How PlaNYC Became the Operating Code for the Global Street

From the floor-to ceiling windows of the Broadway Lounge, eight floors above Times Square in the Marriott Marquis hotel, London Mayor Sadiq Khan looked down at the thousands of tourists, workers and theatergoers shuffling through the LED-glinted pedestrian expanse of Broadway.

In the streets of Times Square, which I toured with him in the early autumn of 2024,[1] Mayor Khan saw not just the "Bowtie"—the interlocking triangles of street and sidewalks where the car-free diagonal of Broadway cuts across the right angles of 7th Avenue and crosstown streets—but the blueprint of another iconic road nearly 3,500 miles away.

"This is what I want for Oxford Street," Mayor Khan said to me, gesturing to the scene: An energetic, economically vibrant city space that lives up to its reputation and its role in the city.

By the time he visited Times Square in 2024, Mayor Khan already had an idea for the busy shopping street in London's West End, known as the United Kingdom's main street. In 2024, Oxford street was dominated by a nonstop, two-way stream of taxis and buses along its two lanes. Mayor Khan's idea wasn't to make a stretch of Oxford Street the next Times Square, but to reimagine and reclaim the same underlying resource that the two places shared: The asphalt of the street itself.

Less than two years later, Mayor Khan had rewritten the story of Oxford Street. He had completed the City's Greater London Authority's takeover of Oxford Street form the local Westminster Council.[2] Following numerous rounds of public consultation, a one-day, car-free demonstration that brought out hundreds of thousands of people to the street,[3] he established a new operational and management structure in a newly formed mayor's development corporation—a role functionally equivalent to that of a business improvement district.

On October 26, in the early autumn of 2026, workers from Transport for London installed and finalized the last barriers along Oxford Street at each cross street, barring vehicles

[1] Greater London Authority, "Mayor Says Times Square Could Provide Inspiration for the Future Regeneration of London's Oxford Street," press release, September 26, 2024, london.gov.uk.

[2] "Can the New Traffic Ban Save Oxford Street?," AOL UK, 2026, https://www.aol.co.uk/articles/traffic-ban-save-oxford-street-040047000.html; Greater London Authority, "Mayor of London Convenes New Oxford Street Development Corporation Board for Landmark First Meeting to Drive Transformation and Growth in the Heart of the Capital," https://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-london-convenes-new-oxford-street-development-corporation-board.

[3] Greater London Authority, "The Mayor's Landmark Day Pedestrianising Oxford Street Significantly Boosted Footfall and Sales, New Data Shows," press release, October 6, 2025, https://www.london.gov.uk/mayors-landmark-day-pedestrianising-oxford-street-significantly-boosted-footfall-and-sales-new-data; Greater London Authority, *This Is Oxford Street: Event Report* (London: Greater London Authority, October 2025), https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-10/This%20Is%20Oxford%20Street%20event%20report%20-%20October%202025.pdf.

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from using the street again,[4] and turning six-tenths of a mile of the high street into the UK's—and the world's—newest car-free street and the largest of 2026. Planning continued for a permanent redesign with seating, landscaping, and by replacing the craggy asphalt with a more inviting surface for pedestrians.

The transformation Mayor Khan's Oxford Street was an international coda not just for the inspiration for the physical transformation that New York City demonstrated by pedestrianizing Broadway in Times Square in 2009, but for the enduring visionary, tactical and operational underpinnings of municipal government catalyzed by PlaNYC. Transportation was one of the plan's central pillars, and its street-transforming strategies and tactics produced some of the plan's most enduring legacies. The elements of PlaNYC's transportation agenda changed the way the New York City Dept. of Transportation viewed and exercised its jurisdiction over the city's 6,300 miles of streets as a means of achieving citywide economic, health, and social and environmental impact, bringing about a realignment in the management of its operational, administrative and infrastructural resources.

The visionary and operational impacts of PlaNYC document reached neighborhoods across New York City, from Corona, Queens to The Bronx Hub and in East New York, Brookly. But it also informed the vision and tactics deployed on streets around dozens of schools in Milan and in the heart of Athens's historical Trigono district commercial district, which have been transformed into safe places to walk, play and shop. The safety strategies tested on New York City's streets helped to tame dangerous corridors in Mexico City and Rio de Janeiro and make them safer for public transportation. Innovative bike lanes in New York's Chelsea, Park Slope and Jackson Heights neighborhoods helped inspire the city of Detroit as it created the city's first parking-protected bike lanes and opened a keystone pedestrian space atop former traffic lanes outside its city hall, and launching what is today expanding into a city-encircling greenway. Strategic transportation plans patterned after New York City's created the architecture for new transportation departments in Oakland, California and Atlanta, and spawned a new generation of people-friendly roadway redesigns in Chicago and Los Angeles.

This didn't happen by chance but by design. PlaNYC was adapted into a strategic plan for the operation for a reimagined New York City's Department of Transportation (DOT), Sustainable Streets, fundamentally changing how the agency operated and the goals to which it was oriented.[5] PlaNYC and Sustainable Streets formed the bases for a change-based approach to transportation policy centered in safety, expanding opportunities to walk, bike and take public transportation through the Bloomberg era and beyond. The

[4] "Khan Hails Traffic-Free Oxford St as 'Truly Momentous Occasion for the Capital,'" LBC, October 2026, https://www.lbc.co.uk/article/7160aa94505545398885aed26bab17c6-5HjdkRB_2/; "Cyclists Caught on Camera Riding through Oxford Street as Traffic Ban Comes into Force," *Evening Standard* (via AOL UK), updated October 26, 2026, https://www.aol.co.uk/articles/pictured-cyclists-spotted-riding-oxford-121235000.html.

[5] New York City Department of Transportation (NYC DOT), *Sustainable Streets: Strategic Plan for the New York City Department of Transportation, 2008 and Beyond* (New York: NYC DOT, 2008), https://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/stratplan_compplan.pdf.

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PlaNYC/Sustianable Streets framework was the bases for the 2019 Street Plan passed by the New York City Council, codifying operations innovated during the PlaNYC era into standard transportation practice. This influence has spanned administrations and been adopted by the popular and political culture, including the eventual passing of PlaNYC's central but elusive goal of implementing congestion pricing, and with the plan's core transportation bus and cycling tenets enthusiastically embraced by current mayor Zohran Mamdani.

The PlaNYC/Sustainable Streets influence has been embedded in the street designs and transportation management of cities through the authors' subsequent work with Bloomberg Associates, and in hundreds of projects influenced by guidelines adopted by the National Association of City Transportation Officials/Global Designing Cities Initiative, leading to hundreds of street project. Each of these cities and each of these projects has its own story, but from Times Square to Oxford Street, each owes a debt, explicit or implicit, to the vision behind PlaNYC.

The old operating system

In 2007 New York's streets were out of sync with their people.

On paper, the Department of Transportation had an enormous portfolio: 6,300 miles of streets, 12,000 signalized intersections, nearly 800 bridges and the Staten Island Ferry—transportation assets that touch the lives of more than the 8.2 million New Yorkers and the millions more who flood into to it daily via the city's tunnels, trains and river crossings.

In 2007 and continuing to this day, the majority of New York households did not and do not have access to a car, and even fewer commuters relied on it. Since the dawn of the motor vehicle, Manhattan's Central Business District (CBD) has remained overwhelmingly reliant on transit, seeing 2.7 million trips daily, more than triple times the number of vehicles entering Manhattan below 60th Street. This lopsided mode share is a virtual inversion of the rest of America, where greater than 85% of trips are made in a car.

But Manhattan's streets in 2007 didn't physically reflect the way people used them. Thousands of pedestrians slogged along streets in Midtown and in Flushing. People walking in Times Square and dozens of sidewalks across Manhattan overflowed, ambling dangerously into the street. Yet DOT's budget, materials and manpower were dominated by a single criterion: keep the cars moving and keep everyone else out of their way.

Instead of a bench, a fire hydrant qualified as public seating. Instead of sidewalk cafés, vendors hawking hot dogs and pretzels were the rare outdoor amenity. And a sunbaked expanse of limestone outside a Midtown office building was close enough to be considered a public plaza. Where New York City's streets were built for mediocrity, the PlaNYC worldview saw the footprint of the open space it sought to put within a 10-minute walk of every New Yorker.

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By their very design, the streets and the DOT that managed them reinforced and incentivized this practice. Many of New York's busiest avenues looked and operated much as they had had fifty years earlier: multiple wide lanes, little protection for people walking or biking, crowded with drivers looking for parking, cabbies looking for fares, and thousands of other motorists just using the street to get somewhere else.

The average speed of a bus in New York City was just 7.9 mph, a pace that slowed to walking sped at intersections like Herald, Times and Union Square, creating hotspots of traffic. The traffic status quo was no better outside of Manhattan. In Queens, sidewalks in Main Street, Flushing and on East Fordham Road in the Bronx overflowed with people walking, street vendors, and sightseers, while travel lanes remained sacrosanct.

Streets make up 26% of the city's area, more than twice the combined expanse of the city's parks and public spaces. People on foot far outnumber people in cars on many of the city's busiest streets and few places in New York demonstrated this gross imbalance more than Times Square. In that bowtie of space, from 42nd to 47th street, 82% of the traffic each day was on foot, yet they had only 11% of the cavernous space.[6]

City Agencies: Heal Thyselves

Despite these challenges, the New York City Dept. of Transportation in the early 2000s was, both practically and conceptually, a massive asphalt, concrete and steel maintenance entity. Its operational budget of $2.8 billion was earmarked for repairing and augmenting the city's aging and underperforming infrastructure. It worked with expensive materials—1 million of tons of asphalt that had to be produced to order using petroleum-based materials, transported and spread onto roadbeds while still hot, and 12,000 miles of concrete along city sidewalks, curbs, medians and islands. The methods that guided it—traffic studies informed by national and manuals whose sole purpose was to move cars—were as crude as the materials it used to implement the roadway designs and the repairs the manuals prescribed

Dedicating the vast majority of public space to the least efficient way of getting around was not a sustainable strategy. It didn't merely fail spectacularly to reduce traffic congestion, expanding driving space enabled traffic volumes to increase, representing one of the deadliest threats to human life in the city.

PlaNYC's new view was that the City could fully organize and exercise the jurisdiction of its many overlapping offices, divisions and 300,000 employees, toward achieving specific,

[6] Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center, "Reclaiming Broadway's Public Space," https://www.pedbikeinfo.org/resources/resources_details.php?id=4587.

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achievable goals in the short- to medium-term, in support of the larger goal of creating a city that could function even more efficiently with a million more people. One of the primary lenses this was viewed through was not just building new buildings, bridges and rehabilitating old ones, but reenvisioning the city's vast legacy infrastructure.

In the case of transportation, PlaNYC looked at the city's streets as they were and sought to rebalance them to speed buses and reduce traffic congestion and build bike lanes as a kind of investment strategy targeting "the physical city, and its possibilities to unleash opportunity."[7]

The outward transportation orientation of PlaNYC was toward environmental and climate goals: Vehicle emissions are the largest contributor to greenhouse gases in the US—even greater than those of coal plants. City roads are built for the inefficiency of cars, with traffic jams inducing congestion, pollution and contributing to health problems and global climate change. A strategy to give people alternatives to driving and introduce cleaner materials into city operations would result in a cleaner, healthier and more livable city.

By *not* organizing the DOT to minimize the waste of its own operations, by *not* minimizing the miles traveled by its own fleets of paving trucks, maintenance vehicles, and trucks carting old asphalt to landfills; by *not* using the concrete, asphalt and steel, the paint and thermoplastic and the agency's staff of engineers and planners to reduce speeding, to speed buses and reduce traffic deaths on the city's lanes; and by passively devoting most street space itself to its least efficient mode—the single occupancy vehicle—city operations were themselves a part of the problem that PlaNYC wanted to solve for.

Transportation made up 16 of the PlaNYC's 127 initiatives.[8] It set the direction: Expand access to transit and promote cycling. Restore the city's bridges, roads and infrastructure to a state of good repair, and manage roads more efficiently.

Central to PlaNYC was the call for establishing five rapid bus routes, one in each borough[9], and studying congested arterials as a step toward implementing new traffic management plans.

But the cornerstone of the transportation chapter got most of the attention in 2007: Congestion pricing, a policy of charging vehicles to enter the city center during rush hour, and pioneered just a few years earlier in London.

Less remarked at the time, however, was the goal of promoting cycling by building 200 miles of bike lanes over three years.[10] Also hidden in plain sight in the document was one

[7] City of New York, *PlaNYC: A Greener, Greater New York* (New York: City of New York, April 2007), http://www.nyc.gov/html/planyc/downloads/pdf/publications/full_report_2007.pdf, [Page number needed.]

[8] City of New York, *PlaNYC*, [Page number needed.]

[9] City of New York, *PlaNYC*, [Page number needed.]

[10] City of New York, *PlaNYC*, [Page number needed.]

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item not in the Transportation chapter but which would have a direct impact on it: Ensuring that every New Yorker is within a 10-minute walk of a park[11]—and idea that could take on added significance if the streets could be reclaimed as a new, liminal genus of safe, inviting public space, somewhere between an ordinary sidewalk and a traditional park.

The environmental, emissions-oriented, climate-output-focused thrust of PlaNYC overshadowed a recurring theme in the document that became a watermark for the plan's legacy: Economics. PlaNYC invoked variations on the word "economics" nearly 60 times on its 156 pages—nine times in the Transportation chapter alone—and "jobs" and "opportunity" clocked in at 22 and 58 mentions, respectively.

"Transportation has always been the key to unlocking New York's potential," PlaNYC declared. "The city's quality of life and economic prosperity depend on a transportation system that can meet demand. That means we must use our streets more efficiently if we are to absorb millions of new residents, workers, and tourists."[12]

These words weren't platitudes, and they took on added significance as the city and nation plunged from economic precarity into a financial crisis one year after PlaNYC's launch. Deploying city services and materials more sustainably wasn't just good for the environment, it saved money by reducing the need for expensive, frequent and cost-inefficient repairs—while projects that made better use of the street were better for local business and prevented billions of dollars a year in costs related to crashes.

Also less regarded were strategies to improve enforcement of traffic laws, long an Achilles heel in the city's transportation management policy. Double-parked cars that blocked lanes on high-traffic corridors were largely the result of failed but unacknowledged curbside management policy, with parking meter rates so low that people parked at the curb indefinitely, leaving no spare parking spaces. With little fear of tickets for overstaying parking limits, an entrenched culture of rampant double-parking prevailed across the city. PlaNYC called for renewed efforts to expand camera enforcement of red-light runners and bus lane violators, and more efficient meters that could charge higher prices for the busiest times of day.

Viewing infrastructure investment as economic investment was only part of PlaNYC's orientation. The other part was looking at streets and street designs differently. Bus lanes, bike lanes weren't engineering challenges. They could be sited on almost any street using ordinary materials in a matter of days or weeks. What were car lanes today could be pedestrian space tomorrow and that space could be an economic engine and provide New Yorkers an off-ramp from car dominance and dependence.

PlaNYC called for a spectrum of changes that would affect how people would move. But it didn't fully spell out how to translate these visions into effective, workable designs on the

[11] City of New York, *PlaNYC*, [Page number needed.]

[12] City of New York, *PlaNYC*, [Page number needed.]

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street. To execute a reimagining of the city's streets, the shopworn DOT itself had to be reimagined from the inside out. And changing New York streets would require changing New Yorkers themselves.

Operationalizing PlaNYC: A Strategic Plan for DOT

PlaNYC's transportation chapter called for a historic reshaping of the city's physical infrastructure with specific goals, but it didn't dictate the design and tactics for achieving them. DOT translated this reshaping into a management doctrine for DOT itself: *Sustainable Streets*, the department's first strategic plan. In its seven chapters, streets were regarded not simply as transportation infrastructure but as integrated public-space networks that could move more people and transit more safely, more efficiently, using more and with less of an impact on the local and global ecosystem.

The document opened with something that had never appeared in a New York transportation plan before: an unambiguous, citywide safety goal to cut traffic fatalities by 50 percent from 2007 levels.[13] Death by vehicle has long been one of the most common ways to die in the city. From 1913 through 1999 the number of traffic deaths ranged well above 400 and even exceeded a staggering 1,300 people a year. The relentless crashes often blended into the white noise of city life, and frequently passed with little news coverage, concern or legal or criminal repercussions.

The cumulative, nearly 72,000 traffic deaths averaged 620 people a year—and over a century totaled eight times the capacity of a sold-out Madison Square Garden. The dead were were children walking to school, seniors crossing wide avenues, cyclists squeezed next to trucks trying to get around a double-parked car.. For more than a century since the first traffic death, in 1899, these deaths were treated as routine side effects of life in the big city and not as tragic but preventable outcomes. There were also no metrics to assess success or to determine accountability for failure, no concept of responsibility and accountability. New York City had no stated goal for ameliorating this public health hazard, and, for after more than a century, no one was in danger of losing his or her job for failure to improve it.

Starting with Sustainable Streets in 2007, crashes were no longer inevitable or invisible, and safety was no longer a nice-to-have; it was a performance target. By solving for safety on the street, by taming traffic and making it accessible to people of any age or ability—on their own two feet or on two wheels—many of PlaNYC's goals for the city's future could be achieved.

For an agency used to planning from resurfacing season to resurfacing season, a public, 200-page roadmap centered on halving traffic deaths was itself a cultural shock. The agency was governed more by bureaucratic inertia, and many traffic engineers simply

[13] NYC DOT, *Sustainable Streets*; NYC DOT, *Pedestrian Safety Study and Action Plan* (New York: NYC DOT, 2010), https://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/nyc_ped_safety_study_action_plan.pdf.

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weren't comfortable committing to meet goals over which they felt like they had no control, like speeding and dangerous driving, which they felt were human failures, and not engineering flaws.

But Sustainable Streets, backed by PlaNYC's bureaucratic positivism, posits that behavior largely follows design. Wide-open streets invite speeding and double-parking, while these same dangerous behaviors discourage people from biking and slow down buses. But on the positive side, widening sidewalks decreases the number of lanes pedestrians have to cross while inducing drivers to drive at safer speeds. Safe bike lanes and more abundant bike parking induces more people to ride, confident that there is a secure place to lock a bike. New Yorkers won't ride buses or ditch their cars simply because it is healthier or more environmentally sustainable to do so. But they will ride if the bus or bike trip is faster, more efficient and less expensive than driving.

How DOT got this done is perhaps better known than its conceptual framing. Over six years, from the first plaza to the completion of the first section of a reimagined Times Square, DOT launched more than 70 pedestrian spaces across the city built atop former car lanes, starting in the summer of 2007 with a plaza on Pearl Street below the Manhattan Bridge in Brooklyn's historic and artsy DUMBO district. While most plazas would take years of planning and iterative design processes, visualizations and community meetings, DOT workers marked the outline of Pearl Street Plaza in a triangle of asphalt where a dozen cars could park, just in the period of a single weekend.

DOT workers used only the materials we had on hand: paint to mark the plaza's borders, and surplus granite slabs left over from bridge restoration projects lined the perimeter and keep cars out. Heavyweight planters also provided protection and dotted the interior of the news space with tables and chairs that one might find in world-class piazza—comfortable enough to enjoy lunch or a cup of coffee in, durable enough to withstand the outdoor elements. The plaza was an immediately sensation, drawing locals and tourists alike to it during lunchtime and after hours when the neighborhood swelled with nightlife. By 2012, the local Business Improvement District would hold 27 events in the new space, and local shops would see sales nearly triple—far outpacing growth borough-wide[14]

We quickly adapted similar designs in the Meatpacking District, where pedestrians far outnumber cars, and at Madison Square, where three busy roads meet and where people were forced to cross an intersection the length of a ball field. On the stretch of Broadway between 22nd and 23rd streets, the two lanes beside the landmark Flatiron Building were transformed into a plaza in late summer of 2008, furnished with seating and tables. Several other pedestrian spaces were created, enhanced or enlarged atop what was formerly driving or parking space, repurposing 42,000 square feet of street space for people.

[14] NYC DOT, *Measuring the Street: New Metrics for 21st Century Streets* (New York: NYC DOT, October 2012), http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/2012-10-measuring-the-street.pdf.

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Each time, we created public space out of the roadway lanes that was already there, consolidating and more clearly defining traffic lanes to keep traffic moving safely, but leaving more than enough room for people to sit comfortably and enjoy the pulse of the city.

The Public Space Heard 'Round the World

The most famous of the new pedestrian plazas were in Times Square and Herald Square. Using the same toolbox of flexible, temporary materials, we diverted car traffic from Broadway north of Times Square onto 7th Avenue, which we widened by one lane. This left enough capacity to process midtown traffic while creating five massive pedestrian spaces in Broadway's roadbed from 42nd to 47th streets.[15] Reporters counted down the hours until the project opened, forecasting that closing Broadway would create chaos. But what happened instead is one of the great stories in modern urban design: Hundreds of thousands of people came out to the street, experiencing Times Square in a way that had never been possible, and using only the street space that was already there.

Where a day earlier there were thousands of cars, they were quickly replaced by beach chairs, a placeholder until more durable café tables and chairs would arrive. Thousands of people, families and friends sprawled out in beach and patio chairs, many of them visitors to New York for the first time and unaware that the street had been used any other way.

The Times Square that Mayor Khan admired in September 2024 wasn't the same one that existed in 2009, when NYC DOT pedestrianized Broadway. Despite fears at the time that the new traffic pattern would create traffic chaos and make it harder for theatergoers to get to shows, traffic moved just as well as before, fewer people were injured in car crashes.[16]

The people followed the traffic changes and area reinvestment, with pedestrian volumes peaking at 34% higher before the pandemic—an estimated 480,000 people a day. The businesses followed the people, with scores of major retailers moving in. Asking rents tripled as Broadway has posted a string of box-office records, with visitors treated to a Times Square where they could stop and take in the visual cacophony of the space and not just be pushed into the sidewalk by crowding.

The local economy followed the people. As new stores moved into ground-floor spaces, the buildings above them prospered. One Times Square underwent a $425 million upgrade to renovate its interior and add an observation deck high above the south end of the square. The 47-story, $2.5 billion TSX Broadway building topped out at the north end of the square, elevating the Palace Theater from its original footprint 30 feet and constructing it directly into the new building, opening the ground floor for retail stores. Investment in the Marriott Marquis hotel where Mayor Sadiq Khan stood in 2024 had undergone a $385 million

[15] NYC DOT, *Green Light for Midtown Evaluation Report* (New York: NYC DOT, January 2010), https://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/broadway_report_final2010_web.pdf.

[16] NYC DOT, *Green Light for Midtown*.

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investment in its renovation, all part of $5 billion in real estate investment in the area since 2010. By 2016, the economic outpoint just of the Times Square area represented a GDP equivalent to the entire city of Nashville.

Times Square represented the culmination of the PlaNYC/Sustainable Streets change-based approach to policy implementation. Instead of endlessly debating, dissecting and diluting big ideas to make them more palatable or marginally less controversial, the City instead moved quickly to implement and demonstrate the power of the project, with a swift data collection plan to reach clear and conclusive determinations.

In 2009, New York City opinionators had declared the reclaiming of Broadway and other street-transforming policies of the Bloomberg Administration as "The Wrong Crusade" and "Dead-End Streets." Crotchety opinion-makers still kvetched, and they would have an endless source of material as street redesigns swept across the city from the West Village to East New York. But just as quickly, plazas became part of New Yorkers' experience of the city, and whether measured in sales figures or sheer enjoyment, they were successful enough to endure and for more plazas to be built.

The plaza program, until this point a budding initiative of the DOT, was itself reengineered as a community led program. The department created an application process allowing community groups to request plazas be built in their neighborhoods. As part of the selection process, applicants needed to demonstrate community support to build the project in their streets, and a capacity to maintain those spaces, with cleaning and maintenance, placing and removing tables and chairs daily, and tending to the landscaping elements. In communities without the resources to staff and maintain plazas, DOT established the Neighborhood Plaza Partnership with Chase Bank to work in neighborhoods with little green or public space, assisting community groups with applications and administration, and training groups on plaza maintenance.

Mayors de Blasio and Adams maintained the plaza program, bringing plazas to more than 100 locations, including on Victory Boulevard on Staten Island, Thieriot Avenue in the Bronx, Beverly Road in Brooklyn and 34th Avenue in Queens, where a pandemic-era car-free street was transformed into a pedestrian space.

Building a Better Bus Network: A Lane of Their Own

Just as the city's transportation resources could easily transform street space from car space into people space, they could reorient the streets capacity to better serve transit riders.

In a city of transportation icons—subways, taxis and the Staten Island Ferry—the network is administratively fragmented, by design. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) operates most of the city's buses, subways and commuter trains, as well as tolled bridges between boroughs, like the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge. The Port Authority operates trains,

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buses, bridges and tunnels to New Jersey. The Taxi & Limousine Commission keeps an eye on the taxis, Uber and Lyft, while the NYPD enforces the rules of the road.

The DOT I led didn't operate the buses, but it did run the streets and sidewalks that buses used. I came to see the streets as the rails for the bus network, and, following PlaNYC's call for one rapid bus route in each borough, the City initiated a collaboration with MTA and New York City Transit leadership to give the nation's slowest buses priority on city streets.[17]

In the Bronx in 2008, the city's first Select Bus Service route, as we branded the rapid bus initiative, on Fordham Road, a commercial corridor linking Bay Plaza with Fordham University and Upper Manhattan, buses moved 20% faster and moved 10% more passengers in its first year of operation, moving in dedicated lanes marked in terra-cotta-colored paint, fewer stops, and with passengers able to pay before boarding at any door on the bus.[18]

Buses running on the SBS M15 route, the city's busiest bus corridor moving along the uptown-downtown pair of First and Second avenues, moved 18% faster in its first year of operation than the limited-stop service it replaced. The route recorded a 10% increase in passengers in just that first year.[19] Similar routes, all built in partnership with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, came to Rogers and Nostrand avenues in Brooklyn, and leading from Hylan Boulevard on Staten Island over the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge to Bay Ridge.

Select Bus Service proved that surface transit could be made faster and more reliable without waiting decades for new subway lines. By the end of 2013, New York had created seven Select Bus Service routes, spanning every borough, cutting travel times by about 20 percent for 210,000 riders a day.

That achievement established the template for what is now a much larger network, far exceeding the five originally called for: today the city has 17 SBS routes, making trips 27 percent faster for roughly 600,000 daily riders—as dozens of bus routes across the city benefit from the dedicated bus lanes they share with Select Bus routes.

The PlaNYC Bike Boom

More than almost any of PlaNYC's 16 transportation initiatives—and rivaling almost any of PlaNYC's 127 initiatives for sheer media attention—the implantation of bike lane networks citywide was what captured the public imagination, and, frequently, ire. In the six years

[17] NYC DOT's route pages date the selection of the original five BRT corridors to the NYC Bus Rapid Transit Study completed in 2006, before PlaNYC's release. See NYC DOT, "First Avenue and Second Avenue Select Bus Service," https://www.nyc.gov/html/brt/html/routes/first_ave.shtml.

[18] NYC DOT, "Fordham Road/Pelham Parkway," Select Bus Service, https://www.nyc.gov/html/brt/html/routes/pelham.shtml.

[19] NYC DOT, "First Avenue and Second Avenue Select Bus Service".

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after PlaNYC, NYC added nearly 400 miles of bike lanes, double the three-year number including the first parking-protected bike lanes in North America.

From the onset, critics declared that New York wasn't a cycling city, that its streets were too dangerous to cycle on, and that there would be blood in the streets if the City encouraged more people to ride. A dominant narrative presumption claimed that riding a bike was somehow alien to New York, and at odds with its character. Detractors claimed "We're not Copenhagen!" in dismissing the possibility of installing new bike lanes successfully on New York City's streets.

DOT nonetheless pressed forward with the strategic-plan concept that if the agency made the street safe enough, with dedicated infrastructure, people would ride. Critics did observe a legitimate concern with street design. New York City's bike lane network was small and disconnected. What few bike lanes existed in 2007 were, typically, a pair of faded parallel lines painted between parked cars and moving traffic. Though recognizable, painted lines provided little safety or solace to prospective riders, who were forced to ride close to moving traffic, opening car doors and, more often than not, to navigate into car traffic to avoid doubled-parked cars and trucks.

DOT in 2007 experimented with a bike lane design seen in Copenhagen, relocating the parking lanes on 9th Avenue in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan from the curb into the street and allowing cyclists to ride in the curbside lane. That concept may have seemed foreign at the time, but the impact was immediately legible, with parked cars serving as a physical buffer between cruising cyclists and moving drivers, augmented by pedestrian islands that shortened the distances that people had to walk across traffic lanes. The design instantly changed the feel of the street, with traffic moving at safer speeds—reducing injuries to all road users by 58% on 9th Avenue and by more than one-third on 8th Avenue.[20] The parking-protected lane quickly became a standard across the city on Manhattan's north-south avenues and on avenues in Brooklyn like Kent Avenue and Prospect Park West.

Though seemingly foreign, these innovative new designs required mostly the same materials that DOT had already using—the everyday paint, asphalt, concrete and stone blocks already in city depots, or easily procured, flexible in the way it could be used, and relatively inexpensive compared to the costs of building new bridges and roadway infrastructure. Using this approach and flexible materials New York embarked on the largest bike path expansion of any big city at the time. New designs and construction solved thorny access problems at the base of the bridges linking the boroughs across the city's East River Bridges, and it reached into neighborhoods in The Bronx along Grand Concourse; in Queens along 34th Avenue; and in Brooklyn, extending along roads like Flushing Avenue through Fort Greene and Kent Avenue across Williamsburg.

[20] NYC DOT, *Measuring the Street*.

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New infrastructure induced demand as new riders surged into the lanes. The greatest barrier to cycling in the city wasn't weather but the safety of a connected, legible cycling network.

The City hit PlaNYC's 200-mile target on time in 2009, laying down bands of thermoplastic to demarcate lanes on Grand Concourse in the Bronx, just as the backlash was starting to hit. At public meetings and to local media, some New Yorkers voiced indignation at proposed changes to their streets. Some residents inveighed that the bike lanes were unnecessary, as no thinking New Yorker would ever want to bike. Others claimed that so many people were cycling that the lanes made the street more dangerous. Business owners alleged that cycle lanes hurt sales at local shops, whose customers and deliveries were thwarted by parking-space-eating lanes. Some locals protested on the street, others sued to stop the City, saying officials had employed high-handed methods to build the lanes without community engagement.

The greatest counterargument wasn't made in the courtroom or in the press. The interconnected network of paths just worked, unambiguously leading to more cycling, and, just as with claims about public space, the changes were found to have positive impacts on local traffic—far from the "carmageddon" that naysayers had predicted.

Studies found that they not only reduced injuries to all street users, but they increased retail sales along their corridors by as much as 49 percent, challenging the hard-hard notion that livable streets and car traffic were an either-or proposition.[21] Cycling doubled, serious crashes remained unchanged even as the number of people cycling increased sharply.[22]

Despite the backlash, most New Yorkers got the message, and the rest of the nation took notice, too. Bicycling magazine named New York City as a top American city for cycling for the first time, and the League of American Bicyclists recognized the city as a "Bike-Friendly Community." Dozens of American cities adopted its designs and rapid-implementation tactics. In some cities, residents would protest proposed bike lanes claiming that "We're not New York."

The city continued to build on the foundation: DOT reports more than 1,500 lane miles of bike lanes citywide and over 620,000 cycling trips on a typical day by 2026. Though their numbers are dispersed across borough streets, this number represents that of a mass transportation mode, with daily cycling trips exceeding the ridership Metro North and Long Island Railroad, and dwarfing traffic on some of the region's most heavily used highways.

Citi Bike: A New Model for Transit Expansion

[21] NYC DOT, *Measuring the Street*.

[22] NYC DOT, *Safer Cycling: Bicycle Ridership and Safety in New York City* (New York: NYC DOT, 2017), http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/bike-safety-study-fullreport2017.pdf.

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The words “bike share” didn’t appear once in PlaNYC. But they did appear in a Financial Times article on my desk one morning almost three months after PlaNYC was released.

The article announced the launch of the Vélib’ bike-share system in Paris, which went live the day before, bringing 14,500 bikes to city streets for public use.

Clipped to the article was a slip of paper with the handwritten note: "What do we think about this?"

That note was written by Dan Doctoroff.

What started as a great idea would become a years-long interagency planning process, that would restart many of the conversations around traffic and economic management, land use and technology, public policy and community engagement that produced PlaNYC itself.

If New York City’s streets were to accommodate the docks and ubiquitous riders of a citywide bike share system, city streets within the service zone would first require safe cycling infrastructure. Creating that infrastructure would require a citywide rethinking of road space, parking policy and traffic safety. Designing the system to achieve the scale and infrastructure to be successful would require administrative skill. Winning public approval in New York’s tabloid culture would require a media acumen. Achieving both within the remaining two and a half years of what we thought was Mike Bloomberg’s final term as mayor would require sheer pure political will.

To move fast, we reverse-engineered a process and created a contract model that would withstand the city’s contradictory political pressures. By classifying the bike share partnership as a revenue contract, the bike share system would remain less vulnerable to politicization in the land use process. By creating an online portal to crowdsource potential bike share locations, the DOT could identify multiple, community-identified alternate locations, helping ensure that station locations reflected local will and identify alternative locations should one not work out. Many locations for new stations to dock thousands of Citi Bikes were sited on former parking spaces, sidewalk space or plazas, helping activate existing but underused space. Two dozen bikes could be docked and undocked in a single hour in the time a car would sit parked unused. By having the program privately funded we also avoided the criticism that taxpayer money would be used to fund the nascent program. And by operating the private contract with strict service requirements, the City could make sure that Citi Bike maintained minimum standards for station density, equity and safety.

The project faced intense challenges long before the first ride. Just as they had alleged in opposing bike lanes, critics forecast that the program would lead to increased traffic crashes, injuries and deaths. Opponents said that bike share stations would impede deliveries, sanitation trucks and emergency vehicles. Others insinuated that terrorists might somehow use the bikes to plant explosives. Wealthy residents filed lawsuits claiming that

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the program, which was vetted in hundreds of public meetings in dozens of communities, was conducted in secret.

But not all the obstacles to implementing bike share were based on fantasy. The system's operating technology was buggy in early tests, requiring technical workarounds. And the historic storm surge caused Hurricane Sandy in 2012 severely damaged hundreds of bikes and stations stored in a Brooklyn Navy Yard warehouse, delaying implementation.

The process culminated in 2013 with the launch of Citi Bike, New York City's first new transportation system in the more than half a century since the MTA took over the city's private bus routes. When Dan wrote his note in 2007, few New Yorkers dared to ride on the city's mean streets. Today, more than 300 million trips have been taken Citi Bike trips, and the public-private system is now expanding to 40,000 bikes across all five boroughs, making it the world's largest bike share system outside of China, and as integral to the New York streetscape as yellow taxis.[23]

Citi Bike was in most ways a symbol of the unanticipated outcomes: The physical and administrative city required to make Citi Bike possible simply didn't exist in 2007. And while PlaNYC and Sustainable Streets didn't envision bike share specifically, it was only through the implementation of their objectives that still higher goals even became visible, much less achievable.

Safety as a Sustainability Strategy

While cycling and the reallocation of street space dominated headlines, the administration's most consequential achievement was in safety.

From 2001 to 2013 traffic fatalities fell by about 25 percent, saving more than 100 lives a year compared with the start of the period. Cumulatively, the last 10 years of the Bloomberg administration as the 10 safest years in city history at that time. The administration paired major redesigns of dangerous corridors with new safety tools, including pedestrian countdown signals, which give pedestrians a head start in crosswalks before drivers get a green light and innovative new intersection treatments that expand pedestrian space at crosswalks and medians.

By 2013, in just the interval since PlaNYC was announced, the DOT Implemented safety redesigns on 137 street corridors and 113 intersections citywide. Counting pedestrianized street space across the city, 39 acres of road space was repurposed for people to walk, with public seating, refuge islands, painted extensions, medians, and sidewalks extended into the roadbed. The city implemented or initiated planning on 29 residential slow zones,

[23] "The Big Lyft: Mamdani Faces Tough Fight for Cheaper Citi Bikes," *Streetsblog NYC*, October 8, 2026, https://nyc.streetsblog.org/2026/10/08/the-big-lyft-mamdani-faces-tough-fight-for-cheaper-citi-bikes.

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which brought lower speed limits and speed-reducing designs to community streets, as well as reduced speed zones around 189 schools.

The Bloomberg Administration lobbied for and won passage by the New York state Legislature the authority to install the city's first speed-cameras, leading to a pilot installation at 20 locations, and adding 50 more locations to the existing active network of red-light cameras. 2011 was the first year in more than two decades that Queens Boulevard, known long before the Bloomberg Administration as the notorious "Boulevard of Death," did not record a single pedestrian death, the product of years of safety improvements to make the 15-mile corridor's crossings less perilous.

The Fight

In taking PlaNYC's vision to the street with Sustainable Streets, we encountered an administrative structure that was designed to thwart implementation and innovation andolcal elected officials opposed changes to city streets that altered travel or parking lanes.

"[There is] a sense of the elite telling the everyday people what's good for them," said John Liu, a Councilmember from Queens and chair of the body's Transportation Committee until 2009.

Liu's successor on the committee, Bronx Councilmember James Vacca, carried the idea even further when he took over Liu's post a year later: "Too many people are starting to get the impression that bike policy is about getting them to give up their cars," he said when opening a committee hearing where he and other Councilmembers scorned the City's bike-lane building efforts.

Opposition to bike lanes became a proxy for a cultural war, pitting the city's minority of drivers against the idea of city streets built to accommodate bikes. Traffic management projects were routinely challenged, whether or not a project even removed travel lanes or parking spaces, or even whether the project had broad community support pushing for the change. A small number of citizens, backed by elected officials, could easily win the status of an aggrieved constituency, giving the sense that the City was operating unheeded, ideologically driven, or without public input.

The City Council, looking to "do something" about rate of bike path installations, enacted Local Law 90 of 2009, creating a formal notification process for what it termed a "major transportation project."[24] Any redesign affecting at least four consecutive blocks or 1,000 feet that involved a major roadway realignment, such as removing a travel or parking lane, or adding a vehicular lane, would require DOT notification to the affected Council member

[24] New York City Local Law 90 of 2009, https://intro.nyc/local-laws/2009-90.

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and community board. The board could request a presentation and elected officials and the board could submit recommendations, which DOT had to consider before proceeding.

In practice, however, the law had less impact on projects, as DOT's public notification, presentation and meetings and site visits with elected officials and community members already exceeded the minimum standard in the new law. In fact, the vast majority of projects, some of what were considered the most controversial at the time, were supported in board votes or even initiated by the boards themselves.

Though Local Law 90 did not substantively slow the pace of projects, its impact was accompanied by numerous legal actions to thwart them. The City was repeatedly sued by residents and property owners seeking to halt or reverse bike lane projects and the installation of bike share stations, with opponents claiming that the projects went around community processes and without a full consideration of their traffic impacts and would cause irreparable harm to their communities. A full-fledged media backlash ensued, with the general strategy of better managing streets reduced to a "bikes vs. cars" framing.

One bike lane project, on Prospect Park West, was a particular flashpoint. Local residents accused DOT of falsifying data to conceal their contention that the bike lane had made the street more dangerous. In fact the opposite had occurred: More people biked on the street along Prospect Park, and fewer drivers speeded down the nearly one-mile street, whose two parking lanes and two through lanes maintained both traffic and parking. Hotels and property owners followed this playbook to stop Citi Bike years later, claiming in legal filings that residents and emergency personnel would be unable to reach buildings because of the obstacle posed by the bike share docks.

The tide turned little by little, then all at once: Each of the lawsuits challenging bike lanes and bike share stations was thrown out by judges, who affirmed time and again that the City has broad authority and latitude to design city streets. And critics eventually overplayed their hand, as pedestrian plazas, bike lanes and bike share programs failed to produce the dire, "carmageddon" predictions. Stores didn't close—in fact, retail sales increased in many project areas while more new stores opened their doors. Safety improved at crossings as people walking had shorter crossings. Citi Bike usage far exceeded expectations, with tens of thousands of riders using the system daily as it expanded into more neighborhoods. And the City and DOT did a better job at systematically documenting and publicizing their public outreach, showing that communities had ample opportunity to have an impact on projects, and that most supported the changes.

City of Good Repair

While DOT was in the headlines for bike lane wars, much less heralded was the fact that, the agency was becoming a national leader in manufacturing recycled asphalt—literally reclaiming blacktop harvested from city streets that was then reheated, combined with new

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aggregate and reformulated into fresh asphalt—to be spread on a different street elsewhere in the city. By 2012, DOT had increased its recycled asphalt content to 40%, almost double the content of the next largest municipal asphalt recycling program. Asphalt production at DOT's Hamilton Avenue plant in Brookly resulted in savings of $10 million a year, making the case for the agency to acquire a second asphalt plant at the Harper Street in Queens.

This not only reduced material costs for the city, by converting old asphalt into new resurfacing material, DOT diverted 174,000 tons of milled asphalt from being deposited into landfills, eliminating 321,000 trucks trips that would have been needed to carry the waste to locations sometimes in other states, while reducing the use of oil in asphalt production by 840,000 barrels. DOT has built upon this, experimenting with asphalt developed with recycled rubber from tires and plastic from consumer waste streams.

While making its resurfacing program a world standard for efficiency and sustainability, DOT committed $3.1 billion for the city's bridge program from 2007-2013, rehabilitating or replacing 66 bridges, including the Brooklyn Bridge, Willis Avenue Bridge, and the ramps at St. George Ferry Terminal, creating a smoother and safer ride for motorists. By the final year of the Bloomberg Administration, the agency had brought each of its 788 bridges into a state of good repair or started projects to rehabilitate them—the first time in the city's modern history. This wasn't just a box-checking exercise: By investing in sustained roadway, bridge and tunnel repair in the near and medium term, the City could avert more costly and dangerous repairs when roads deteriorate and require emergency shutdowns and rehabilitation Another $2.1 billion when to street reconstruction and repaving projects, with another $430 million committed to upgrading and maintaining the city's expansive lighting and traffic signals.

From PlaNYC to Standard Operating Procedure

Once known for its mean streets, New York has become a national model for cycling, with women and families walking, riding and taking transit in increasing numbers, doubling the number of cyclists in just a few years, without measurable increases in traffic congestion or crashes on city streets.

The bike lanes, pedestrian plazas and transit projects, controversial and criticized just a few years earlier in the city's newspapers, proved to be extremely popular. In the last months of the Bloomberg Administration, a New York Times poll found that 73 percent of New Yorkers supported bike share, 72 percent supported the plazas and 63 percent supported bike lanes[25]—if policies were people, bike lanes would be elected mayor of New York City.

[25] "Times Poll: New Yorkers Really Love Bike Lanes, Bike-Share, and Plazas," *Streetsblog NYC*, August 2013, https://nyc.streetsblog.org/2013/08/16/times-poll-new-yorkers-really-love-bike-lanes-bike-share-and-plazas/ (reporting the *New York Times* poll at http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/08/18/nyregion/new-yorkers-views-on-bloomberg-poll.html).

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But the surest test of the policy durability of this period weren't polls or political artifacts tied to a particular mayor or commissioner. PlaNYC and Sustainable Streets were the basis for a different transportation direction for the city as a whole, one that has been adopted and adapted by subsequent administrations.

Under Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Polly Trottenberg, the DOT invested heavily in the safety orientation defined in *Sustainable Streets*. Where reducing traffic fatalities by 50% was the first chapter in *Sustainable Streets*, Vision Zero and the goal of eliminating *all* traffic deaths became the organizing frame for agency operations, from signal timing to school outreach. Based on an idea pioneered in Sweden that there was no tolerable level of traffic deaths, the concept envisioned city streets which were designed not for the speed of vehicles but for the safety of the children, seniors, walkers and bikers, who made up a majority of people killed on city streets each year.

New York City's Vision Zero plan built on Sweden's example but also directly on PlaNYC's foundations: lower default speed limits, more speed cameras near schools, systematic redesigns of high-injury corridors, and a culture shift in how crashes were discussed. Traffic deaths were no longer seen as inevitable "accidents," they were the predictable products of street design — and they could be changed.

A decade after Vision Zero, the city's own data told a story that stood out nationally. While the U.S. as a whole experienced a grim surge in traffic fatalities over the 2010s and early 2020s, New York City bent the curve in the other direction, becoming the only big city to record a sustained decline in pedestrian deaths.

Comparing 2023 with 2013, the year before Vision Zero began, traffic deaths were down by more than 12 percent, and pedestrian deaths were down by 45 percent—reaching a 120-year low of 206 deaths in 2025.[26]

Those numbers are not an accident of luck. They reflect the cumulative effect of hundreds of concrete projects—curb extensions, protected crossings, re-timed signals, protected bike lanes, road diets—built one by one around the city. They reflect thousands of traffic stops and millions of automated speed camera violations that changed driver behavior, especially around schools. And they reflect something deeper: a political choice to treat the loss of life in traffic as a preventable crisis, not a toll we pay for living in a big city.

The release of OneNYC, de Blasio's 2040 plan for New York, in 2015, was written with the new mayor's vision of the city through the lens of equity—which was mentioned 74 times in the document. The document declared it was a "groundbreaking" effort to manage the

[26] NYC DOT, "Traffic Deaths Reach All-Time Low: New York Ends Year with Fewest Fatalities Ever Recorded," press release, January 2, 2026, https://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/pr2026/traffic-deaths-reach-all-time-low.shtml; "Mayor Mamdani Offers Bold 'Vision Zero Reimagined' but Details Are Few," *Streetsblog NYC*, September 15, 2026, https://nyc.streetsblog.org/2026/09/15/vision-zero-report-2026-mayor-zohran-mamdani-street-safety-dot.

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challenges posed by "the forecast of 9 million residents by 2040, changing climate conditions, an evolving economy, and aging infrastructure."

In fact, OneNYC's orientation and central transportation pillars were principled on and expansions of strategies plotted in and emanating from PlaNYC, with the added goals of solving the city for its resiliency and equity issues. Formulations of the word "resilience" were invoked more than 400 times in the document, dwarfing mentions of equity by five times. But the transportation strategies toward those goals followed PlaNYC in policy, calling for an even greater expansion of bike lanes and bike share, bringing more public spaces to more neighborhoods, expanding the growing Select Bus Service program, subway and ferry service, and seeking stronger camera enforcement of traffic rules.

Adding to the growing map of protected bike lanes on First, Second, Eighth and Ninth Avenue, and on Prospect Park West, Kent Avenue and elsewhere in Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island, new protected bike lanes arrived on core Midtown avenues like Fifth and Sixth, and to Queens Boulevard. The first seven Select Bus corridors inaugurated under the Bloomberg Administration were expanded into a 17-route network. Buoyed by the community plaza application process, public space projects continued to spread across the boroughs, including many high-injury corridors.

During Bill de Blasio's first term, however, the most serious threat to the city's burgeoning pedestrian plazas in Times Square did not come from public dissent or a stray legal action ruling, but from within City Hall itself. In August 2015, amid a political uproar over aggressive, costumed characters in Times Square and so-called "*desnudas*"—scantily clad women soliciting tips from tourists—de Blasio said the city would study whether to remove the plazas and reopen Broadway to cars in order to quash disorder.

The public backlash was immediate, scathing and astonishingly broad. Urban planners, transportation advocates, preservationists, and many elected officials strenuously argued that the mayor was using a manageable public-space problem as a pretext to undo Times Square's public-realm success.

City Comptroller Scott Stringer told Politico that "Shutting down the plazas would be a serious overreaction to what is essentially a quality of life enforcement issue," while City Councilman Dan Garodnick, who represented the district encompassing Times Square area decried the overreaction: "Times Square has problems, but let's keep the pedestrian plazas & not throw the baby out with the bathwater."

"Sure, let's tear up Broadway," an exasperated Tim Tompkins, president of the Times Square Alliance, told *The New York Times*. "We can't govern, manage or police our public spaces so we should just tear them up. That's not a solution. It's a surrender."

Faced with intense opposition, de Blasio blinked, convening a task force to look into how to address the Elmo invasion. The group, co-chaired by Planning Dept. Director Carl

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Weisbrod, recommended a series of measures, including designated zones in the plazas where the costumed and scantily clad characters could pose for tips. But the plazas would stay, with he rest of the space open for families to walk and take pictures without being hassled or hustled.

The striking misstep—and the intense public reaction to it—was a revealing marker of how much New York's politics had changed since the early PlaNYC years. Six years earlier, pedestrianizing Broadway had itself been treated by many skeptics as a radical, almost anti-New York act. By 2015, however, even a half-cocked proposal to reopen Broadway to cars had become even more politically toxic. The pedestrian plazas had moved from a controversial experiment to essential civic and social infrastructure. What was once attacked as municipal overreach became something that New Yorkers were no longer willing to give up.

Congestion Pricing: A Dream Deferred, Not Denied

Many of de Blasio's signature transportation goals were never realized, either the result of changed priorities, or deferred ambitions amid the pandemic. The addition of a new subway line along Utica Avenue never advanced even to a planning stage, while a proposed Brooklyn-Queens streetcar connection and a process to rebuild or rehabilitate the deteriorated Brooklyn-Queens Expressway languished amid controversy for years, but without resolution. De Blasio also restored parking placards to 50,000 City employees, a privilege previously widely viewed as open for abuse by workers who use them to park illegally, and he gave drivers of double-parked cars a pass, publicly claiming that New Yorkers shouldn't be punished for leaving their cars in bike or bus lanes. In the final months of the de Blasio administration, his transportation team quietly abandoned a long-delayed bus lane for Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, allegedly at the behest of major developers along the corridor.

But while many key components of his transportation agenda languished, the signal transportation advance of de Blasio's term was a transportation initiative championed by his predecessor.

For all of OneNYC's similarities with the goals and strategies with PlaNYC, perhaps the most significant difference was congestion pricing, which wasn't mentioned in the document's 350 pages. The concept had been moribund since the Bloomberg administration and presumed politically dead.

In 2017, as Gov. Andrew Cuomo revived congestion pricing after the "summer of hell"—a demoralizing series of subway derailments, track fires and stalls that disrupted service and highlighted decades of underinvestment in basic maintenance. The snafus threatened to overshadow the opening of the Second Avenue Subway, the first significant expansion of the subway system in decades, bringing service to three new stations along Manhattan's east side early in the year. The decline in reliability and ridership on existing subways

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prompted Gov. Cuomo to identify dedicated sources for MTA revenue so that subway funding would be solely dependent on the volatile budgetary cycle.

For his part, Mayor de Blasio initially criticized the proposal, arguing that congestion pricing would unfairly burden outer-borough and middle-class drivers, He championed in its place a "millionaires' tax" on the wealthiest New Yorkers to fund transit. Over the next two years, as, as the MTA's financial and service problems deepened, de Blasio's position would soften. In February 2019, he publicly conceded that the transit crisis could not be solved without congestion pricing, issuing a joint declaration with Gov. Cuomo that endorsed congestion pricing as part of a broader MTA financing and governance framework. That agreement helped pave the way for the Legislature, which enacted the Central Business District tolling program in the April 2019 state budget, and scheduled to be implemented one year later. With a governor championing the proposal at the public level, and by including the measure as part of the overall State budget and not an individual item, legislators were insulated from the supposed political risk of voting for the measure.

Though not even mentioned in the OneNYC agenda and initially opposed by the mayor, this central pillar of PlaNYC would become the most significant transportation legacy of the de Blasio era.

By January 2025, New York City had implemented congestion pricing, 18 years after it was proposed in PlaNYC, becoming the first city in the hemisphere to assess a charge to drivers who entered the busiest part of Manhattan

Many of the same critics who predicted traffic havoc from bike lanes ten years earlier, prophesied mass commercial extinctions from the new charge. Congestion pricing would purportedly make deliveries too expensive and would price their customers out of the market, they foretold. The MTA conducted a thorough study of the program's first year of operation and determined that within the congestion relief zone, that retail sales improved, scores of new stores opened—faster than elsewhere outside of the zone—while revenue exceeded forecasts, providing much-needed, dedicated revenue for the MTA to improve its subways.[27]

Yet even the version of congestion pricing that was implemented in January 2025—charging $9 to enter Manhattan below 60th Street, a fee reduced from the originally planned $15—still had the traffic-deterring effect of reducing traffic volumes by 71,500 a day by the end of the year.[28]

Congestion pricing's implementation showed the endurance of good ideas. While policies can languish for fear of political backlash, time and again, the goals and strategies in

[27] MTA, "Less Traffic, Better Transit".

[28] Metropolitan Transportation Authority, "Less Traffic, Better Transit: On Its First Anniversary, Governor Hochul Celebrates Transformational …," press release, January 5, 2026, https://www.mta.info/press-release/icymi-less-traffic-better-transit-its-first-anniversary-governor-hochul-celebrates.

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PlaNYC showed that, far from being toxic politics, they can be sound policy and the street-level basis for electoral victory.

Streets Plan in 2019

The enactment of Local Law 195 in 2019[29] could be viewed as the institutional culmination of PlaNYC/Sustainable Streets' transportation principles. Before PlaNYC, projects that systematically altered the design, management and allocation of streets in support of long-term city planning goals were executive priorities, advanced by a mayor and commissioner who had the inclination and the political will to achieve them. By 2019, the City Council was writing this vision into law, requiring mayors and their DOT to produce a citywide implementation plan with precise benchmarks, maps, and deadlines for street-transforming projects.

Local Law 195 required DOT to commit to a five-year plan and to build, at minimum, 150 miles of protected bus lanes, transit signal priority at thousands of intersections, 250 miles of protected bike lanes, 2,000 intersection redesigns, thousands of accessible pedestrian signals, parking and loading reforms, hundreds of bus stop upgrades per year, and 1 million square feet of pedestrian space by the end of 2023.[30]

The vocabulary of what had once been painted by critics as fringe or anti-car was now embedded in the Administrative Code of the City of New York.

The political reversal here was historic. In the late 2000s and early 2010s, many of the projects associated with PlaNYC and *Sustainable Streets* were treated as deeply controversial. I had to answer to a frequently skeptical City Council that accused DOT of doing too much, too quickly, and with too little deference to those who wanted streets to remain as they were.

This reversal also put DOT at odds with Speaker Johnson and the Council in a different way: Council hearings during the second de Blasio term were marked by sometimes confrontational hearings, with Council members demanding that DOT officials explain why they were failing to meet mandated bike and bus lane mileage.

In 2025, the City Council passed new oversight bills borne out of frustration that DOT was routinely missing Streets Plan benchmarks and providing too little transparency. The DOT in 2024 built only 13.5 miles of protected bus lanes, far short of the required 30 miles, and just over 29 miles of new bike lanes, short of the mandated 50 miles. Council members

[29] New York City Local Law 195 of 2019 (NYC Streets Plan).

[30] "NYC DOT Falls Far Short of '24 Targets for Bike and Bus Lanes, Touts Progress," *City & State New York*, March 2025, https://www.cityandstateny.com/policy/2025/03/nyc-dot-falls-far-short-24-targets-bike-and-bus-lanes-touts-progress/403707/.

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demanded trackers, updates, and accountability mechanisms because they believed DOT was not implementing street transformation aggressively enough.[31]

Some of this criticism was made in bad faith, with Council members opposing proposed bike lane projects in their own districts on one hand, then criticizing DOT in public hearings for not building the required miles of bike lanes citywide. And while the Council made great demands on the agency to build new expansive new infrastructure, it did not always provide the leadership, support nor the budget to do so.

Still, Local Law 195, and the required 2021 Streets Plan that the DOT drafted in response to the 2019 law, helped further change the mission of DOT from one of traffic preservation to public space transformation.

The "piecemeal way we plan our streets has made no sense for far too long," said City Council Speaker Corey Johnson, calling for "faster buses, safe streets infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists, and more pedestrian space" as structural requirements for DOT.

The Adams administration inherited this architecture in 2022 and advanced it with its own vocabulary. Commissioner Ydanis Rodriguez, himself a former transportation committee chairman in the City Council, framed bus and bike improvements as equity tools.

In perhaps the clearest sign of continuity and fidelity to the original plan's goals, Mayor Adams titled his climate action agenda PlaNYC 2023 and explicitly reinforced to the original plan's goals.[32]

For example, the 2007 plan argued that New York should accommodate growth through mass transit rather than increased automobile dependence, proposed transit expansion, better bus service, completion of the bike master plan, ferries, improved road management, and congestion pricing. PlaNYC 2023's principal transportation goals included an effort to "prioritize public transit, walking, and biking first," and calling for an 80 percent sustainable-mode share by 2050, with policies to implement congestion pricing, expanded bike and pedestrian infrastructure, Vision Zero improvements, and continued transformation of streets and public spaces.[33]

The language was as similar as the policies it produced, stated stated almost as a governing principle.

The Pandemic Era: The Primacy of the Street

[31] "Council Passes Bills Increasing DOT Oversight," NY1, April 10, 2025, https://ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/transit/2025/04/10/council-passes-bills-increasing-dot-oversight.

[32] City of New York, *PlaNYC: Getting Sustainability Done* (New York: Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice, 2023), [Page number needed.]

[33] City of New York, *PlaNYC: Getting Sustainability Done*, [Page number needed.]

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Nowhere was the economic, social and health value of the PlaNYC transportation toolkit borne out than during the city's stressful pandemic era, and with racial and social justice protests across the city. With shared indoor activities and public transportation one of the pandemics early casualties, people looking to get around and socialize took to the streets—on foot or on bikes.

After a balky start, punctuated by Mayor de Blasio briefly suspending the program and sparking a public outcry similar to his actions in Times Square, a citywide program of city-sanctioned, locally-maintained open streets and outdoor dining locations grew to give people car-free space to gather, walk, run and plan when offices were closed. The citywide program expanded to over 100 miles of Open Streets in the first two years, with more than 12,000 restaurants participating, occupying more than 10,000 former parking spaces for outdoor seating. These programs provided a lifeline to the city's battered hospitality industry during the pandemic, saving an estimated 100,000 jobs and supporting neighborhoods across the city

The Open Streets program, borne as an emergency response during the COVID-19 pandemic, was made permanent and expanded, turning hundreds of blocks into seasonal or year-round spaces where walking, biking, play, and community events take priority over through traffic.

On 34th Avenue in Jackson Heights, Queens, an Open Street launched in the early months of the pandemic in 2020 and became the city's flagship example of the program's potential, stretching 26 blocks across 1.3 miles, making it the longest Open Street in the city. It almost immediately became a daily gathering space where thousands of students spill out after school into a mix of kids playing, parents socializing, and pedestrians on bikes and scooters, and sustained by a volunteer network.

The dramatic success led the City Council to vote to make it permanent, and the city has since committed $90 million in capital funding to transform the corridor into the city's first permanent Open Street, known as "Paseo Park."

A DOT study verified what many had observed just in foot traffic: Average sales on Open Streets increased 19 percent compared with pre-pandemic averages, while nearby corridors without Open Streets saw retail receipts drop 29 percent.

It is one of the most fitting codas that when New York was faced with one of its greatest challenges, the response in dozens of neighborhoods was to reclaim its streets. This practice ran parallel to other cities advancing their own people-first streets around the world, with cities like Paris transforming its noisy and congested Rue de Rivoli into a bus and bicycle corridor, or London barring all but buses and taxis from its city centers, and with bike riders soon outnumbering car drivers in both cities.

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Back in New York City, however, the number of open and restaurant streets contracted sharply Under the Adams administration. Outdoor dining was formalized into a permanent, more restrictive program, with the City Council in 2023 banning roadway dining structures from December through March. The 2023 law also prescribed new structural standards for the dining platforms which, while intended to make them sturdier, made the structures more expensive, less inviting to sit in, and more burdensome to dissemble and store during the winter. Many business owners decided that the effort wasn't worth it, and by 2025 the roughly 12,500 restaurants with outdoor setups at the pandemic peak had shrunk to about 2,700 permitted to operate, with most remaining roadway cafés concentrated in Manhattan and Brooklyn, leaving Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island were left with only a handful or none. In August 2026, the City Council restored year-round roadside dining sheds with stricter cleanliness rules.

The Adams administration, entering office after 14 years of sustained roadway redesigns, squandered much of its momentum and its ambitions. While seeking the support of pedestrian and cycling advocates on the campaign trail, his administration subsequently sought to abandon, delay or scale back numerous high-profile transportation projects, including removing a protected bike lane on Bedford Avenue in Brooklyn, and weakening bus, bike and safety redesigns on Fordham Road, Underhill Avenue and Ashland Place after opposition.

A fight over a bike lane found its way into one of the city's biggest corruption scandals in a generation on McGuinness Boulevard in Greenpoint, where DOT had proposed a protected bike lane corridor at the foot of the Pulaski Bridge, only to alter its design at the last minute to preserve parking. The bizarre ploy spilled into the battle and led to Lewis-Martin's ouster. But Local Law 195 still remains the law of the street, and the basis for a new mayor and his incoming administration.

But more importantly, the incoming mayor restored the importance of the law and of fulfilling the safe, accessible-street program. On the third day of his administration, in January 2026, Mayor Zohran Mamdani announced that the city would complete the full, originally planned redesign of McGuinness, pledging to install parking-protected bike lanes along the entirety of the boulevard.[34]

"For too long, critical street safety projects have been delayed or shelved because of political considerations and backroom deal-making rather than the needs of New Yorkers," Mamdani said. "Those days are over."[35]

Mamdani: The PlaNYC Mayor

[34] Office of the Mayor, City of New York, "Mayor Mamdani Announces City to Complete Redesign on McGuinness Boulevard," press release, January 3, 2026, https://www.nyc.gov/mayors-office/news/2026/01/mayor-mamdani-announces-city-to-complete-redesign-on-mcguinness-.

[35] Office of the Mayor, "Complete Redesign on McGuinness Boulevard".

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In some ways, Mamdani wasn't a transportation outlier. As candidates, Bill de Blasio, Eric Adams and Zohran Mamdani all ran on platforms that promised to extend, advance and accelerate the city's growing bike, bus and pedestrian advances that made New York City a national and global leader. Each of the three was endorsed by StreetsPAC, the city's first political action committee, formed at the tail end of the Bloomberg Administration to support candidates for public office who were committed to the improving the safety, design and livability of city streets, a large majority of whom have been successful in their races.

The emergence of StreetsPAC also represented a political coming of age as the livable streets movement proved to be an influential force citywide. Neighborhood residents, parents of young children and seniors started making common cause, representing a voice previously overmatched in community meetings, calling for calmer, safer, less deadly streets as a basic component of city management. Marshalled with the city's existing advocates, they shaped a new generation of politicians who cut their teeth in the shifting politics of the early- to mid-2020s and came to expect their elected officials to deliver increased transit service, expanded bike lanes and bike share, and pedestrian space quickly.

Mayor Mamdani, who was just a teenager as protected bike lanes and plazas where first being introduced and 21 when Citi Bike was launched, represented this change in politics, centering his political identity and commitment to buses and bikes and their ability to deliver on his affordability agenda. Mamdani rode Citi Bike regularly during his campaign, and he was blunt about his intention to fully implement the projects Mayor Adams left unfinished—even appearing on McGuinness Boulevard in one of his first events as mayor-elect.

Also in keeping with the PlaNYC era, Mayor Mamdani appears willing to take the short-term heat for his stances and even to relish the fight. When riding a Citi Bike while traveling between campaign events, a heckler shouted "Communist!" at the candidate. Mamdani retorted: "It's pronounced 'cyclist!'" then rode away.

While the MTA has ceased to create new Select Bus Service routes on top of the original 17, the most audacious SBS prescriptions for improved bus service citywide—all-door-boarding, paying fares before boarding dedicated lanes, improved stops, shelters, signals and enforcement of bike lanes—were central to Mayor Mamdani's *Next Stop* bus service agenda, a partnership among the Mayor, Governor and MTA, released in July 2026. As of this writing, additional and offset bus lanes and transitways were underway on Fordham Road and Tremont Avenue in the Bronx, on Madison Avenue in Manhattan, and along the most congested sections of Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn, with plans for full Bus Rapid Transit invoked for the first time in years.

"In a place where every minute counts, some buses crawl at 5 mph. The wealthiest city in the wealthiest nation in the history of the world shouldn't have some of the slowest buses in America."

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PlaNYC: The World Wide Street

PlaNYC's transportation influence has found its way into city streets far beyond the Hudson since the conclusion of the Bloomberg administration in 2013.

Just as outdated engineering practices dominated New York's streets for most of the last half-century, roadway designs nationwide have similarly been dictated by traffic manuals like the federal Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), which contain crude but easily replicable roadway designs. These standards were intended to maximize traffic throughput with wide lanes and long green and red signals. In almost every American city, pedestrians, cyclists and street life were on the losing end of these designs, being left with little or no space on the street, or with unsafe crossings or few if any safe and dedicated places to walk or ride.

The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) — a coalition of big-city DOTs, was designed to bridge this gap. Originally just an email support group for transportation commissioners before 2007, the group has evolved to become one of that most dynamic peer exchange networks for the nation's transportation leaders, representing leadership for more than 100 of the nation's largest cities.

One of the earliest actions was to codify many of the street designs being pioneered in cities like New York, which was receiving frequent inquiries for design details, specs and considerations from other cities undertaking bike-, bus- and pedestrian-friendly roadway redesigns, but with limited or nonexistent design options available in the MUTCD

In 2011, NACTO released the *Urban Bikeway Design Guide*. It showed, for the first time in a U.S. engineering document, the details of how cities of any size could site, adapt and implement parking-protected bike lanes, bike-specific traffic signals, and protected intersections, many of them based on projects built in New York under the aegis of PlaNYC, or implemented in a handful of peer cities. It was a first not just for the design but for the national attention in prompted.[36] US Dept. of Transportation (USDOT) Secretary Ray LaHood joined NACTO's announcement of its release, holding the guide aloft at a Washington DC press conference, and declaring it a resource that cities everywhere should look to.

Two years later, NACTO published the *Urban Street Design* Guide (USDG), which translated the full spectrum of transportation goals of *Sustainable Streets* and turned it into a national design playbook. The guide opens with a premise that could have come straight from PlaNYC: streets are public spaces as well as corridors for movement—and they could

[36] National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO), *Urban Bikeway Design Guide* (New York: NACTO, 2011).

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be quickly designed to support walking, biking, transit—and thus the economy, health and sustainability of cities.[37]

What made the guide transformative was not just its content but the institutional support and legitimacy it gained. Less than a year after its release, the USDOT endorsed the Urban Street Design Guide and Urban Bikeway Design Guide, giving cities explicit permission to use these documents — and putting protected bike lanes, safety treatments and new bus lane designs on the menu for all federally funded projects.[38]

This adoption skyrocketed the guides' influence. Today, more than 100 American cities have endorsed the NACTO Urban Street Design Guide, and the annual Designing Cities conference attracts 1,000 of the nation's top transportation officials and is the industry's most anticipated events.

In practical terms, the adoption of the guides means the DNA of PlaNYC and *Sustainable Streets* grew to shape projects far from New York. When Chicago built its first parking-protected bike lane, or Atlanta narrowed dangerously wide lanes to make room for a bus-only lane and wider sidewalks, there's a strong chance the cross-sections in the internal memo were inspired by, referenced to or supported in a NACTO guide that traces its lineage straight back to the Bloomberg-era DOT.

San Francisco's "Pavement to Parks" program, an early source for the national parklet movement, was, by the city's own account, "inspired by the recent success of similar projects in New York City," especially the Broadway plazas created with paint, planters, and moveable tables and chairs. What started as an experiment that brought people to sit in chairs atop former road at the intersection of Market and Castro streets in 2009 has become a global export in its own right, but the idea of reclaiming underutilized road space quickly, with inexpensive materials and evaluation built in, was pioneered at scale in New York.[39]

Philadelphia launched its own Pedestrian Plaza Program, with its own plazas closely resembling New York's. Local advocates explicitly described their placemaking activity as "inspired by New York City." The city, like New York, tied every pilot plaza to a community management plan responsible for maintenance and programming, a key element NYC's

[37] NACTO, *Urban Street Design Guide* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2013), https://nacto.org/publication/urban-street-design-guide/.

[38] Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), "Guidance: Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility Design Flexibility," memorandum, August 20, 2013; NACTO, "FHWA Officially Supports City-Friendly Street Designs," July 25, 2014, https://nacto.org/latest/fhwa-officially-supports-city-friendly-street-design/.

[39] San Francisco Pavement to Parks program document hosted by NACTO, https://nacto.org/wp-content/uploads/sf_parklet_perkins.pdf [title and date to be confirmed; link carried over from draft]

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plaza model. When one early plaza in South Philadelphia was proposed, 98 percent of nearby residents told surveyors they supported it.[40]

The U.S. federal government has reinforced the shift. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021 explicitly allowed cities to apply the Urban Street Design Guide and Urban Bikeway Design Guide to bring federally funded projects to city streets, without having to get permission from state highway agencies.[41]

With national recognition, these street designs took on added credibility with cities around the world.

In the nation that virtually invented the piazza, Milan imported New York City-style tactics as part of its *Piazze Aperte* program, started in 2018. Developed by the city's mobility and environment agency in collaboration with Bloomberg Associates and GDCI, the program deployed the same tactical urbanism strategies pioneered New York City in DUMBO, Meatpacking District and Madison Square— paint, planters, and simple furniture — to convert excess roadway space into neighborhood plazas.

Projects in the *Piazze Aperte* program and its subsequent evolution as *Strade Aperte* (Open Streets) started as rapid-implementation, cost-effective projects, reclaiming more than 60 streets and overbuilt road spaces and transforming them into inviting, active neighborhood plazas, including 30 new spaces outside of schools. Milan also used these tactics to drive the city's world-leading pandemic response that reclaimed roadway space on key corridors for people to walk and bike. This work has been recognized in global media and emulated on city streets the world over, sparking a post-pandemic recovery agenda for Milan and other cities.

An open call produced dozens of proposals; by the early 2020s, more than 60 new piazzas had been created in districts across the city, and a successor initiative, "Open Squares for Every School," focused on creating car-free and reduced-car-traffic spaces outside school entrances.[42]

I worked with Milan on these street-reclaiming projects and walked in these spaces before and after their implementation. These reclamations show a coherent urban vision of streets as essential safety, community and economic infrastructure, and also how design strategies can reduce inequality by improving access to public space. From Milan's Dergano neighborhood to Spoleto and Piazzale Bacone, these spaces have become

[40] "Philadelphia Pedestrian Plaza Welcomed by 98% of Neighbors," *Streetsblog NYC*, March 27, 2014, https://nyc.streetsblog.org/2014/03/27/philadelphia-pedestrian-plaza-welcomed-by-98-of-neighbors.

[41] FHWA, "Design Standards, FAST Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Provisions," memorandum, November 16, 2023, referenced at https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/design/altstandards/index.cfm.

[42] Global Designing Cities Initiative, *Piazze Aperte* report, https://globaldesigningcities.org/update/piazze_aperte_report-en/ [title and date to be confirmed; link carried over from draft]

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cherished community spaces where thousands of old folks socialize, kids play ping-pong after school, and parents can bring their families into the open and engage their neighbors.

This work has been advanced with the support of the Global Designing Cities Initiative, an organization which I chair and which produced the Global Street Design Guide in 2014.[43] The compendium of peer-supported, tested street designs has now been adopted by more than 100 cities, nations and NGOs. The World Bank endorsed the guide, making its street designs an available resource for capital transportation infrastructure projects among the nearly $120 billion in investments, grants and loans to help alleviate poverty around the world. The guide has found a global audience in transportation departments, ministries and nonprofits, and has been downloaded more than 110,000 times, and translated into nine languages, including Spanish, Arabic, Portuguese, and Vietnamese.

In New York and now in cities like London, Paris and Milan, transportation departments that once saw themselves purely as road managers are now explicitly in the business, policy and practice of health, equity, climate, and public life. That is PlaNYC's worldview, exported.

A New Plan for All Cities

One of the most consequential legacies of PlaNYC and NYCDOT's 2008 *Sustainable Streets* was the re-conception of what city transportation departments could be designed for. Instead of acting primarily as a traffic-management and public-works agency—paving streets, timing signals and keeping vehicles moving—NYCDOT was recast as an agency responsible for broader urban outcomes: safety, mobility choice, public space, economic development, sustainability and quality of life.

In bringing this institutional alchemy to a national and international audience, the model was never simply to export New York's bike lanes and plazas—which themselves varied in design, orientation and purpose from neighborhood to neighborhood. The more important export was the idea that a city's transportation institutions, assets and policies could be a aligned to advance a city's own values and long-term social, economic, and environmental goals.

Detroit adapted the same framework to a radically different urban condition than New York's. After losing around 60 percent of its population to deindustrialization, suburbanization, social strife and economic challenges Detroit's population by the 2010s was growing again, led in part by Mayor Michael Duggan's leadership and reinvestment in the city center. The city's 2018 Strategic Plan for Transportation, a collaboration with Bloomberg Associates, was not about managing Manhattan-style congestion—Detroit's streets were twice as wide as many New York streets but carried a tiny fraction of the traffic. Detroit was no longer the Motor City in an economic or mobility sense, so the plan

[43] NACTO and Global Designing Cities Initiative, *Global Street Design Guide* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2016).

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instead emphasized street- and urban-design's ability to influence affordability, access to jobs and services, improved bus service, safer crossings, neighborhood traffic calming and transportation choices for residents who could not—or did not want to—depend on a car.[44]

An early action that presaged the city's new transportation approach came in 2017, when Detroit's transportation department closed the short block of Woodward Avenue between Jefferson and Larned, directly in front of the Spirit of Detroit statue and City Hall. The intervention converted 20,000 square feet of roadway into a civic square with seating, programming, food trucks and space for public gatherings. The pilot was incorporated into Detroit's strategic plan, showing proof of the possible.[45] Despite initial opposition from some motorists and a divided City Council, the experiment proved its popularity, giving confidence to the Council to vote in 2019 to make it permanent, followed by an $800,000 reconstruction with more durable tables and chairs amenities.[46]

The meteoric arc of Spirit Plaza closely echoed the PlaNYC-era approach pioneered in places like Times Square: Acting fast using in the roadbed using inexpensive, reversible materials, measure the impact and how people use it, and then make a successful experiment permanent.[47]

As Detroit and its Department of Transportation (DDOT) launched its transportation strategic plan, the City was already working on a connected bike-lane network. A 2018 pilot project converted portions of East Jefferson from a wide-open car corridor that parallels the Detroit River into a more clearly defined roadway with parking-protected bike lanes, shorter pedestrian crossings and improved access between East Side neighborhoods and the riverfront. That work formed part of a rapid expansion of separated bicycle infrastructure around downtown and the riverfront in 2018, supported by bike lanes built on Conner and East Warren avenues, making Detroit's one of the fastest buildouts of protected lanes of any American city that year outside of New York.

The strategic plan also sought to transform DDOT from a system that many Detroiters used as a last resort, or because they lacked the means to purchase, fuel and maintain a car. DDOT reimagined was the first comprehensive redesign of Detroit's bus network in decades. Rather than inefficiently attempting to preserve every existing route and schedule, the redesign concentrated service into a stronger network of frequent corridors, with a longer-term plan to provide frequent bus service within a ten-minute walk of roughly

[44] City of Detroit, "City of Detroit Announces Strategic Plan to Address Detroiters' Transportation Challenges," https://detroitmi.gov/news/city-detroit-announces-strategic-plan-address-detroiters-transportation-challenges [title and date to be confirmed; link carried over from draft]

[45] City of Detroit, *Detroit Strategic Plan for Transportation* (Detroit: City of Detroit, 2018), https://detroitmi.gov/sites/detroitmi.localhost/files/2018-10/Detroit-Strategic-Plan-For-Transportation.pdf [link carried over from draft; the "localhost" path should be checked]

[46] "Detroit's Spirit Plaza on Woodward to Get a New Layout," *BridgeDetroit*, https://www.bridgedetroit.com/spirit-plaza-detroit-renovations/ [date to be confirmed; link carried over from draft].

[47] City of Detroit, "Spirit Plaza," https://detroitmi.gov/departments/detroit-parks-recreation/parks-and-greenways/spirit-plaza [link carried over from draft]

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83 percent of Detroit's residents and nearly 87 percent of jobs. Key corridors would see buses arrive as frequently as every 7.5 -10 minutes and incorporate bus rapid transit elements. In population terms, that amounted to roughly a half-million Detroiters.

The development of Detroit's Joe Louis Greenway was perhaps the most powerful legacy of Detroit's strategic plan. The roughly 29-mile system reclaims former railroad rights of way in residential districts to connect neighborhoods, parks, the riverfront and neighboring municipalities through off-street trails, protected bike facilities and to existing, popular paths like the Dequindre Cut and RiverWalk. Though many urban rail trails are viewed as recreational infrastructure, Detroit positioned the Greenway to connect communities with jobs, school and services, support economic opportunity and to bridge the physical divide historically posed by the expansive railroad right-of-way.[48] While the project had a long and robust planning parentage, Bloomberg Associates helped to stand up the Joe Louis Greenway Partnership to lead and manage the transformation and to raise funds and maintain the spaces once they were built.

While Detroit represented an attempt to alter a city's long-term transportation course, Chicago demonstrates how far the model could evolve when confronted by a different political moment. Its 2021 Strategic Plan for Transportation, developed with assistance from Bloomberg Associates, was developed as the COVID-19 pandemic exposed severe inequalities in who could work from home and who had to travel amid national health concerns, and after the racial-justice protests of 2020 erupted across the nation, forcing institutions to reassess structural inequities. Chicago established transportation equity and mobility justice as the plan's organizing principles, not simply mobility or sustainability as abstract, distant goals. The result was to make a core commitment to residents that neglected neighborhoods would be central to city transportation planning, while confronting structural racism within the agency's own operations. Community organizations in the Transportation Equity Network helped shape the plan so that lived experience in historically underserved neighborhoods informed City investment priorities.[49]

Modern Atlanta developed squarely in the automotive age, with the motor vehicle a virtual transportation requirement to navigate the sprawling suburban development pattern. Though long viewed as a car-dominated city, swathes of the city are centered on relatively dense Midtown, separated not so much by long distances but as streets hostile to walking and biking even for short trips to local stores, parks or transit.

Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms created Atlanta's first Department of Transportation in 2019. With technical assistance from Bloomberg Associates, the city consolidated into one organization the planning, construction, maintenance and mobility operations that had

[48] City of Detroit, "Joe Louis Greenway," https://detroitmi.gov/departments/general-services-department/joe-louis-greenway [link carried over from draft]

[49] City of Chicago, Chicago Department of Transportation, "CDOT Strategic Plan," https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/cdot/supp_info/cdotstrategicplan.html [title and date to be confirmed; link carried over from draft]

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been divided among several agencies. Bloomberg Associates helped develop and draft a transportation strategic plan, One Atlanta,[50] looking beyond the city's historical automobile-first approach, calling for Vision Zero, more expansive and connected sidewalks and bike facilities, better bus service, curb and parking management, improved project delivery and investments targeted according to safety and equity. Announcing the plan Mayor Bottoms called it a blueprint for "a safer, more equitable and more sustainable transportation network."

These principles were built into the projects that followed. The new AtlDOT resurfaced the DeKalb Avenue corridor, long viewed as one of the city's most miserable roads, with signal, intersection and bicycle improvements and by eliminating a notorious, dangerous reversible lane. Workers redesigned Juniper Street to add a cycle track, safer crossings, improvements to make Midtown streets easier to cross, and improving the landscaping along the corridor.[51] The importance of the plan was less that they originated in its pages than that they were no longer seen as isolated capital projects from different agencies. They projects were components of a single city transportation vision administered by one department.[52]

Similar strategic action plans in Chicago, Los Angeles and elsewhere helped extend transportation in American cities beyond revised street-design templates into something more durable: A standard for managing transportation to elevate an entire city. Atlanta used it to break down fragmented bureaucratic silos among city agencies and barriers that disconnected neighborhoods. Detroit connected physical mobility with social mobility, opportunity and neighborhood reinvestment. Chicago recast transportation around racial equity and mobility justice after the crises of 2020. Los Angeles incorporated it into a broader "Great Streets" vision of safety, public life and multimodal choice. The projects differ—from DeKalb Avenue to the Joe Louis Greenway—but the institutional workings in each of these cities descended from PlaNYC and *Sustainable Streets*: Transportation agencies should not merely preserve and defend the streets they inherited. They should use their authority, budgets and everyday operations to help create the kind of city their residents want to live in.

The recurring controversy — and the recurring mandate

On Sunday, September 21, 2025, London temporarily removed traffic from roughly half a mile of Oxford Street for an eight-hour pedestrianization experiment. Instead of a river of

[50] City of Atlanta, news release on the One Atlanta transportation strategic plan, https://www.atlantaga.gov/Home/Components/News/News/11982/1338 [title and date to be confirmed; link carried over from draft]

[51] Atlanta Department of Transportation, "DeKalb Ave Safety Improvements," https://atldot.atlantaga.gov/projects/dekalb-ave-safety-improvements/ [link carried over from draft]; Atlanta Department of Transportation, "Juniper Street," https://atldot.atlantaga.gov/projects/juniper-street/ [link carried over from draft]

[52] "Atlanta Welcomes Its First Transportation Chief and Unveils a New Plan …," *ThreadATL*, November 13, 2019 (date taken from URL), https://www.threadatl.org/blog/2019/11/13/atlanta-welcomes-its-first-transportation-chief [title truncated in the draft's link; confirm full title].

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buses, taxis and bus traffic, the street came alive with music, food, fashion, sports, performances, an urban forest and family activities, giving hundreds of thousands of Londoners and visitors a preview of Mayor Khan's proposed permanent redesign.[53]

The results spoke for themselves, with huge crowds and widespread news coverage and little detectable traffic impact, giving strong evidence that, just like Times Square, a pedestrian Oxford Street filled with people worked better, whether commercially or as public space. A City Hall analysis of the one-day event found that foot traffic was 45% higher than the previous Sunday, and 38% higher than one year earlier. Passenger traffic at nearby Underground stations rose by about 25%. Sixty-seven percent of Oxford Street businesses responding to a New West End Company survey reported sales equal to or higher than a normal Sunday.[54]

These findings strengthened Khan's resolve and his public case for making the experiment permanent. Following additional consultations, he formally approved the permanent pedestrianization of Oxford Street in February 2026, directing Transport for London to remove traffic between Orchard Street and Great Portland Street by the end of summer 2026. He declared the one-day demonstration "the day the fight back began to rescue this street."

The permanent scheme is intended to go considerably beyond the one-day closure, with more trees and greenery, seating and rest areas, improved lighting and signs, and ample space for cultural and special events, and overnight access for deliveries and services.

Oxford Street is a particularly clean contemporary echo of the Times Square model: test the project in the short term, use programming and inexpensive interventions to let people experience a different use of the street, collect data on pedestrian activity, commerce and traffic, and use the success of the demonstration to build the case for permanent reconstruction.

London drivers fumed at Mayor Khan for expanding the city's Ultra Low Emission, subjecting him to sometimes vitriolic and racist rhetoric, yet he has twice been re-elected.

In Paris, Mayor Anne Hidalgo's reclamation of a roadway along the Right Bank of the Seine for pedestrians, slashing of on-street parking in the city center, and the creation of hundreds of pedestrianized school streets an enormous protected bike lane network triggered bitter opposition, yet she nonetheless won reelection in 2020.

In Milan, *Piazze Aperte* faced skepticism from drivers and some merchants, yet resident satisfaction surveys and the program's expansion tell their own story. When voters were

[53] Greater London Authority, "Landmark Day Pedestrianising Oxford Street".

[54] Greater London Authority, *This Is Oxford Street*.

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asked to determine whom they wanted to lead Milan for another four years, they reelected Giussepe Sala.

The backlash is real, but so are the benefits better streets bring, and the political mandate it supports. Every time a mayor runs and wins on a platform that includes safer streets, better buses, more bike lanes, or new plazas, it sends the same message: when given a choice, voters choose better streets and back the leaders who fight for them.

PlaNYC doesn't solve those questions by itself. What it does offer — in New York and beyond — is a different baseline: the assumption that the point of a transportation agency is not to preserve and protect a status quo that serves few people poorly, but to reimagine and reallocate a city's space, resources and energy to move more people

Conclusion: PlaNYC and the World Wide Street

From Ozone Park in Queens to Oxford Street in London, and from Trigono in Athens to Le Gare in Addis Ababa to Alqueria in Bogota to Mlinsky Nivy in Bratislava, PlaNYC has directly or indirectly, in policy or in practice, impacted the way millions of city residents experience their streets and their cities.

PlaNYC and its practice through Sustainable Streets in New York City has played an influential role in realigning NYC DOT's baseline transportation operations so broadly that it is a fundamentally different agency in 2026 than it was in 2007. The policies outlined in 2007 turned out to be not one mayor's agenda but the day-to-day métier of a 5,000-person agency and its multi-billion-dollar capital and operational plan. New York City mayors from that point on, regardless of their ideological outlook, while credibly claiming some innovations, would find themselves working with the same new culture of implementation, evaluation and adaption to meet new and higher goals.

Each of the policies, programs and projects set in motion by PlaNYC were not just continued, either in spirit or in practice, but expanded and accelerated by mayors de Blasio and Mamdani—or resisted the efforts of a mayor like Adams to slow or undo those policies and projects.

At the height of the bike backlash of 2009–11, the Council's transportation agenda was to add political and procedural hurdles to a DOT it perceived as changing streets too readily and too quickly. By 2019, the Council enacted Local Law 195 requiring DOT to produce large quantities of precisely the kinds of changes that it previously sought to rein in—protected bike lanes, bus lanes, pedestrian space and safer intersections. By 2026, the Council was repealing some of its own Bloomberg-era procedural barriers because it concluded that bike lanes were being installed too slowly.

The city's cycling network had swollen from a few slapdash, unconnected bike lanes to a network of more than 1,500 miles spanning the city with protected and two-way lanes.

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Ubiquitous yellow taxicabs were quickly outnumbered by blue Citi Bikes, as the largest bike share system outside of China, with 150,000 daily trips.[55] This is just a quarter of the 620,000 daily rides New Yorkers now take on two wheels, a volume greater than the combined traffic volume of the city's FDR Drive, Brooklyn-Queens Expressway and Cross Bronx Expressway combined.

At times, New York City today sees itself being outpaced by cities it previously inspired, such as London's Low-Traffic Neighborhoods, or watching as cities like Barcelona experiments with vast pedestrian zones like Superblocks and Green Axes, or, or Paris's wholesale greening and limitation of through traffic and parking in its central streets. But just as PlaNYC was inspired by innovations seen elsewhere, so too must it now take inspiration to break further ground.

To plan is human. To implement, divine. Changing the course of the city starts with a vision, but implementing that vision requires altering the structural workings of government and the organization and operation of the agencies that deliver on it.

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[55] "The Big Lyft".

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