing ideas by listing some of what we "heard" on a final slide as examples of possible directions. Congestion pricing was included in that list, which began to enable us to understand how "regular" New Yorkers may react to such a proposal. The transportation advocates, who were quite organized, took advantage of the public outreach events and had local advocates raise the issue of traffic, and bike and pedestrian safety at these meetings, creating a paper trail of those who wanted PlaNYC to address these issues.

I spent much of this time shadowing Deputy Mayor Doctor off around the City as he presented to boards of non profits, law firms, and anywhere we thought would be an audience that would be out in the City talking about this over dinner tables and business meetings. The script was tight and regardless if the meeting was led by the Deputy Mayor, or by an Office of Long Term Planning and Sustainability staffer, by design, everyone said the same thing and asked the same questions.

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We could feel we were gaining momentum and outside support for the initiatives we knew would be included in the plan, but at the time these were not yet disclosed. This strategy enabled us to have a clear understanding of who our potential allies were, know what questions would be asked, and how to explain the initiatives in the final plan. It also built deep trust with the advocates and for the first time, truly co-planned the PlaNYC initiatives with private and non profit sector experts..

CONGESTION PRICING
By Amy

When I arrived at the office, it was clear that congestion pricing, a user fee for entering a certain geographic area, would be a big focus, and one that did not yet have City Hall leadership support. About a year before the announcement of PlaNYC goals, The Partnership of the City of New York put out the report[17] that quantified loss revenue in traffic, giving a reason for Congestion Pricing to happen. At that time, National Public Radio reported that when asked about congestion pricing, the Mayor responded "The city is always trying to solve traffic problems and will continue to do that, but congestion pricing is not something that we're talking about[18]." It's unclear (to me) if the Mayor did not yet know that his offices were considering this, or if he deflected from the truth to give his offices time to do the due diligence needed, either way it was far from being certain or having the internal leadership report needed for a successful rollout.

Within that year, quite a lot of work happened within the government to make that change. Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff who led the Olympic bid for the Mayor, was a fan of London's congestion pricing plan and believed that that traffic was one of the issues that could hold the City back from being able to grow, and that growth was the best economic development.

Given that congestion pricing would be controversial, we needed to strategically lay the groundwork with elected officials and the press. About a week before the Earth Day announcement, Mayor Bloomberg had a press conference "setting up" the challenge of increased emissions,[19] and lightly talked about what was to be included in the plan.

A few days before the plan was announced, Rit Aggarwala, Jeff Kay, Deputy Mayor Dan Doctorff and I briefed key people and elected officials disclosing that Congestion Pricing would be part of the announcement, and asking for each of them to hold their public reaction for 48 hours, to first see how the public responded. This idea, derived by Jeff Kay, gave us the space we needed for the advocates we worked with to take ownership of this plan.

We also briefed the entire NYC Press Corp the day before the announcement, giving them a technical briefing that went into detail about many of the initiatives included in the plan. At that

[17] https://www.npr.org/2005/11/23/5025343/congestion-pricing-suggested-for-new-york-city
[18] https://www.npr.org/2005/11/23/5025343/congestion-pricing-suggested-for-new-york-city
[19] https://www.nyc.gov/assets/climate/downloads/pdfs/iclei_planyc_case_study_201004.pdf

briefing, the press was told that they could report on the Million Trees plan, leaking an initiative that would be widely popular. However, the New York Times was able to triangulate and find out on background that Congestion pricing would be announced. Someone we briefed leaked it to the press, though in the end, it did not matter because the 48 hours we asked for was respected. The only person they had quoted was Congressmember Anthony Weiner, the Mayor's foe.

And while this story in retrospect feels buttoned-up, it was not. It was only two days before the launch of PlaNYC that Congestion Pricing got the nod from the Mayor. Though the Mayor's Office and agencies had been doing work for years, the Mayor was not yet convinced that he wanted to enter this fight. In one of the last meetings before the release of the plan, it was even weighted to implement congestion pricing only for lower Manhattan, given the increased truck traffic that the rebuilding of the World Trade Center would bring. The final decision was finally made, and the PlaNYC books went to print, to have a first copy for the attendees of the announcement. This decision was so late, that when the books were delivered two days later, the glue had not properly set and fell apart in the hands of announcement attendees.

BUILDING PUBLIC SUPPORT
By Amy

In 2002, Mayor Bloomberg, a first term mayor, picked up three[20] unpopular fights - a smoking ban, tax increase and closing of fire houses. The introduction of the smoking ban, when introduced, was highly unpopular but the Mayor, a public health advocate, was determined to reduce smoking and increase life expectancy. A collaborative effort between the City and advocates was a precedent for the Campaign for New York's Future.

Funded through a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Special Opportunities Grant through the American Cancer Society and others, built upon the work of NYC Coalition for a Smokefree City, housed at Public Health Solutions, the effort used a mix of philanthropic/charity dollars with funding that could be used for more political purposes to run an issue-based campaign targeting New York City Council Members who would decide on the future the bill. The coalition used commonly used tactics such as press conference, lobbying, leveraged paid and earned media, and developed spokespeople who could tell compelling stories of their experiences working in environments that allowed smoking. Ultimately in December 2002, the campaign was successful and secured a vote of 42-7[21] from the NYC Council.

The Bloomberg Administration sought to replicate this model for PlaNYC knowing that Congestion Pricing could be just as unpopular, and in particular, Deputy Mayor Kevin Sheekey saw this as a way to boost the Mayor's popularity and become a global leader. Beginning months before the release of the plan, and ultimately culminating with a breakfast of

[20] https://www.cbsnews.com/news/nyc-adopts-strict-anti-smoking-law/#:~:text=The%2042%2D7%20vote%20with,effect%20in%20March%20or%20April.
[21] https://www.cbsnews.com/news/nyc-adopts-strict-anti-smoking-law/#:~:text=The%2042%2D7%20vote%20with,effect%20in%20March%20or%20April.

Philanthropic leaders, Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff presented the aspirations and received support.

Philanthropic support was granted to the Regional Plan Association for the purpose of supporting a coalition of nonprofit advocacy organizations to work towards implementing the PlaNYC recommendations. With the blessing of City Hall, M&R Strategic Services, who also ran the anti-smoking campaign, was selected to coordinate the group. The initial group was a small selection from the Sustainability Advisory Board who sought to work together to see their ideas implemented as part of the plan. The vision was to create a well-aligned campaign that worked lockstep with the Mayor's Office on shared interests. Michael O'Loughlin, M&R' Strategic Services New York City's Campaign Director led the coalition from outside the government. I was selected to represent the coalition from inside the government. I had previously worked for Michael at M&R though the decision to go with them came from a higher level at City Hall.

The idea for developing and financially supporting (with non government funding) an outside campaign for PlaNYC came from the Community Affairs Unit Commissioner Patrick Brennan. Patrick was a Bloomberg campaign staffer who came from a political family as his late father was Chief of Brooklyn South Police, and one of his brothers, in Mayor Bloomberg's security detail. Patrick, reporting up through Deputy Mayor Kevin Sheeky, did the hard work of convincing the Mayor and First Deputy Mayor Patti Harris that this was a feasible plan. Patrick was also the person who told me about this "secret plan," that the Mayor was cooking up, which led me to my job at City Hall.

About a month before the release of the Plan, a breakfast was organized at the Rockefeller Foundation with NYC philanthropic leaders. Dan, Patrick and I went there to pitch the idea of supporting a campaign to implement the co-created agenda. Ultimately, the coalition received funding from 15 foundations[22]. The funding went directly to non profits, not to City Hall, as this highly unusual arrangement gave way for a new collaboration between the real estate industry, business community, national environmental organizations, and local environmental justice organizations who would do the heavy lifting to implement many parts of the plan. This closeness between advocates and government was a new relationship that was only able to thrive because the Sustainable Advisory Board included a diverse group who began to see common ground.

BRINGING THE ADVOCATES INSIDE THE ROOM: THE CAMPAIGN FOR NEW YORK CITY'S FUTURE WAS BORN
By Amy

Knowing that the advocates would now know the details of the plan by the public announcement, a briefing was held for all the advocates for which outreach was made during the building of the plan the morning of the announcement. Director Rit Aggarwala presented a very detailed look of what would later be announced, and it was clear from the room that

[22] https://www.nyc.gov/assets/climate/downloads/pdfs/iclei_planyc_case_study_201004.pdf

advocates saw themselves and their ideas into the final 147 recommendations. At the conclusion of the briefing, Michael O'Loughlin from M&R Strategic Services (and Marcia Bystyn from the New York League of Conservation Voters made an announcement to the room that there would be a press conference on the steps of City Hall the next morning, and all were invited. They also encouraged the organizations to meet them in the back of the room after the public announcement so they could be available to press. New groups joined with the Sustainability Advisory Board. That was the birth of the Campaign for New York's Future.
By Amy

The Campaign for New York's Future was publicly announced on the steps of City Hall the day following the City's release of PlaNYC. This was a highly orchestrated strategic decision by City Hall to fill the gap in the days when the Mayor's Office asked elected officials not to criticize the plan. XX groups joined in to show their support for all of the recommendations for the plan, including congestion pricing. Just two and a half weeks later, The Campaign for New York's future was a coalition of forty-four organizations - a true groundswell of supporters from the advocacy community who, with or without knowing it, would make any politicians pause before they criticized aspects of PlaNYC.

The leadership of this campaign were many of the same people who were on the Advisory Board including The League of Conservation Voters, the Environmental Defense Fund, the Natural Resource Defense Council, the Regional Plan Association, the New York City Central Labor Council, among new organizations such as Transportation Alternatives, Straphangers Campaign, NYPIRG and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign who were interested in the passage of congestion pricing, as well as the General Contractors Association and the New York Building Trades who were interested in the long-term investment in the City, the American Cancer Society and American Lung Association of the City of New York who were prominent forces in the workplace anti smoking campaign and many more. This group of unlikely bedfellows were unprecedented and allowed for creative messaging and tactics.

As of May, 2007- just three weeks after the announcement - that Campaign for New York' Future ballooned to over 80 groups. Their mission was as follows: *"The Campaign for New York's Future is a coalition of civic, business, environmental, labor, community and public health organizations that support the goals and strategic direction of PlaNYC. Our goal is to make every neighborhood in NYC a great place to live and work, as well as make a significant contribution to fighting climate change. The coalition aims to encourage public debate — as well as fair and effective action — now and in the years to come. We recognize the need to both seize the opportunity for immediate action and to ensure that this long-term plan evolves with continued dialogue and changing conditions".*

The uniqueness of this coalition was that it was for the "future of New York City" which aligned with City Hall's narrative for growth, and brought in many diverse members who were not used to working together. This became the main strategy for implementing the Greener Greater Buildings Plan, clean heat, congestion pricing, and much more initiatives.

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Precursors to PlaNYC and the Campaign for New York's Future
by Dani

PlaNYC and the Campaign for New York's Future had its roots in ideas and tactics that were already percolating in the advocacy community, but perhaps more slowly and not always at the same scale as was called for now.

I know this since at the time, I was working for one of these groups, Transportation Alternatives, as their Deputy Director for Development and Communications. My background was in working with non-profit and advocacy groups in the transportation space. I had no idea at the time that I would be changing jobs and my career trajectory with it.

In 2006 [link to IMBD?] TransAlt released a short documentary called Contested Streets, highlighting the clash between automobiles and quality of life in New York City. The documentary featured voices from Copenhagen, famous for its reclamation of space from autos for bicycling and walking and London, which was still early in its congestion pricing journey. TransAlt also worked with researcher Bruce Schaller to commission a report called Necessity or Choice - Why People Drive in Manhattan (2006) and Congested Streets: The Skewed Economic Incentives to Drive Into Manhattan (2007). [need to get links to these]. These reports helped demonstrate that most New Yorkers had viable alternatives to driving, and began to debunk the idea that driving was a necessity, and instead unpack systemic reasons that were encouraging more driving that perhaps was good for the City as a whole.

In November of 2006, TransAlt formed the Citywide Coalition for Traffic Relief, and got 125 groups to sign-on to this effort. It is unclear what happened with this group after their launch but many of the organizations wound up back together as part of the Campaign for New York's Future.

NYPIRG, of which Amy, Neysa Pranger (who was at the Straphangers Campaign and went to work at the Regional Plan Association during the time period covered in this article), and Michael O'Loughlin were all alumni of, was already organizing students city wide for better transit. NYPIRG's transportation offshoot, the Straphangers Campaign, organized students at college campuses across New York City , and was able to turn out students from a wide range of geographies and backgrounds to public meetings and hearings, as well as activate students to do flyering and tabling[23].

The Empire State Transportation Alliance (ESTA)[24], which brought together transit advocates and labor, housed within the Regional Plan Association, was already advocating for transit improvements as well. The group was formed to advocate for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)'s five year (2000-2004) capital plan. As part of that effort they did their own 5 and 20 year "needs assessment" for the MTA. By 1999 ESTA points out that the MTA has largely overcome the dismal levels of underinvestment of the 1970s and 80s and was now a

[23] Source: Conversation with Neysa Pranger, April 2026
[24] https://www.edf.org/media/new-ad-campaign-urges-commuters-speak-out-mass-transit-improvements-and-congestion-pricing#:~:text=The%20Empire%20State%20Transportation%20Alliance%20(ESTA)%20is,and%20environmental%20organizations%20that%20seek%20to%20build

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"victim of its own success" pointing to overcrowding as one of the agency's toughest issues[25]. This nicely aligned with PlaNYC's theme of preparing New York for future growth without compromising quality of life.

At the same time (2006), the Pratt Center, (under the leadership of Brad Lander who later became NYC Comptroller Joan Byron and Elena Conte) was mapping residential communities underserved by transit and outer-borough employment centers (such as hospitals, colleges), and documenting racial and economic disparities in commuting times of New Yorkers. This research project helped them convene the groups they called - Communities United for Transportation Equity (COMMUTE!) coalition,which brought together outer borough community based organizations in support of bus rapid transit and transit improvements in lower income communities.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign, was advocated on topics that governed a wider geography, covering the entire region. Their approach was more grounded in deep policy and budgetary analysis.

And it wasn't just advocates. In 2006, before the plan's release, the organization representing the largest, most powerful business group in New York City, the Partnership for NYC, released a report called Growth or Gridlock which estimated the economic impact that traffic congestion was having on New York City and called for change in the name of the preservation of New York's economy. The report concluded that analysis therein "provides sufficient empirical data and analysis to justify a request to the U.S. Department of Transportation for a grant to New York City to carry out a feasibility study of congestion relief options for the New York Metro Region."

Having to cover the broad geography of New York City or organize constituents with relationships to all of the electeds that represented that area was new and stretched advocates outside their regular practice

For example, Transportation Alternatives at the time was used to working one-on-one with Community Board or City Council Members at a time to advocate for a bike or pedestrian project; or doing petition drives targeted at certain agencies or City Council committee chairs to win campaigns like closing Central Park to car traffic. But some of the basic connective tissue already existed between them. By that time, the advocates had already created a substantial body of research and messaging to support the themes of PlaNYC. In November 2006, T.A.unveiled a coalition of 125 business improvement districts, community organizations, environmental and health groups – the City-wide Coalition for Traffic Relief[26].

TOP DOWN + BOTTOM UP
By Amy

[25] https://rpa.org/work/reports/investing-in-new-yorks-transit-future
[26] - TransAlt Magazine Summer 2007

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In the months that followed, the Campaign for New York's Future would meet weekly with a core group of leaders to determine the strategy and shared activities. As the representative from the Mayor's Office, and with many years of issue-based advocacy experience I took a heavy hand in steering the coalition towards the activities that I knew would be successful. Even so, the organizations who attended the planning meetings were included in every decision.

The Campaign for New York's Future Representatives presented at Community Boards and organizations throughout the City, packed the State hearing on Congestion Pricing, a rally in Times Square and the State's Congestion Pricing Board meeting, and took advantage of every opportunity they could to deliver a clear strategy message to policy makers, that a diverse group of organizations throughout the city supports this work. Though it did not come easy, in March 2008, nearly a year later, City Council home rule legislation, a move which was to be seen asking for the state to act, passed 30-20[27], which is a tight margin given that most votes in the City pass easily. There is no doubt that congestion pricing would have been *dead on arrival* without this effort.

Though PlaNYC had 147 initiatives, though congestion pricing was the only one that required approval from State and Federal entities, making it a politically complex quest.The City needed enter into an agreement with the Federal government to be part of the Value Pricing Pilot Program and receive federal funds to help advance the program, requiring the City Council pass a home rule that would give them the authority from the State to implement the program, and a vote from the State legislature to enable the City to take this control. Strategically, it was also an idea that had support from advocates who were sincerely surprised to see the City taking leadership on.

The Inside-Outside Game: A perspective from the Outside.
By Dani

The Campaign for New York's Future was an unusual approach for the government. Up until that point, New York City Government had been neutral to hostile to advocacy groups, at least in the transportation space. In one striking example, advocates had repeatedly asked the City to fix the “bumps” on the Williamsburg Bridge bike path since the path opened in 2002. It took a $10M lawsuit and multiple injuries to get the City to finally take some action in 2005.[28, 29] Transportation Alternatives (where I had been working) had occasional meetings with the two or three staff members at NYC DOT that worked on bike projects. My perception of them at the time ranged from their being scrappy to demoralized. They were underfunded and squirreled away several layers removed from power in the agency. In mid-2006 the Director of the New York City Department of Transportation’s Bicycle Program resigned and their resignation letter was leaked reading “I waited for a long time for the direction from the commissioner’s office to

[27] https://council.nyc.gov/press/2008/03/31/1318/
[28] https://www.nydailynews.com/2005/09/22/bumpy-road-to-a-fix-city-finally-dumps-bridge-humps/
[29] https://gothamist.com/news/williamsburg-bridge-bike-bumps-to-be-bumped-off

change, or for the commissioner to be changed," said Andrew Vesselenovitch "I hope that you won't have to wait much longer.[30]"

Little did they know at that time, that within a matter of months, that would all change.A few months after mayor Bloomberg released PlaNYC there were several leaders from advocacy organizations working at a senior level inside DOT This brought a new perspective to the agency and also fostered ongoing inside / outside relationships that helped advance pieces of PlaNYC and NYCDOT's strategic plan (that was grounded in PlaNYC). I will explore this further below.

How did this happen?

I was still working at Transportation Alternatives when I received an invitation to come to the Natural History Museum for a City announcement on Earth Day, 2007. Seated beneath the big blue whale in a room of hundreds of other advocates for different issues, stakeholders, and city employees, the atmosphere felt electric. There were rumors of "big things" to be announced that day. I remember feeling nervous to be too hopeful. But then the presentation began and my professional life was about to change forever.

I remember feeling very inspired by the PlaNYC narrative and visuals. All of a sudden it felt like the government understood the intersectionality of the environment, transportation, and quality of life in urban areas. Both the substance, and the way it was presented, with a crisp, clear script, strong visuals, and in a room with such symbolic resonance felt brand new. It was a feeling for me that I didn't get again until I read President-elect Biden's transportation policy platform in 2020.

That event was designed to inspire and galvanize the next "ring" of supporters and advocates that the City knew it needed to be successful in advancing their bold policy agenda. And it worked. Transportation Alternatives came away from the event ready to help in any form necessary. At the time, TransAlt published a quarterly magazine for TransAlt's thousands of members. For the Spring 2007 issue, the last one that I would be the Managing Editor of, we rushed in a special "Publisher's Letter" from our Executive Director Paul Steely White, before going to press. " Mere months before it was nearly unimaginable. Then, on Earth Day, he did it.

Mayor Bloomberg announced that London style congestion pricing would be a central tenet of his sustainability plan, PlaNYC: A Greener, Greater New York. The proceeds of congestion pricing will fund a new generation of bus and subway improvements. The Mayor's plan, if successful, has the potential to dramatically improve mass transit, reduce pollution and help millions of New Yorkers breathe easier[31]." In his letter Paul pledges that "In the coming months, Transportation Alternatives will be working to make sure that the Mayor's plan is not killed by the fossil fueled opposition. The Director announced that we would send new organizers into Brooklyn, Queens and Albany to communicate to the grassroots and the "grasstops" (heads of organizations and those will a bit more political power) the benefits of the charge to support better public transit, and to get feedback on what transit improvements are needed to make the proposal politically feasible. It was a strong message that we will continue to do what has gotten us to this historic juncture: effective coalition building, original research and effective communication with City Hall."

[30] https://nyc.streetsblog.org/2006/07/10/dot-bike-director-bombshell-resignation-letter
[31] Transportation Alternative Magazine, Spring 2007

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The City swiftly began convening morning strategy sessions for advocates, led by Michael O'Loughlin who had famously helped Bloomberg win his push for a city-wide ban on indoor smoking. He was assisted by Ya-Ting Lu, a young organizer at the time. Amy Chester presided over the meetings from the City side, a driven and sometimes terrifying figure, in contrast to Michael's more laid-back, jokey style. Together they set out a strategy that was often iterated upon by advocates.

The relationship between advocates and the City was very new. The City had built a tremendous amount of goodwill reflecting the ideas of the advocates in the release of PlaNYC, many of which reflected ideas that advocates had long dreamed about or fought for. But the City was moving quickly and asking advocates for a lot, very quickly, without the time or funds for advocates to staff up or find ways to transition to other campaigns or projects. The City could take a demanding tone and it was important for the advocates and City staff to find ways to build a relationship and trust quickly, or else the goodwill would quickly be burned down.

One of the most controversial points in PlaNYC and one of the main reasons for the creation of the Campaign as Amy notes above, was Congestion Pricing. And so it merits a deeper look into some of the messaging and tactics developed by the Campaign and it's members.

Messaging

First, the initial messaging around Congestion Pricing didn't work. PlaNYC was sold as a long-term sustainability (and growth enabling) plan for NYC. It was grounded in science and it was being led by a Mayor who saw himself as a public health leader, and whose team wanted to position him as a climate leader. The messaging around congestion pricing focused on clean air, and secondarily, later the ability to reduce crowding on transit. That messaging worked in London upon introduction in 2003 reducing traffic by 30 percent, and shifted 30 percent of residents out of their vehicles and instead walking, biking, and cycling[32].

Clean air was important to several members of the Sustainability Advisory Board,including EDF, Environmental Defense, WEACT and UPROSE and it was well known in transportation circles that London's air quality showed significant improvement[33] after congestion pricing. And of course, clean air is an easy sell to the public. But making the benefits of cleaner air more tangible is difficult, as climate and environmental health advocates know too well.

At the outset the groups' ability to do polling or truly understand what messages would move voters was quite limited. As this was a City initiative, the MTA, controlled by the Governor, and not the Mayor, did not have as much "skin in the game" and didn't have specifics on what improvements they would make with additional funding from congestion pricing.

The City, perhaps rightfully, wanted to keep things more open ended, since in the end the State legislature would need to establish what the funds from congestion pricing would support The City only called for them to be placed in a "lockbox" for the MTA, without details or an understanding of who would directly benefit. At the time, public trust in the MTA and in the State's management of the MTA's budget was low. By the time the State passed their first

[32] https://tstc.org/fixmycommute/congestion-pricing/
[33] https://tstc.org/fixmycommute/congestion-pricing/

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(weakened) attempt at a lockbox bill in 2011, the TWU estimated that the State had "raided" nearly $260M in funds from the MTA (into the State's general fund) in the prior three years.[34]

Tri-State Transportation Campaign used a different approach, trying to make the benefits more tangible. Michelle Ernest, a policy analyst at the time, used Tri-State's remarkable (for the time) analytic capacity to transform census date into fact sheets showing district by district how residents commuted to work, where they commuted to work (in the central business district or outside of it) and what percentage of residents owned a car.These sheets were incredibly helpful to ground conversations with legislators whose own experience was often being ferried around in a car, to understand just how small a fraction of their own constituents drove into the central business district for work, and how many would benefit from more revenue for transit. The City, seeing the benefit of these fact sheets, adopted them as their own, and used them to create fact sheets for each Council, Assembly and Senate district detailing PlaNYC benefits (and needs) to each individual legislator. This gave elected officials more concrete details and ways to talk to their constituents and the media about why PlaNYC was important for their community.

The Empire State Transportation Alliance, which had existed prior to the Campaign, and whose members largely overlapped with Campaign members, had developed messaging to support advocacy on the MTA's capital plans. Their research had been able to deep dive in MTA's needs, and they were able to develop messaging that focused on what they saw as the core challenges to the MTA's service at the time – overcrowding on the subway and very, very slow buses. ESTA pushed the Campaign and the City to make this messaging part of the sales pitch for congestion pricing. More revenue for the MTA could help alleviate crowding, less traffic would mean faster buses that, at the time, crept across Manhattan at a pace slower than walking. ESTA and the Campaign, under the auspices of EDF, raised over $500,000 to create and place ads with this messaging in February 2008[35].

Future years of the congestion pricing campaign in New York would offer far more specifics about the benefits that each legislative district would see as a result of more funding (down the the # of new accessible elevators or station overhauls).But these ads from ESTA and the fact sheets from Tri-State were the precursors to that approach, demonstrating more granularity the benefits (less crowding, faster buses) and lack of harm (actually most of your constituents take transit and do NOT drive into Manhattan). And as the Tri-State fact sheets showed, these transit riders were the vast majority not just of New Yorkers, but also the suburban residents who commuted into the City, whose legislators' votes were needed to for approval

The Campaign structure ensured that the messages, be it around clean air or around relief from overcrowding on transit and slow buses, would be repeated and amplified across all of the groups. There was a communications committee as part of the Campaign that worked with outside consultants to develop messages, draft press releases, develop press conferences and other media moments. This committee shared the plans across the Campaign groups and got their participation. This was essential when it came to communicating needs and benefits across a region as vast and populous as the New York City metropolitan area.

[34] https://www.twulocal100.org/story/assembly-joins-senate-passes-lock-box-bill

[35] https://www.edf.org/media/new-ad-campaign-urges-commuters-speak-out-mass-transit-improvements-and-congestion-pricing#:~:text=The%20Empire%20State%20Transportation%20Alliance%20%28ESTA%29%20is,and%20environmental%20organizations%20that%20seek%20to%20build

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Direct Outreach to Educate New Yorkers about PlaNYC

To reach a City of 8 million people without a multi-million dollar ad campaign the City and advocates employed a variety of tactics including direct outreach. New York has “Community Boards,” 59 in total, that are the City’s most local form of governance. These boards, often mostly advisory, have historically had outsized influence with City Councilmembers. They were identified by the City as an important channel for outreach for PlaNYC.

The City created a script and a very nicely designed powerpoint presentation about PlaNYC. Junior city staff were trained in the script and dispatched to community board meetings across the City to explain PlaNYC more directly to constituents. The script and the slides ensured consistent and high-quality communication, even if multiple different people had to give it to different audiences to be able to cover all the meetings.

Once I went to work for City government in June 2007, a few months after PlaNYC was released, I estimate that I personally gave the transportation portion of the PlaNYC Roadshow as it came to be known, to at least 30 Community Boards, being booed in many parts of Eastern Queens and Brooklyn when I talked about congestion pricing and building more bike lanes. The neighborhoods where we did this outreach could not envision, at the time, that they would benefit from congestion pricing, because they would not imagine they would become users of transit or start riding bikes, especially not all the way into Manhattan.

The City and advocates also met with City Councilmembers, State Assemblymembers and State Senators, educating them on PlaNYC, with the advocacy groups promoting different parts of the plan that were in line with their missions.

The groups used the intelligence they were gathering to start keeping a whip count of votes for aspects that would require City Council and/or State approval. For congestion pricing in particular the City Council needed to pass a “home rule” asking the State Legislature for
As the congestion pricing piece of PlaNYC advanced the City also established a "Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission" which held seven public hearings between October 24 and November 5, 2007, gathering over 25 hours of testimony to address congestion and improve transit. The hearings provided a place for advocates and supporters to publicly show their support for congestion pricing, but they also were a flash point for people who opposed the plan. This was helpful in some regards as a place to allow people to vent, and to surface themes of arguments that the City and advocates needed to address. It helped the City find places where some mitigations might be necessary and evaluate what parts of the program they might be willing to negotiate or compromise on. This being New York, they also sometimes drew out the bizarre like the person who testified in support of creating a citywide slip-and-slide system that would be much greener than the existing transit system. They also provided ample fodder for the press which had started to cover the twists and turns of PlaNYC like a reality TV show.

The Campaign represented citywide and local organizations. From Business to Labor to Advocacy. Part of how the Campaign mobilized people to testify and attend was through more grassroots groups, like Straphangers Campaign which had organized students on XX campuses

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city wide in support of mass transit. And through groups like NYEJA, WEACT, UPROSE and the Pratt Center, which helped turn out community voices.

However, the grassroots network at the time was still a patchwork, with certain groups covering discrete geographies or interest areas. There wasn't a single group or even a few groups that together could cover all of the districts that the Campaign needed to be able to reach to win votes needed in Albany. It would not be until future rounds of campaigns for Congestion Pricing that that capacity would be developed, much of it thanks to the approach of the Riders Alliance which wasn't founded until years afterward.

Earned Media

Streetsblog/Streetsfilms

Transportation Nation

The Inside-Outside Game: A perspective from the Inside
By Amy

PlaNYC was designed to not sit on a shelf. Releasing the plan, with the budget to implement was, in itself, new to the government and sent the message we needed that the Mayor was serious.

While the coalition's activities happened outside of government, inside of government was also buzzing. Briefing Council Members, negotiating with the New York City Council Speaker, taking trips to Albany, developing briefing packets and education materials fell mostly on the Office of Long Term Sustainability's staff and director. The release of PlaNYC gave way to an investment in new staff to see the projects through.

The long weekend meetings continued as we were in the thick of the fight for months. Council Members who represented constituencies that were more likely to drive in general, and to Manhattan came out against the plan. We tried to win on the data as OLTPS created an "origin and designation" study which showed that a vast majority of New Yorkers live and work in the same borough. However, fighting a political pushback with numbers alone never works. We had to enlist advocates to help us demonstrate that constituents supported this and that being against Congestion Pricing also had consequences.

We were also hampered by the MTA. Though our narrative used investments in transit as the rationale for this fee, the MTA refused to commit to specific improvements, and trust in the MTA was always low[36]. Also, realistically, the money that congestion pricing would raise was only a small portion of what the MTA needed for their capital plan[37].

Inmates Running the Asylum
By Dani

[36] https://nypost.com/2017/06/25/the-villains-and-heroes-behind-the-subway-mess/
[37] https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/osdc/pdf/report-6-2007.pdf

Three days after the launch of PlaNYC the City announced it was hiring Janette Sadik-Khan to lead NYCDOT. Jannette had been in the Dinkins Administration and served as the Deputy Administrator of the Federal Transit Administration. She had been at Parsons Brinckerhoff, an international transportation engineering firm, when the former Commissioner, Iris Weinshall resigned. In her conversations with City officials about the job, Janette made it clear that she had a bold new vision for transportation leadership. That vision was welcomed by City Hall and advocates alike. She quickly moved to bring advocates INSIDE her administration, elevating some who were already at NYCDOT and hiring others from outside. These included people such as: Steve Weber from Regional Plan Association, Bruce Shaller a consultant with considerable strategic research and analytic capabilities to advocacy groups looking to reform traffic and transit policies, John Orcutt, the Executive Director of Tri-State Transportation Campaign, Andy Wiley-Schwartz, Vice President at Project for Public Spaces and myself,

Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan deliberately cultivated a team of change agents to help her work to transform the agency. And she also used these people to help foster relationships with the advocacy groups to build more support for PlaNYC and subsequent City initiatives (like Summer Streets and the Plazas Program).

When I was recruited, I was the Deputy Director for Communications and Development at Transportation Alternatives when Janette approached me about joining NYCDOT. I joined in June 2007 as the Director of E-media and became Director of Strategic Communications, helping NYCDOT to communicate through emerging (at the time) channels like social media, and helping improve the agency's website and public outreach programs. After congestion pricing was not passed in the early years I helped launch Summer Streets, which was a precursor to the transformation of Times and Herald Squares, and helped build public support for allocating more space for people to walk and bike. All groundbreaking initiatives at that time.

This was a high contrast to the previous Commissioner who became party to a lawsuit to stop a protected bike lane on her block.[38] This truly marked a new era in City Hall, and one that would change New York City forever.

WE HAVE NOT FINISHED ANYTHING PAST HERE

TO BE ADDED IN:

VI. What happened (or didn't) in Albany and why
- Denny Farrell - didn't want the surveillance (can we get a trascript?)

VII. Analysis: how the tight integration of advocates and policymakers succeeded on many PlaNYC initiatives;
- Lessons for policymakers and advocates about whether and how to collaborate in this way.
- Products that worked/what should be replicated (in and outside of government)
  - Launch event
  - PlaNYC book
  - Endorsement letters
  - Fact Sheets
  - Public meetings

[38] https://nyc.streetsblog.org/2011/11/16/the-nbbl-files-weinshall-and-steisel-manufactured-anti-bike-coverage

DRAFT

        - The “Road Show” ppt and script
- Twenty years of Congestion pricing advocacy
    - A win or a loss?
    - How did the original structure of the CFNYF live on? Was it ultimately helpful?

VIII. Lasting Impact

- On NYC
    - TransAlt - expansion of bike network and bike parking, bus stops under the Els program
    - Million trees
    - Regional Parks
    - Bike Lanes
    - NRDC and EDF - air quality initiatives, cleaner school buses, retrofit diesel trucks
- On other cities

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