

Executive Summary



Traffic and transit indicators were significantly affected by the economic recession and resumption of job growth that occurred in New York City over the past two-plus years. Initially, transit ridership fell sharply due to job losses, budget cuts and increased fares, while traffic levels edged upward. As the city's economy began to emerge from the recession in 2010, however, subway (though not bus) ridership began to increase while traffic levels flattened out. The key trends, based on comprehensive data available for 2009 and the more limited data available for 2010, are:

- Subway and bus ridership fell 2.5% citywide from 2008 to 2009. The declines were more severe for transit ridership into the Manhattan Central Business District (CBD - defined as 60th Street to the Battery), which experienced more rapid job losses than did the city as a whole; CBD-bound transit ridership fell 5.7% in 2009.
- Traffic levels increased 0.3% citywide and 1.1% for traffic entering the Manhattan CBD from 2008 to 2009.
- Subway ridership began to grow in the spring of 2010 and finished with a 1.5% increase for the year as a whole, while bus ridership declined throughout 2010.
- Citywide traffic levels were not significantly changed in 2010 compared with 2009, based on traffic data from tolled bridges and tunnels and New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) traffic counts at a randomly selected sample of locations throughout the city. (Note that CBD-bound traffic and transit data are not yet available for 2010.)
- The one consistent trend involved bike riding, which continued a pattern of rapid increases. Commuter cycling increased 26% from 2008 to 2009, and an additional 13% from 2009 to 2010.

The available data for 2010 thus suggest that New York City may be positioned to resume the trends seen during the economic expansion of the last decade. From 2003 until the 2008 recession, New York City experienced a period of fully transit-centered economic and population growth in which non-auto modes absorbed all the growth of travel in the city. Vehicle traffic levels declined slightly while subway and bus ridership rose 12% from 2003 to 2008 and commuter cycling increased 79%. These trends were consistent with the transportation and sustainability goals of encouraging mass transit, walking, cycling and ferries established in PlaNYC, the City's sustainability plan for 2030, and Sustainable Streets, DOT's strategic plan.

Looking beyond the recession, sustainable modes of transportation will likely absorb increased travel generated by economic and population growth - but only if the City and the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) commit the resources to support these modes. The importance of investing in transit and other transportation improvements is illustrated by the two bright spots in the overall picture in the last several years. First, while the bus system as a whole was losing ridership, new Select Bus Services (SBS) in the Bronx and Manhattan attracted increased bus ridership. In a similar vein, continued expansion of the bike network spurred large increases in cycling both into the Manhattan core, and in other areas of the city.

The good news looking ahead is that the City and the MTA are continuing to innovate in these areas. DOT and the MTA are continuing the roll-out of SBS routes and developing plans for improved transit service to LaGuardia Airport, the only major airport in the region without rapid transit access. DOT continues to expand the bike network and is exploring a bike share system that would make cycling a more convenient option for point-to-point trips.

These initiatives will be further supported by patterns in population growth in the city. Over the last decade, 80% of new housing units were built within walking distance of a subway station or SBS route, focusing population growth in transit-oriented areas of the city. Increases in population are thus likely to continue to lead to increased use of sustainable modes of transit, biking and walking.

The big if, however, lies in the area of overall bus and subway service. Given continued State budget shortfalls and pressures on the MTA budget, it is unclear whether the recent pattern of MTA service cuts and fare increases can be broken. In addition, the current MTA Capital Program remains only partially funded. Without firmer financing of the city's transit system, the gains of the past decade are clearly at risk.

This third annual Sustainable Streets Index reviews transit and transportation trends in New York City, reports CBD traffic speeds based on taxi Global Positioning System (GPS) data and reports performance indicators for eleven major roadway projects involving changes in street operations. A new section to the report profiles transportation patterns at the neighborhood level. Based on field interviewing in eight neighborhoods, the neighborhood-level data show that overwhelmingly, most people shopping, going to restaurants, running errands and going to and from their homes have traveled to the neighborhood by walking or transit:



- In six diverse neighborhoods (from the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens) 85-93% of people arrived by transit, biking or walking.
- In two neighborhoods (Astoria, Queens and New Dorp, Staten Island), 60-77% of people arrived by transit, biking or walking.

These results underscore the value of strengthening transit, biking and walking to address mobility, environmental quality and quality of life goals.

The neighborhood-level section also shows the broad-based and increasing role that cycling plays in the city's transportation system:

- 520,000 adult New Yorkers bike at least several times a month.
- On key bike routes in Manhattan, bike riders comprise up to one-third of those using the street for transportation – for example, 37% of those traveling on Prince Street in the evening rush period and 32% of those traveling on East 10th Street.
- Installation of improved bike lanes and protected bike paths led to 46% to 268% growth in bike volumes, helping to fuel the overall growth in biking in the city. Examples are the 69% increase on Ninth Avenue in Manhattan, 97% increase on Kent Avenue in Brooklyn and 268% increase on Rockaway Boulevard in Queens.

Highlights from the taxi GPS and project-specific performance indicators sections are:

- Traffic speeds in the Manhattan CBD improved by 6% between the fall of 2008 and fall of 2009, and then leveled off in 2010.

- Bus ridership on 34th Street in Manhattan increased by 3-6% after implementation of bus countdown clocks and related improvements to bus service, even as other crosstown bus routes experienced an average drop of 5%.
- Injuries from vehicular crashes decreased by 48% along Gerritsen Avenue in Brooklyn after narrowing the roadway and implementing left-turn bays, a painted median, a pedestrian refuge island and other improvements.
- Injuries from vehicular crashes decreased by 24% along Houston Street in Manhattan after implementation of lane reconfigurations, dedicated left-turn bays, new medians, pedestrian refuge islands and other improvements.
- Injuries to motor vehicle occupants and bicyclists both decreased by 35% along Allen and Pike Streets in Manhattan after implementation of lane reconfigurations, dedicated left-turn bays, pedestrian plazas, pedestrian refuge islands and other improvements.
- Delivery companies' vehicles saw travel times improve 130% from a pilot of off-hour deliveries, based on a comparison of evening and midday travel speeds.
- Traffic delay fell by 70% for northbound vehicles coming off the Pulaski Bridge turning right onto Jackson Avenue in Queens after lane reconfigurations and signal timing changes.
- Parking duration fell by 20% in Park Slope, Brooklyn due to the PARK Smart peak rate pricing pilot, enabling more drivers to find metered spaces and reducing overall traffic volumes on the neighborhood's main commercial avenues.

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