



# World Class Streets

# Introduction



72%

of New Yorkers support  
DOT's public plazas



39

acres of road  
repurposed for  
plazas, public seating,  
and traffic calming

World Class Streets are hallmarks of diverse, vibrant and thriving cities. The best cities in the world have both famous boulevards or squares, and also hundreds of local streets, sidewalks and plazas that are treated not primarily as thoroughfares for travel, but as places that reflect and celebrate a city's energy, art, and culture.

In a 2008 report, urban design experts engaged by NYCDOT called New York a "city without seats," noting that without public seating in attractive, accessible public spaces, it is impossible to define city streets as places.

The 2007 PlaNYC report had acknowledged that New York City had largely discounted its streets as public space during the 20th Century, allowing traditional traffic engineering to crowd out all other considerations. PlaNYC's vision for a thriving, attractive 21st Century called on New York to "re-imagine the public realm" and stated the ambitious goal of opening new public plazas in every community and of ensuring that all New Yorkers live within a 10 minute walk of open space.

NYC DOT developed specific action plans to reinvent the public realm in both its *Sustainable Streets* strategic plan and the more detailed *World Class Streets: Remaking New York City's Public Realm*, published in 2008 in collaboration with Denmark's Gehl Architects. These strategy documents and action plans elaborated on the problems of treating streets exclusively as corridors for motor vehicles, and on the huge potential for high quality of public life inherent in New York's dense historic form.

World class streets programs were the cradle of NYCDOT's signature innovation during the Bloomberg Administration—changing City streets in real time. Instead of wading through years of planning studies and trial balloons, NYCDOT uses paint, stone blocks and planters to transform the function and use of city streets virtually overnight. In addition to capital construction plazas that can take 5–6 years to implement, with its real-time approach, DOT delivered acres of new, instantly usable public space to New Yorkers, delivering on the promise of PlaNYC in tangible, practical ways. The proof of concept for the new projects was not a computer model, but real world performance. If some feature of a space or new traffic and parking patterns did not work, it was not difficult to change.

Attractive public space and better designed streets are not simply aesthetic improvements. The business case for better streets has been clearly established and documented in cities around the world, and indeed had been embraced by NYC business improvement districts earlier than by City government. Streets that help create and strengthen communities and businesses increase foot traffic, raise

the value of many locations and enable the city to grow economically. These same effects were evident in New York City as well over the past six years. New Yorkers have taken naturally to the public spaces and people-oriented streets that NYCDOT has created, and DOT has clearly documented the economic benefits of this attraction. Better streets mean better business.

The PlaNYC update in 2012 found that 76% of New Yorkers lived within ten minutes of open space, up from 70% in 2007. DOT's efforts to repurpose street space has been crucial to this progress, but there is no shortage of work and opportunity looking into the future. New Yorkers in every community across the five boroughs want world class streets. Far more applications come into the plaza construction program each year than can be accommodated. Enthusiasm and participation in the Weekend Walks and Urban Art programs continues to rise. Opinion surveys asking about existing plazas, like the high-profile examples along Broadway in Midtown Manhattan, return super-majorities in favor. New Yorkers instinctively understand city streets as places.



Above: Dumpster pools at Summer Streets, 2010

Right: Park Avenue Tunnel, Voice Tunnel, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer





## Chapter 9

# Plazas, Public Space and Public Seating

In the 20th century, city streets were designed primarily to move motor vehicle traffic—a policy which attracted increasing numbers of vehicles, with negative effects on the overall quality of the City’s streetscape and quality of life. But New York’s streets can accommodate many users, not only cars. The City’s dense, active neighborhoods already encourage walking, making the addition of more pedestrian space a benefit to everyone.

NYCDOT initiatives since 2006 have ranged from the temporary use of street space for public events to permanent reclamation of underutilized asphalt for public plazas. Beginning in 2008, DOT’s Summer Streets program has transformed Park Avenue into a boulevard dedicated to strolling, cycling, skating and more for three Saturday mornings in August. At the other end of the spectrum, Willoughby Plaza in Downtown Brooklyn became the first of the DOT Plaza Program’s spaces originally created with temporary materials to be redesigned and set in stone through permanent capital construction. Elements included extended concrete sidewalks, underground utility work and new tree plantings.

In addition to open space, NYCDOT also responded to PlaNYC’s call to “re-imagine the public realm” with new public seating options. By adding seating, both in and out of plazas, DOT has encouraged New Yorkers to use sidewalks as civic space to be enjoyed. Seating has the added benefit of increasing foot traffic, providing a needed resource for the elderly and very young, and engendering feelings of ownership and community.

NYC DOT’s plazas and new seating create vibrant, social pedestrian spaces for communities across the city.

The effort is a key part of the City’s effort to ensure that all New Yorkers live within a 10-minute walk of quality open space. Streets make up approximately 26.6% of the City’s land area and yet, outside of New York’s excellent parks, there had been few places to sit, rest, socialize and enjoy public life. DOT’s public space programs work to change that through innovative design and partnerships.

DOT and its partners create public plazas that are active local destinations and can serve as a gathering place for community events and celebrations. New public spaces and plazas are in demand all across the city, and where DOT has created them, they are extremely well-used. A recent poll conducted by the *New York Times* revealed that 72% of New Yorkers approve of the creation of pedestrian plazas throughout the city. In fact, plazas enjoy high, constant levels support across incomes, ages, races and genders in New York (NYT poll 8/16/13). Two methods of creating plazas have been developed and established in NYC; a quick-moving temporary materials program and a longer-term capital construction program. Both are over-subscribed with proposals from groups around the city.

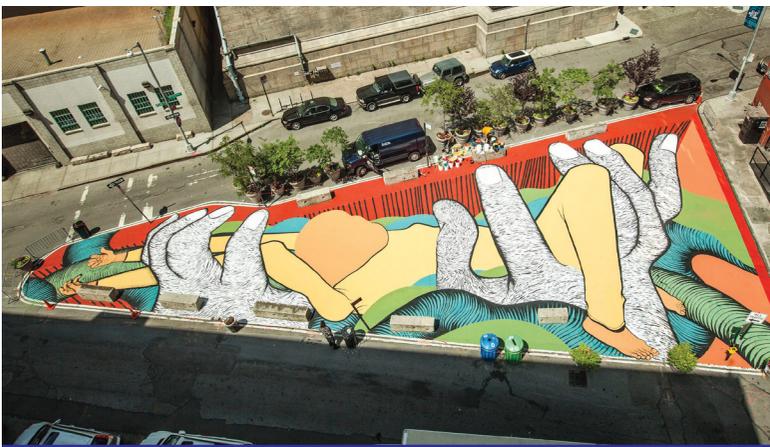
Since 2007, DOT has created over 59 new public places from what had been active vehicular lanes on streets, adding over 26 acres of pedestrian-space amid some of the busiest and most valuable real estate on Earth. With other street treatments like pedestrian refuge islands, a total of 39 acres street space has been reclaimed. 750 benches of seats have been added to the NYC streetscape. Additionally, more space in the City’s flagship parks has been dedicated to pedestrians and cyclists, and Weekend Walks temporary pedestrian streets have occurred in dozens of neighborhoods.

## PLAZA TYPES

NYCDOT pursues two major methods for implementing new public spaces in New York City. “Overnight” plazas created with operational materials such as paint and planters are one of NYCDOT’s major, signature innovations. They transform New York’s street by improving pedestrian safety and increasing accessibility.



Fowler Square, Fort Greene



Pearl Street Triangle, PST, David Ellis

## TEMPORARY MATERIALS PLAZAS

While capital projects can take years to plan and implement, NYC DOT’s temporary plaza program can bring open space to neighborhoods in nearly real-time. By simply adding crushed gravel or paint, new markings and signage, planters, tables and chairs and artwork, DOT has succeeded in transforming asphalt into space for people, enlivening neighborhoods

all over the city. This method is a quick and cost effective way to test the capacity of maintenance partners, build local support and study real benefits and impacts, not just models, of modifications to traffic and public use. Over time, successful temporary plazas can enter the capital project pipeline to be built out with permanent materials.

## CAPITAL PLAZAS

Capital program plazas are longer term and permanent. NYCDOT’s Public Plaza Program solicits applications for new plazas to directly enter the capital project pipeline, for completion several years after a successful application. Frequently, while a capital project is in development, a temporary materials version of the plaza is implemented. Capital plazas often involve major

construction, including subsurface infrastructure upgrades or relocation as well as aesthetic elements. Capital plazas often level out the roadbed at sidewalk grade, better connecting public and pedestrian spaces. Uniform pavers or concrete may be used across the entire space, and permanent fixtures such as seating and trees are generally integral to designs.

**DOT has created 59 new public plazas since 2007**

**81%**

of people surveyed had a positive opinion of Times Square Plaza



**St Nicholas and Amsterdam Avenues**



**Columbus Ave between 75th and 76th Street**

A third, ancillary type of public or open space is often created by DOT as a result of safety improvements to roadways. When undertaking reconfigurations of streets, DOT often adds or increases the size of pedestrian islands or adds painted sidewalk extensions. Where there is room, public seating and other street furniture can also be added to these spaces.

DOT partnered with the Columbus Ave Business Improvement District to design and improve the streetscape along Columbus Ave. The project includes a new landscaped area, six CityBenches, 26 in-ground solar powered LED lights, a new solar-powered trash compactor, DOT's repurposed parking meter bicycle racks, enlarged and newly planted tree beds along the curb, and Manhattan's first next-generation bioswale. Overall, the design helps enliven a once uninviting block and provides some great new amenities for Columbus Avenue.

# 750

benches installed  
since 2012

## SEATING AND THE STREET SEATS PROGRAM



City Bench

A key part of bringing social and economic vibrancy to city streets is having places for visitors and residents to sit. New public space in New York City is popular in part because New York has long represented the contradiction of being a walking city with no place to sit down. When pedestrians are unable to find public seating, they will often resort to finding alternative seating which may be dangerous or obstruct the flow of other pedestrians. Having places to sit creates a vibrant streetscape for retailers, increases walking and transit use, and is a welcome relief for seniors and parents with younger kids. Through the City Bench and Street Seats programs, NYC DOT is working to remedy this problem throughout the streetscape, not only in places where there are opportunities to develop public plazas.

The Street Seats program offers chic seasonal, outdoor public space and seating where sidewalk seating is not available. During warm-weather months, when demand to spend time outdoors is highest, Street Seats can temporarily replace a few parking spots

in a neighborhood providing an area for eating, reading, working, socializing, or taking a rest. Street Seats also help to beautify the streetscape with attractive wooden platforms and topiary. Like plazas, Street Seats are requested and maintained by local businesses adjacent to the seating.

The CityBench program is another initiative to increase the amount of public seating on New York City's streets. DOT is installing attractive and durable benches around the city, particularly at bus stops, retail corridors, and in areas with high concentrations of senior citizens. As with many other innovative DOT programs, CityBench is largely request based. Local business or community groups can request a CityBench from the DOT. If technical criteria are met and adjacent business do not have objections, a bench will be installed in short order.

As of 2013, we have installed over 700 benches and are on track to install 1,500 newly-designed City Benches across the city by 2015.



Pearl Street pop-up cafe



# 172%

increase in retail at  
DUMBO sales stores  
adjacent to plaza

## ECONOMIC VALUE OF PUBLIC SPACE



Broadway at Union Square

The idea that more welcoming streets can lead to better business is not just an aesthetic or marketing concept. Detailed studies around the world show that investments in a lively and attractive realm pay off in real terms.

A Transport for London study of that city's West End found that consumers who walk spend more than those who drive or take transit. That same area has had a tremendous experience with record sales during holiday weekends over the past few years when Oxford and Regent Streets were closed to vehicles and opened to pedestrians. These kinds of findings have been mirrored from Glasgow to Shanghai.

In New York, one real estate company [J. Liff Co.] has found that real estate demand and value is higher in areas where DOT has significantly improved the public realm by adding public space, like the Flatiron District at Broadway and 5th Avenue and the Meatpacking district on Manhattan's West Side. Studies of the value of proximity of park space in New York, including recent work by the CBRE group also confirms these types of economic benefits. In Brooklyn's DUMBO district, tax receipts show that retail sales in stores adjacent to a new plaza increased 172% in the three years after the plaza was implemented, over twice the growth seen in other parts of the same area [Measuring the Street, NYCDOT]. Similar findings regarding the signature public spaces that NYCDOT created along Broadway in 2008, 2009 and 2010 are detailed in the next chapter.

## COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND PARTNERSHIPS



**Marcy Plaza, Bedford Stuyvesant: Permanent plaza ribbon cutting. Artist: Ellen Harvy**



**25th St Plaza**

Every public plaza created in a former roadbed has a partner in a business improvement district, merchants association or local development corporation that has done its own calculus of the benefits of generating more foot traffic and attracting people with public seating and attractive surroundings. Even for temporary plazas, DOT must have maintenance partners.

Recent DOT plazas have been created through the application-based NYC Public Plaza Program for capital construction plazas, which has become a national model for community based planning. This focuses new initiatives into places where people want them, dramatically reducing project negotiation and development times, which in turn keeps implementation in reasonable time scales. Here again, the private sector shows that it values attractive urban space and public seating. Demand for the plazas through this program has been very strong, with applications outstripping awards by 2 to 1.

Through the Public Plaza Program, business improvement districts or non-profits across the city suggest sites for plazas. Winning applicants partner with DOT to design the plaza. Through public workshops, DOT and its partners draft a vision for each plaza that complements the architecture, culture, and history of the surrounding neighborhood. DOT tailors community outreach to suit the scope, size, complexity and magnitude of potential impacts of each project. The process is iterative, as DOT often adjusts and modifies the project based on community feedback. A plaza is then built with city funds, either as a temporary plaza with DOT paint, gravel and plantings, or as a more extensive, longer term capital street construction project by the Department of Design and Construction. After the plaza is built, the non-profit partner is responsible for maintenance, cleaning, and the management of plaza concessions, events and programs.

**“Corona Plaza ...has immediately become a magnet for people looking for a safe place to relax, eat, read, play and even enjoy a game of dominoes”  
—Queens Economic Development Corporation**



Corona Plaza

## CORONA PLAZA

Corona is located in central Queens, adjacent to Flushing Meadows Corona Park. As one of the most ethnically diverse communities in the U.S. according to Census data, Corona Plaza area is a bustling commercial hub that includes the 103rd Street station on the 7 line and Q33 bus, a public library, and a newly constructed elementary school. A large number of ethnic foods available in and around the plaza make the space a recognized destination. To support these activities, DOT closed the service road to through traffic to provide 13,000

square feet of public open space. The space, now known locally as “La Placita” uses NYC DOT’s signature mix of crushed gravel, new seating and tables, umbrellas, bike racks and greenery. Queens Economic Development Corporation partnered with other organizations, including the Flushing Willets Point Corona Local Development Corporation, Corona Community Action Network and the Queens Museum to schedule seasonal activities and events that benefit the local community.



Willoughby Plaza

## WILLOUGHBY PLAZA

Willoughby Plaza in Brooklyn is an excellent example of a temporary to capital plaza construction. The site is located in the heart of Downtown Brooklyn, a bustling mixed use neighborhood in New York’s third largest business district. In 2004 the Economic Development Corporation and the Department of City Planning drafted the Downtown Revitalization Plan which recommended a series of zoning map text changes, new public open spaces and other actions. This set the stage for more intense development in the area, which in turn lead to higher

pedestrian volumes on Willoughby Street. DOT created a temporary plaza in the spring of 2006 to help address the increases in pedestrian traffic and provide a place for visitors and shoppers to rest. The temporary plaza allowed DOT, local businesses and community groups to experience and observe the impacts of the plaza in real time. Once it was clear that the change had benefitted the area, DOT initiated the site’s reconstruction to create a permanent, capital plaza working with Downtown Brooklyn Partnership.

## Improvements to Grand Army Plaza defined major new pedestrian areas, reduced crossing distances and added crosswalks and bike lanes

### GRAND ARMY PLAZA



Grand Army Plaza before

DOT has worked for years with the community groups and civic organizations to develop a better design for Brooklyn's most iconic and busy traffic circle, Grand Army Plaza. The design of the circle and large traffic and pedestrian volumes made the area extremely dangerous for pedestrians traveling to Prospect Park and the Brooklyn Public Library and discouraged visitors to the fountain, making the area more prone to crime.

From 1999 to 2006, DOT made modest improvements to the traffic circle, including a larger pedestrian island and reducing auto access to Prospect Park. But residents still felt more needed to be done. Over the next five years, a civic coalition—working collaboratively with government agencies—created a plan for the

area. DOT used the community plan as a guidepost for real projects on the street. In 2007, this included concrete islands to reduce crossing distances, new crosswalks, new bike paths, beautification elements and longer crossing time for pedestrians. In 2011, DOT made additional improvements including a two way bike path on Plaza Street, gravel treatments on the southern side of the plaza and additional beautification. A pedestrian wayfinding program was added in 2013.

The result of the multi-year community based planning effort is a safer, more welcoming intersection and a model for civic and government partnership for livable streets. Safety has improved and the area is more accessible and vibrant.



## SUMMER STREETS



Summer Streets is an annual celebration of New York City's most valuable public space and resource—our streets. Streets can be long-term temporarily transformed into pedestrian space, as discussed earlier in this chapter, and others can be modified for short-term activities and events. This short-term modification is a valuable way to get the general public to think about streets as part of the public realm, not just for cars.

On three consecutive Saturdays mornings in the summer, nearly seven miles of NYC's streets are opened for people to play, walk, bike, and breathe. Summer Streets provides space for healthy recreation and encourages New Yorkers to use more sustainable forms of transportation. In 2013, more than 300,000 people took advantage of the open streets.

The event is part bike tour, part walking tour, part art exhibition, part block party—a great time for exercise, people watching, or just enjoying summer mornings. Summer Streets extends from the Brooklyn Bridge to Central Park, along Park Avenue and connecting streets, allowing participants to plan a trip as long or short as they wish. All activities at Summer Streets are free of charge, and designed for people of all ages and ability levels.

## WEEKEND WALKS



City streets do not have to be used for the same purposes at every time of day or week. Each year, NYCDOT partners with community groups to present Weekend Walks—neighborhood events on multi-block stretch of commercial streets temporarily closed to vehicles and open to walking and other activities. These multi-day events take place in all five boroughs from May through October. As with many other DOT initiatives, Weekend Walks are application based and completely community driven.

Weekend Walks highlight local culture and cultural institutions and often feature music, arts and crafts, classes and youth programming. They promote healthy, safe recreation and bring in potential customers for local businesses. In 2013, the fifth season of Weekend Walks, NYCDOT co-hosted 272 days of weekend walks across the five boroughs.

ONE WAY  
DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION

SPRING ST

LAFAYETTE STREET



NO PARKING  
FRIDAY, 11:00 P.M. - SATURDAY, 2:00 P.M.  
FOR THE FOLLOWING DATES:  
AUGUST 2ND - 3RD  
AUGUST 9TH - 10TH  
AUGUST 16TH - 17TH  
ALL VEHICLES  
WILL BE TOWED





## Chapter 10

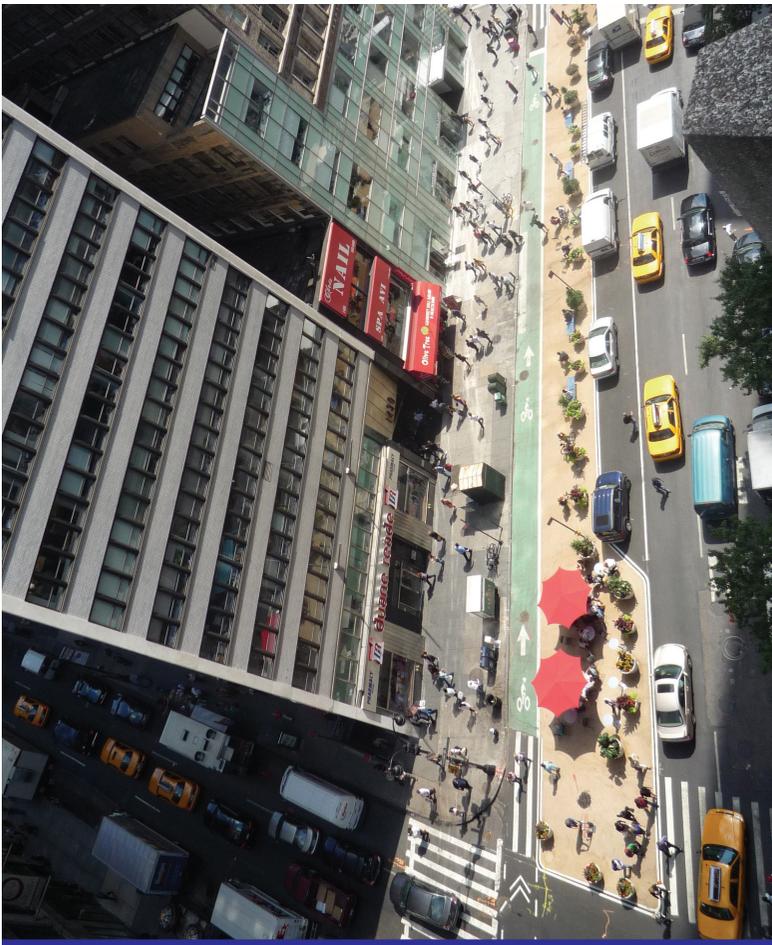
# Broadway

Between 2008 and 2010, NYCDOT undertook the most extensive revision of traffic patterns in Manhattan since the mid-20th Century, when the City changed most major avenues from two-way traffic to one-way. In 2009, major public plazas were added in Times and Herald Squares, and Broadway was closed to through-traffic at those locations. Vehicular traffic is able to serve destinations along Broadway, but the route is no longer a thoroughfare. As a result, DOT and the business improvement districts that manage streetscapes and public space in Midtown Manhattan have been able to devote more room along the route to pedestrians, public seating, cycling and special events.

In many respects, the changes along Broadway constitute an exceptionally visible microcosm of NYCDOT's overall street improvement program, encompassing new public

space, safety improvements, better traffic flow, a better balance among street users and a strengthening of the local economy. The transformation of Broadway, beginning in 2008 with the Broadway Boulevard and Madison Square projects, followed by 2009's major initiative encompassing both Times and Herald Squares, and extending to Union Square in 2010, has exhibited striking improvements in all of these dimensions. But the result of the changes that is perhaps best known and appreciated is the creation of signature public spaces in the heart of New York City—the major expansion of pedestrian plazas in Times, Herald and Madison Squares. In 2013, NYC DOT broke ground for the permanent establishment and construction of the Times Square plazas. The blocks between 42nd and 44th Street in the former roadbed of Broadway are scheduled to be completed during the first quarter of 2014.

## 2008 TEST CASES



## BROADWAY BOULEVARD

Broadway's unique diagonal course through the Midtown street grid creates the particular intersections and shapes that make up well-known spaces such as Madison and Times Squares. The traffic tie-ups that these three-way junctions engendered also meant that portions of Broadway saw relatively less traffic than other Midtown avenues. That was the case in the mid-2000s in between Times and Herald Squares. In July and August 2008, NYCDOT applied its "overnight plaza" approach to the then-unique setting of linear traffic lanes not needed for vehicular movement along the seven-block stretch of Broadway between 35th to 42nd Streets. The project featured a protected bicycle lane along the western curb, defined by "floating" vehicle parking and public

seating in plazas that were defined with rapidly-deployed planters and epoxy gravel surfaces. Vehicular lanes were reduced from four to two.

The project spanned three business improvement districts, the 34th Street Partnership, the Fashion Center BID and the Times Square Alliance. Each organization has taken a hand in maintaining its parts of Broadway Boulevard.

Like other plaza projects, the new public seating quickly drew a heavy base of users, which persisted into the winter months. The project initially created over 22,000 feet of new public space. A 2013 redesign of the bicycle lane through this area, which sees even less traffic since the closures to traffic of Times and Herald Squares in 2009, added even more space to the public and pedestrian areas.



# 42,000

square feet of new  
public space in  
Madison Square

## MADISON SQUARE



**Madison Square from the Flatiron building**

In August and September, 2008, NYC DOT reconfigured the intersection of Broadway, Fifth Avenue and 23rd Street, creating major new public spaces and dramatically simplifying one

of Manhattan's most difficult-to-navigate intersections for pedestrians and motorists alike.

At the project's center, a significant new plaza in the shape of the Flatiron Building offers over

## The Flatiron BID marks the inauguration of the Madison Square Plazas as an important milestone in the district's development

16,000 square feet of space from which to view one of the world's most photographed landmarks. On Broadway between 22nd and 23rd streets, two lanes of Broadway adjacent to the Flatiron Building were made into a plaza furnished with seating and tables. Several other pedestrian spaces were created, enhanced or enlarged using former roadbed. Pedestrian areas are protected by 170 planters weighing 600 or 1,000 pounds and also 43 granite blocks. Altogether, the project created over 42,000 square feet of new public space.

Southbound traffic from Broadway and Fifth Avenue formerly made several splits, crossing 23rd Street in four different streams. The plan eliminates two of those streams, reducing seven combined lanes crossing 23rd Street to just five lanes, improving safety and convenience for those traveling. Traffic volumes were low enough to reduce Broadway to one lane where it crosses Fifth Avenue.

New north-south crosswalks were installed on 23rd Street, and

existing crosswalks made shorter and more direct. For bicyclists, the new, high-visibility bicycle lanes on both Broadway and Fifth Avenue filled gaps in the area's network.

The new traffic pattern also simplified the M2, M3 and M5 bus routes, which no longer turn off of Fifth Avenue to pick up and discharge passengers.

As in other sites around New York, the new public spaces filled with people even before construction had finished, and remain highly popular. In late 2008, the Flatiron Business Improvement District surveyed the public about the plazas and intersection changes. The basic approval rating of respondents broke down like this: Like - 84%; Dislike - 7%; No opinion - 9%. The overwhelming support found in surveys by the BID increased over time. Approval in 2010 was 89.4%, and in 2012 stood at 90.4%. The BID marks the inauguration of the Madison Square plazas in 2008 as an important milestone in the Flatiron District's development.

## 70% said the Times Square plazas had a positive impact on the theatre-going experience

### GREEN LIGHT FOR MIDTOWN

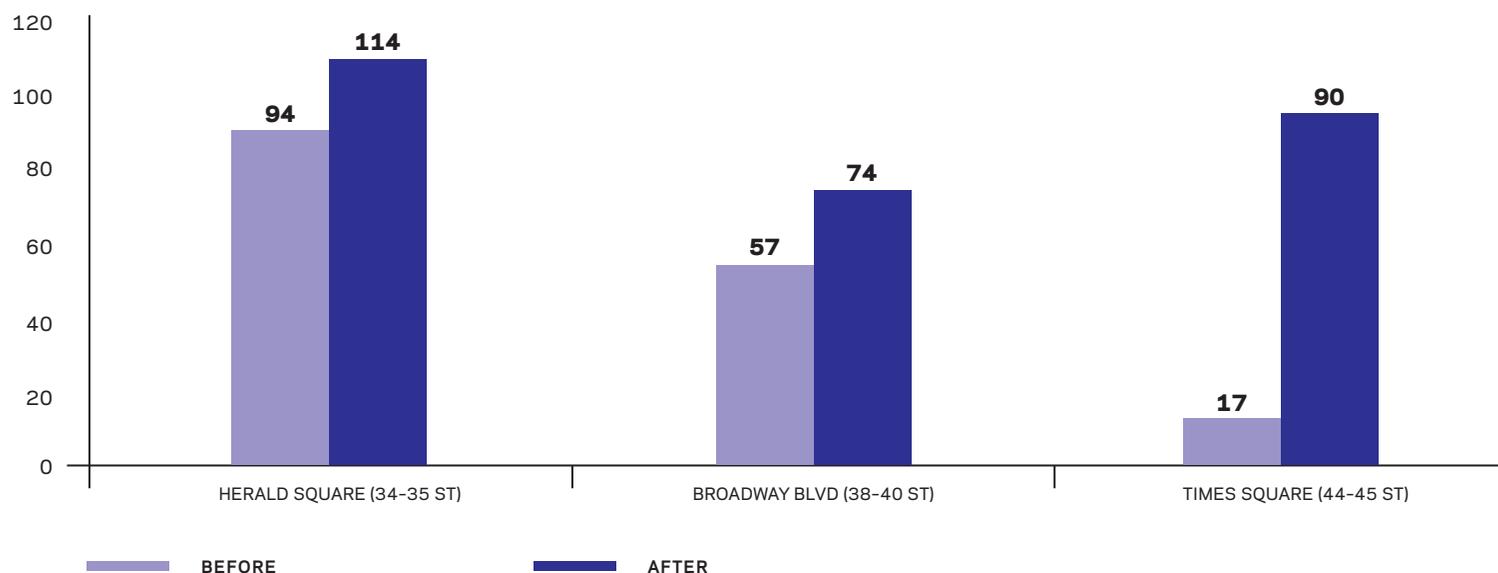
Businesses and BIDS had urged for years that pedestrian space be expanded in Times and Herald Squares, and small incremental steps had been taken in this direction.

In contrast, the 2009 transformation of Times and Herald Squares and connecting segments of Broadway, known as the Green Light for Midtown project, addressed the core of the Broadway corridor, and implemented the most dramatic streetscape changes of the Bloomberg Administration. It took advantage of Broadway's disruptive and diagonal path across the rectangular midtown street grid to simultaneously improve mobility and safety and provide much more public and pedestrian space in the Midtown core along the corridors from Columbus Circle to 42nd Street and from 35th Street to 26th Street. Most notably, it closed Broadway to vehicle traffic through both Times and Herald Squares, creating new signature public places in the heart of New York City.

The traffic complexity caused by Broadway's diagonal path at junctions with major avenues and cross streets caused congestion and contributed to higher crash rates compared to other Manhattan avenue intersections. By removing the Broadway leg from these intersections, the project addressed mobility and safety issues with the added benefit of creating world-class destinations equal to Broadway's reputation. Removing Broadway from the traffic system allowed for an 8% and 66% increase in green signal for 7th and 6th Avenues respectively at Times and Herald Squares.

Dozens of coordinated traffic changes were implemented from Columbus Circle to Madison Square in tandem with the Times and Herald Square closures to improve safety and enhance traffic conditions. Changes ranged from roadway geometry alterations to traffic signal timing adjustments, crosswalk shortenings and parking regulation changes.

### AVERAGE STATIONARY POPULATION (PERSONS OBSERVED)





## PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Even before the new public plazas had been laid out in Times and Herald Squares, the new spaces filled with people. The Times Square Alliance set out inexpensive lawn furniture for a short period before the plaza seating could be deployed, and it became the talk of the town.

Whether with temporary or present-day furniture, the Times

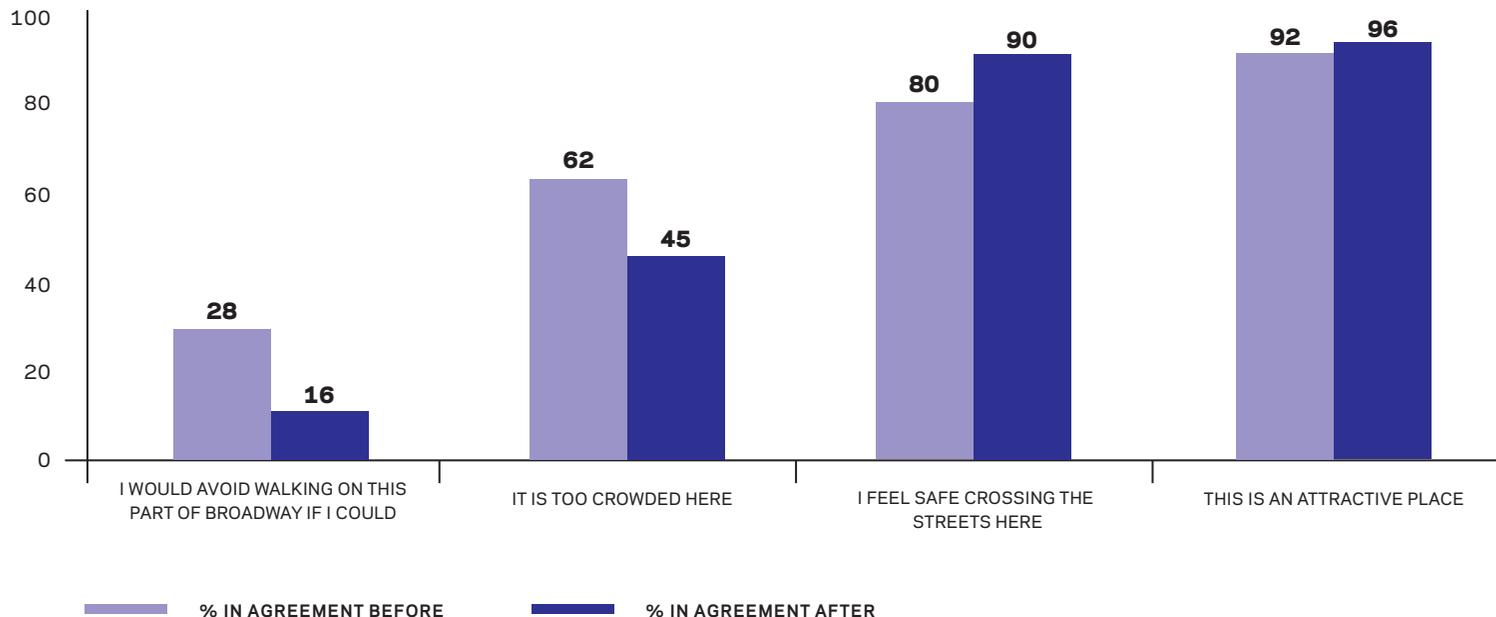
and Herald Square plazas became instant hits. A Quinnipiac University poll conducted in July 2009, close on the heels of the profound changes created by Green Light for Midtown, found that 48% of New Yorkers thought it was a good idea to close the major squares to vehicles and give more space to pedestrians, compared to 35 percent who didn't. A Times Square

Alliance survey in November 2009 found opinion among respondents was 81% favoring the Times Square pedestrian plaza, with 37% indicating a "very positive" opinion. The survey also found that 74% of New York City residents agreed that "Times Square had improved dramatically over the last year."

DOT surveys of people along Broadway before and after the

implementation of Green Light for Midtown found a marked improvement in perceptions of the area: In NY Times poll from August, 2013, 77% of Manhattan residents said they supported the Bloomberg Administration's pedestrian plaza initiatives.

### CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF BROADWAY: SURVEY RESULTS



## Surveys indicated clear support among New Yorkers and local businesses for changes in Times Square



Herald Square

### EVALUATION

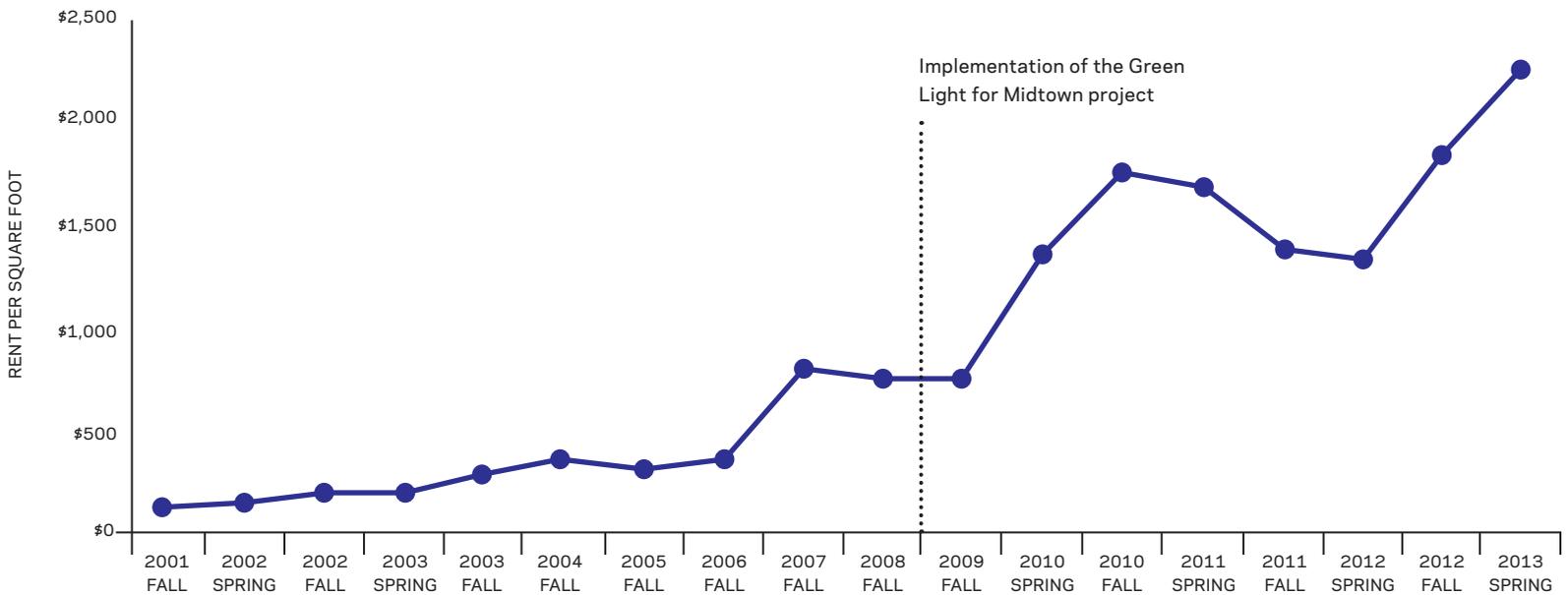
The Green Light for Midtown changes were made with an explicit public declaration that they were pilots, with a definite six-month evaluation window and subsequent decision-making about their permanence. In December 2009, NYCDOT reported results of the evaluation to Mayor Bloomberg. Mayor Bloomberg announced in

February 2010 that these results warranted making the Green Light for Midtown changes permanent. The Mayor noted the project's dramatic safety improvements and said that "Surveys indicate clear support among New Yorkers and local businesses for the project, and the increased foot traffic has been good for business."

#### Key findings of the six-month evaluation were:

- The number of pedestrians in Times Square increased by 11% and in Herald Square by 6% following implementation.
- 80% fewer pedestrians were walking in the street in Times Square following implementation. Injuries to motorists and vehicle passengers in the project area declined by 63%
- Pedestrian injuries were down 35%
- Travel times improved by 15% on 6th Avenue and by 4% on 7th Avenue the project was implemented.
- Injuries to motorists and vehicle passengers in the project area declined by 63%
- Pedestrian injuries were down 35%
- Taxi GPS data showed a greater improvement in northbound travel speeds in West Midtown than in East Midtown—17% vs 8%—from Fall 2008 to Fall 2009. Southbound speeds declined by 2% in West Midtown vs. a 3% improvement in East Midtown.

**AVERAGE ASKING RENT: TIMES SQUARE**



BROADWAY & 7 AVE: 42-47 St  
SEMI-ANNUAL REBNY REPORTS

**ECONOMIC BENEFITS**

The economic benefits of the plazas and more convenient and safer walking conditions were only just beginning to be realized. 2009 surveys had shown an 84% increase in people spending time (as opposed to hurrying through) in Herald and Times Squares, eating, taking photos or reading.

42% of people surveyed said they shopped in the area more frequently since Green Light for Midtown had been implemented. 26% of people working near Times Square said they go out for lunch more frequently, and 70% of theater-goers said the pedestrian plazas had enhanced their experience of the district.

Real Estate Board of New York research shows that retail rents have nearly tripled in Times Square since the Fall of 2008, the greatest change for any retail area that the Board tracks.

Additionally, a robust set of new flagship stores has opened right alongside the Times Square plaza

area since 2009, including Nike, Disney, Forever 21, Aeropostale, American Eagle and others. In 2011, Cushman & Wakefield for the first time listed Times Square as one of the top ten retail locations on the planet.



# 72%

surveyed in 2011  
said they preferred  
the new configuration

## 2010: EXTENSION TO UNION SQUARE



East 17th Street and Broadway

DOT completed the transformation of Broadway's diagonal route through Midtown in 2010 by extending reduction of traffic lanes from Madison Square to 17th Street and building out additional public and pedestrian space on the north side of Union Square. The Broadway/17th Street intersection was simplified, and crossing distances for pedestrians shortened and made more visible. Broadway's protected bikeway was extended south around the Square to 14th Street. The Union Square Partnership took on public space maintenance and worked extensively with DOT on the plan.

The project saw results similar to other Broadway segments—overall traffic speeds improved, but illegal speeding fell by 14%. Crashes causing injury fell by 24%. 74% of people surveyed in the area in 2011 said they preferred the new configuration. In the two years following the project, the area saw 49% fewer commercial vacancies, compared to a 5% increase across the entire borough of Manhattan.

## THE RECONSTRUCTION OF TIMES SQUARE

As in other areas, capital reconstruction is following DOT's "overnight" changes along Broadway. Working closely with the Times Square Alliance and others, the city in 2010 hired the world-renowned Snohetta Architects to create the permanent design for the expanded Times Square.



Pavers being installed as part of Times Square reconstruction project

The reconstruction got underway in late 2012 and is currently laying the new plaza surfaces on the southern-most blocks of Times Square. The entire reconstruction of is expected to be complete in 2016, providing a world class public space in the Crossroads of the World.



## Chapter 11

# Design in the Public Realm

Well designed and complete streets reflect an urban growth and improvement strategy not only by making streets accessible and safer, but also attractive places to be that are economically vibrant. PlaNYC called for re-conceptualizing the city's streets and sidewalks as public spaces that can foster the connections that create vibrant communities. Since 2007, NYC DOT has embraced this concept of livable, modern, and attractive streets. The agency's temporary art installations inspire visual interest and our award winning bus shelters, newsstands, and bicycle racks make public space more attractive and vibrant. New benches along sidewalks and temporary street seating programs have made the city not only more appealing but also more comfortable, especially for the very young and old.



**Bird**

by Will Ryman

actual and fabricated steel nails

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### URBAN ART

NYCDOT may be the only city or state DOT in the country with an assistant commissioner and program staff for public art. The unit runs a variety of programs that allow NYC artists to propose use of public space—street surfaces, facades, jersey barriers—as a broad canvass for all kinds of public art.

Art is integral to DOT's goal of world class streets and the agency's strategy for changing how people use and experience the public right of way in the City. DOT's Urban Art program enlivens the urban landscape with unexpected temporary art installations on DOT properties. Artists help to transform the landscape from ordinary to extraordinary with temporary, unexpected interventions, colorful murals, dynamic light projections, and thought-provoking sculptures. Public plazas, fences, jersey barriers, footbridges, and sidewalks serve as canvases for temporary art in all five boroughs.

DOT's Urban Art initiatives rely on partnerships with community organizations and the creativity of artists to present site-responsive artwork. DOT has presented over 100 inspiring projects since the Urban Art program was created in October 2008. The goals of the unit are to create attractive corridors and activate public space.

In street intercept surveys at DOT Urban Art installations, 83% of respondents had positive feedback, in addition, 60% expressed interest in revisiting the artwork.

Street intercept surveys at DOT Urban Art installations found that sculptures, murals, and lighting design and projections were the most popular, and plazas and sidewalks were preferred sites.

Left: Flatiron Plaza, *Bird*, Will Ryman

Following spread:

*Plan Ahead*, Magda Sayeg, Brooklyn

*Container Series*, Victoria Munro, Staten Island



West Farms Square Plaza, *For Closure*, Gabriela Salazar



4th Avenue Median, *Unparallel Way*, Emily Weiskopf





## STREET FURNITURE



Bus shelter, Manhattan

In order to improve the aesthetic quality of the city's streetscape, DOT has worked to unify the look and feel the city's street furniture. This includes bus shelters, seating, bicycle parking and pedestrian navigation signs that are attractive and have a consistent scale, context and material. This coordination brings modern design to city streets.

In July 2005, after an extensive competitive bid process, DOT awarded a franchise to Cemusa, a Spanish street furniture company, to design, manufacture, install and maintain bus shelters, newsstands, and protected bicycle parking at no cost to the City. In exchange, the City will allow Cemusa to sell advertising space on the structures within clearly defined limits. Cemusa partnered with Grimshaw Architects to create sleek, elegant structures made from high-quality materials to withstand the rigors of New York City's sidewalks.

This award-winning family of designs guided future projects, including the design for street benches and totems and maps used in a new pedestrian wayfinding program.

## BUS SHELTERS

Over three million riders use New York City local and commuters buses every weekday. Giving these people safe, comfortable places to wait encourages transit use and is an essential element of a sustainable city.

The look and feel of the city's 3,300 bus shelters is not only important for the comfort of transit riders, but also the overall design and aesthetic quality of streets. DOT controls the placement of the shelters, and manages the franchise agreement with a private company, Cemusa, who maintains and installs the units. The DOT worked with Cemusa, the MTA to replace every bus shelter and

install an additional 200 (3,500 bus shelters total).

DOT worked closely with community leaders to identify the best locations for additional shelters to ensure that new locations best serve each community and the riding public. For the first time ever, all of the bus shelters offer seating, especially important for the elderly and disabled. The City is also exploring exciting new technologies like Bluetooth, LCD screens and real-time bus arrival information. Shelters come in four sizes—regular, narrow, short and double—so there is an appropriate shelter for every neighborhood and bus route.

## NEWSSTANDS

NYC has a long history of sidewalk newsstands dating back more than 100 years. They are a fixture on New York City streets and provide simple and efficient ways for people to buy newspapers, drinks, and snacks. Since 2007, in an effort to bring a more modern feel to the newsstands, DOT has

replaced every existing newsstand at no cost to newsstand operators. Cemusa maintains the exterior of all newsstands including regular cleaning and graffiti removal. The new design is sleek and modern, and in scale with other street furniture.

## The design of NYC DOT's wayfinding maps and signs has been widely acclaimed

### BICYCLE PARKING AND CITIBIKE



NYC's standard bike parking structure

DOT has also worked with Cemusa to install bicycle parking structures that resemble the bus shelter and use the same high-quality materials. 20 have been installed with a goal of 36 citywide. Each shelter contains stainless steel bike racks for eight bikes. The ad panels are used to display the annual NYC Cycling Map and the "Look" Public Service Campaign. These structures will do more than just provide parking—they send a message that the City encourages cycling.

These structures also complement DOT's existing City Racks sidewalk bicycle rack

program, City Rack. Working with Cooper Hewitt Design Center and cycling groups, DOT launched a design competition for a new type of City-provided bike rack, and received over 200 submissions from around the world. The winning design is now seen throughout the city. Approximately 19,000 total City-provided racks have been installed to date (see Mobility, Chapter 6—Streets for All: Improving Choices for Short Trips).

CitiBike stations were also designed to reflect the bicycle parking, bus shelters, and newsstands, bringing a consistent design narration to city streets.

### WAYFINDING



Pedestrian wayfinding, Brooklyn

The DOT's "WalkNYC" wayfinding system also reflects a coordinated design approach. The system encourages residents and visitors to walk more and to explore areas of the City that may be new to them. The attractive signs provide user-friendly maps and information, including walking distances, the location of other forms of transportation, building addresses, area attractions and public facilities.

The design of the signs and maps has been widely acclaimed

using stainless steel and glass and keeping in scale with other street furniture. A recent review proclaimed the system a "Feat of Design, Data and Diligence" [Mashable, Oct. 24 2013]. The initial roll out of wayfinding signs and maps in 2013 included Chinatown, the 34th Street/ Herald Square area and Garment District in Midtown, Prospect and Crown Heights and Long Island City, with the goal to expand to neighborhoods across the city.



# Looking Ahead

NYCDOT's programs to foster a world-class public realm have a strong future ahead of them. The application basis for public plazas, Weekend Walks, CityBench and Street Seats, as well as the maintenance partner requirement for plazas, ensure that these features or programs are only implemented where there is local interest and strong support. This is also the reason for requiring community board approval for Street Seats installations. As this section has detailed, the application process for plazas is heavily oversubscribed, pointing to the popularity and demand for additional public space in the City. Applications are also very strong for the Weekend Walks and CityBench programs. Additionally, the creation of the Neighborhood Plaza Partnership non-profit organization will ensure that successful plaza applications can be made from any corner of the city, providing assistance for communities and local organizations that may need it.

The ongoing development of both "overnight" and capital pipeline plazas has created an essentially new category within the City's capital budget, that agency and elected officials should be mindful of. The current reconstruction of Times Square, for example, points toward additional capital projects along the length of Broadway in Midtown, particularly at Herald, Madison and Union Squares. Assembling funding and moving major undertakings such as these ahead requires concerted effort and attention. It is possible that work in these areas could come from district benefit funds established in connection with major development projects, as is currently contemplated for the East Midtown rezoning. That initiative is also spurring a wealth of ideas for improving the public realm around Grand Central Terminal and Park Avenue, including pedestrianizing part of Vanderbilt Avenue.

A logical next step for August's highly popular Summer Streets program is to extend it to more hours and more days.

DOT's success car-free Central Park summer pilot during 2013 also points the way to permanent car-free park loop roadways.

Any major pedestrianization projects on the scale of Broadway will likely be led by local business and community initiatives. One strong candidate is Lower Manhattan. Before 2001, parts of Nassau and Fulton Street were pedestrian-only for parts of the day. These could be restored, and with increased security concerns in the Financial District and World Trade Center area, the City could consider creating a wider pedestrian precinct on additional smaller streets, with freight delivery access during specific off-peak windows. Shared streets—pedestrian streets with very slow vehicle access, could complement or be central to such an initiative.

- **Expand application based programs—public plazas, Weekend Walks, CityBench and Street Seats**
- **Continue to transform more temporary plazas into more permanent reconstruction projects**
- **Expand Summer Streets to more hours and more days**
- **Pilot closure of Central and Prospect Parks to cars year round**
- **Expand Urban Art program**