

Curb Enthusiasm Episode 12 Transcript

00;00;01;14 - 00;00;04;14

Emily Weidenhof

Welcome to Curb Enthusiasm. I'm Emily Weidenhof.

00;00;04;20 - 00;00;06;05

David Breen

And I'm David Breen

00;00;06;07 - 00;00;30;11

Emily Weidenhof

Our guest today brings 25 years of experience working with cities and communities to envision and redevelop transportation infrastructure into public space. He's been a consultant at Bloomberg Associates since 2014 and has worked with major cities like Los Angeles, Athens, Bogota, Milan and Mexico City in redesigning their public spaces and transportation infrastructure.

00;00;30;13 - 00;00;53;07

David Breen

Prior to that, he served as assistant commissioner at the New York City Department of Transportation, spearheading the agency's efforts to reposition city streets as public space, with major projects like launching and overseeing the Plaza program, managing the redesign of Time Square, and negotiating the country's first public private partnerships for on street public space, a model now replicated around the world.

00;00;53;09 - 00;00;56;21

David Breen

It's our pleasure to welcome Andy Wiley-Schwartz to the podcast.

00;00;56;23 - 00;01;09;07

Emily Weidenhof

Welcome, Andy, back to 55 Water Street. We are super excited to have you here today and talk about Broadway, a street that is near and dear to all of our hearts.

00;01;09;14 - 00;01;14;28

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

It's actually great to be back. I haven't been here in a long time, but that feels and looks the same.

00;01;15;00 - 00;01;19;14

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And I always loved spending time with you. So, let's have some fun.

00;01;19;16 - 00;01;22;27

Emily Weidenhof

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Yeah, definitely. And I would say let's start at the beginning.

00;01;22;29 - 00;01;23;03

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Okay.

00;01;23;03 - 00;01;40;13

Emily Weidenhof

But Broadway has such a deep, long history. You know, as a as a footpath, as, as Eric Sanderson talked a little bit about in a previous episode. But let's, let's take it to maybe your beginning at DOT with Broadway.

00;01;40;18 - 00;01;45;18

Emily Weidenhof

When you came here, what did you see and what was the potential?

00;01;45;20 - 00;02;10;16

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

You know, when I came here, when Janette Sadik-Khan hired me to work on the public realm strategy for New York, which was pretty audacious in of itself, given that we were at a DOT. We were looking at lots of different spaces and lots of different typologies, but Broadway was very much on everybody's mind, and it took us a little while to get to a point where we were ready to really envision it.

00;02;10;18 - 00;02;42;13

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

That sort of culminated in a presentation at City Hall, where we got sort of the basic sign off to pursue the idea. And that's when I went into one of the little conference rooms at City Hall, and I called Tim Tompkins, who was the head of the Time Square Alliance, and he and I had been, like, nibbling around the edges of the sidewalks, trying to gather just like a tiny bit more room and space for people, because, you know, there were hundreds and hundreds of thousands of pedestrians in Times Square and only, you know, a couple tens of thousands of cars.

00;02;42;13 - 00;03;07;04

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And so, they were really it was just the space was really, really broken at that point. I don't know if people really remember, but it was really broken. Like, I mean, just people pouring into the street and pouring off the sidewalks. And, you know, we have pictures and documentation of this. And it was really scary. Then I was able to call him up and say, okay, are you sitting down because we're going to go for the whole thing.

00;03;07;05 - 00;03;10;03

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

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We're not just going to go around the edges.

00;03;10;06 - 00;03;10;16

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah.

00;03;10;17 - 00;03;12;26

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And working with that partnership was really crucial.

00;03;12;28 - 00;03;29;29

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah, yeah. And I think you're raising something you know, people don't just all get on board because it's a good idea, you know? How did you really craft the momentum around a problem and get people invested in and change and fixing something?

00;03;30;06 - 00;03;57;08

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Oh, that's a great question. So, it really happened to two levels. So, there was like this big communication level, which really kind of blew my mind at the time, because I had always been looking at this as a public space problem. And that Times Square wasn't achieving its potential as a great public space, as the crossroads of the world, as a place where all, you know, all these great things could happen and you know, the streets were just in the way as far as I was concerned.

00;03;57;10 - 00;04;23;06

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

This was when I started at DOT. So, this was a big lesson for me, because really what happened sort of at the high level was the project was reimagined much more holistically and defined as a traffic and transportation problem, a safety problem, and then it would have this benefit of creating this public space. And that was revealing because everyone understood that Times Square was broken, right?

00;04;23;06 - 00;04;49;28

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

That transportation in Times Square was broken, that you couldn't drive through Times Square effectively. Maybe you didn't know exactly why. You know, two streets cross each other like it's a mess, and there's all these people everywhere. And so, we reframed the conversation after a discussion here at City Hall as Green Light for Midtown, where we were making traffic work better in Midtown by taking this redundant street out of the grid.

00;04;49;28 - 00;05;08;15

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

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And I mean, Broadway is again, like just for with all the thinking that public around people had done, we just didn't really think about it as this street that diagonally cut through the entire grid and sort of threw off all the signals and all the systems that the grid was supposed to manage and, and make it successful. So that that was a big lesson for me.

00;05;08;15 - 00;05;29;22

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And I think, I think we did an amazing job here. There was a lot of, you know, a lot of really smart people obviously working here on the problem, but they also got on board because the engineers and the people who had been sort of pushing back against the advocates who wanted change in Times Square, understood that they were now to deliver a certain outcome.

00;05;29;24 - 00;05;46;13

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And they wrapped their heads around that, and they figured out how to do it. And it really it actually really worked. I mean, honestly, like, you know, sometimes you put your finger on the scale a little bit to make something work. But in this case, our biggest problem was that we kind of oversold the benefits on the traffic side.

00;05;46;13 - 00;06;10;01

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And it really came out as a smaller benefit in like bus speeds and travel times than we had sort of promised people. So, it took a little while for this not to seem like, you know, we failed because we didn't achieve the traffic benefits, but all the while we were getting this enormous public space benefit. And really that was really the key.

00;06;10;04 - 00;06;15;20

David Breen

Yeah. Our approach to so many of the projects along the corridor have really stemmed from traffic problems. Right?

00;06;15;27 - 00;06;16;06

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Right.

00;06;16;13 - 00;06;37;28

David Breen

Thinking about Flatiron, for example, you had that very similar problem where Fifth Avenue joins Broadway, joins 24th Street at exactly the same point, and we're left with this huge traffic problem, a traffic problem in terms of how do you safely organize those three converging traffic points at one moment, but then also the seriously negative impact for pedestrians at the same time?

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00;06;37;28 - 00;06;41;29

David Breen

Like, if I remember, that was the widest crosswalk at the longest crosswalk in the city.

00;06;42;00 - 00;06;42;16

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Yeah,

00;06;42;18 - 00;06;55;14

David Breen

Because you literally had to cross three streets at the same time. That's right. So how do you tip the scale to favor pedestrians to improve pedestrian safety, but also overcome this, what is fundamentally a traffic problem?

00;06;55;17 - 00;06;59;10

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

In both of those cases in Times Square and in Flatiron and I think Flatiron, we did first.

00;06;59;10 - 00;07;26;25

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

You had two downtown avenues crossing. So, Broadway, downtown, Fifth Avenue, downtown. In both cases, traffic didn't get prioritized to go where it wanted to go downtown. Right. So, Seventh Avenue traffic that wanted to go downtown got shuffled over to Broadway. Fifth Avenue traffic wound up on Broadway, Broadway traffic wound up on Fifth Avenue. I remember even once I did a walk down Broadway before I joined DOT.

00;07;26;27 - 00;07;47;21

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

All the way from Spuyten Duyvil all the way down to the battery. And it took us, like 2 or 3 blocks to realize, when we had walked through the Flatiron District that we were on Fifth Avenue, we weren't even on Broadway anymore. Like the whole thing misdirected everyone. And so again, like shaping the transportation context of the area was incredibly important.

00;07;47;23 - 00;08;17;24

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And then looking at the public realm aspects, and you have this beautiful park right next door, why are you creating more public space here? But it really was fixing the street. And the dynamism and success of that space is due to a lot of factors. But you're absolutely right. It's that shaping that problem first and then convincing all the property owners that this is going to work right, is fixing the street, but then also recognizing that people use public spaces in different ways.

00;08;17;24 - 00;08;38;03

David Breen

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Right. We always used to use this one photograph of the Flatiron Plaza from this really cold, wintery day in, I think it was in March where you had people sitting in the plaza, but then Madison Square Park in the background was completely empty. And it's just this recognition that the street isn't necessarily a destination, but it's a moment to pause.

00;08;38;03 - 00;08;42;09

David Breen

It's a moment to gather yourself if you've got 30 seconds to take a call or.

00;08;42;11 - 00;08;42;24

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

That's right,

00;08;42;24 - 00;08;46;12

David Breen

Have a quick coffee, whatever it may be, you're there.

00;08;46;15 - 00;08;56;05

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

That's exactly right. It's really just a big wide piece of sidewalk. And you don't have to make a decision to go in. And I think that's really important.

00;08;56;07 - 00;09;27;06

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Like, you might not even think it's important, but. But every single park in New York City has a fence around it and a gate, and you have to find where the gate is and then go in there. It's a decision you're making to go be in that space and stay there for some period of time. So, the movable furniture and the sidewalk part of the plaza is the key, because you can just stop for a second and answer a text, or stop for a second and make a phone call, or tie your shoe or sit down with a coffee.

00;09;27;06 - 00;09;51;28

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And so it's a totally different kind of public space that I think we're all figuring out how to enjoy and use and work with. And the public part of it is so important, right? Even a park has that feeling of like, I'm in an enclosed area, right? And this is just the the thing I used to say was that it's like why everybody hangs out in the hallway at a party, right?

00;09;51;28 - 00;10;00;22

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Because they want to watch everybody walking by and it's active, or sometimes they're all crowded in the kitchen because that's like where the drinks are. And like, people are always hanging out there and the living room is empty.

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00;10;00;25 - 00;10;01;08

David Breen

Right.

00;10;01;10 - 00;10;05;02

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Right? And I think it's sort of the same. It's sort of the same kind of thing.

00;10;05;02 - 00;10;05;24

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Yeah

00;10;05;27 - 00;10;09;28

Emily Weidenhof

Absolutely. And so you mentioned the Times Square Alliance.

00;10;10;03 - 00;10;40;07

Emily Weidenhof

We have kind of amazing partners along the Broadway corridor, including the 34th Street Partnership, Garment District, Flatiron Nomad bid, Union Square bid. Can you talk about the role of that partnership, especially creating spaces where the culture and use really is changing you know, you know, world where DOT was absolutely set up to take care of our streets for vehicles.

00;10;40;07 - 00;11;03;26

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Yeah, filling the potholes, replacing the signs. You desperately need that partnership because not only is DOT built around taking care of the streets, but the streets are now functioning as like literally the veins and arteries of the city, not just to carry vehicles, but also to carry water and steam and electricity and everything else. Right? You know, you need to plow the snow.

00;11;03;26 - 00;11;25;04

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

You need to do all of these things, right? You put your trash out on the curb, and then a garbage truck comes by and picks it up. What happens if you eliminate the ability for all those things to happen in this space? You've basically told people that they need to reinvent their whole idea of the city. We're fortunate here that our business improvement districts are made up of property owners.

00;11;25;07 - 00;11;45;20

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

That's first of all, like in the UK, a lot of the business improvement districts are mostly made up of merchants or a blend. Here we have property owners, right? So that removes the day

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in and day out worry of the shop owner who's margins are then and doesn't like change because, you know, it's scary and businesses aren't that easy.

00;11;45;20 - 00;12;05;19

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Run restaurants are going out of business every day. Right. So like they don't want anything that they think is going to mess up whatever their Excel spreadsheet model is now working to tell them, but a property owner can look two, three, four tenants ahead, can look can think about 10 years from now and that's that's very helpful.

00;12;05;22 - 00;12;27;05

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

It's very helpful. And and I think they they understood that changing the front door of their building, as long as the trucks could get to their loading dock or they could do whatever they needed to do to service, you know, a giant building that this was going to benefit them. They had already made an investment in a business improvement district, which is planting flowers and keeping their street cleaner and providing a presence on the street.

00;12;27;05 - 00;12;28;19

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And this added to it.

00;12;28;19 - 00;12;32;27

David Breen

But still fundamentally a bottom up process instead of the opposite of top down.

00;12;33;01 - 00;12;40;19

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Yes, yes, we could not do it without their support. It had to happen that way. Yeah.

00;12;40;21 - 00;13;08;13

Emily Weidenhof

So as you were pitching this, this massive transformation of Broadway, there were many different types of stakeholders that you were looking to convince. You were looking to convince an administration, property owners, partners, the public, what were some kind of key moments where you felt like you faced some of your your greatest challenges, and how you got over some of those hurdles?

00;13;08;15 - 00;13;34;05

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

The one that sticks with me the most is the theater owners in Times Square, who again, you know, it's not a business that's just like printing money all the time. And they have a very set idea about how that business model works and who their audiences are and how they get there. And there were only three. There were three production companies, and that was it.

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00;13;34;05 - 00;14;04;04

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And the health of Broadway as an institution, as a theater, the theaters is critical to the health of New York City. So we really couldn't mess that up. They were not easy to convince. And like all of our projects, having it be a temporary redesign that was going to be reevaluated later and judged eventually by the mayor, who I believe they trusted. Rightly, they trusted Mike Bloomberg, to make a good decision at the end of the day.

00;14;04;06 - 00;14;25;26

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And Mike definitely put us through our paces to make sure that we were doing this right. You know, we had millions of taxi GPS data that we could record, which was which was great. We, you know, I was on the roof of the Dream Hotel taking, you know, video back before our phones could take video.

00;14;25;28 - 00;14;57;19

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And just trying to do everything we could that was truly, really empirical and evidence based. We had data to bring back to City Hall to show him because, you know, he's an engineer and he likes data. And, and he needed to be convinced that this would work, but he was, and he greenlighted that project, you know, in an election year, which is, which is really saying something. You can't do this kind of work in any city without that level of leadership, both from your mayor and from your commissioner.

00;14;57;19 - 00;15;05;04

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

It's just they have to set the tone that way. And people need to know that they're expecting an outcome.

00;15;05;06 - 00;15;26;03

Emily Weidenhof

Hey, listeners, we hope you're enjoying this episode of our podcast. For those of you who are as enthusiastic about transportation and planning as we are, we'd like to hear from you. You can submit topics and questions that you'd like us to cover at nyc.gov/curbenthusiasm and now back to our conversation.

00;15;26;05 - 00;15;43;28

David Breen

The evolutionary aspect of our work is really like fundamental to the success of of all of our projects or so many of our projects, right? You spoke about that being a way to convince people, perhaps skeptical people at the beginning, that don't worry, these are temporary materials. If it doesn't work, we can change it.

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00;15;44;00 - 00;16;02;05

David Breen

But that's really a tactic that we've used to our success over the years, right? When you think about the evolution of the Broadway corridor, say, over the past 15 years, we've made fundamental changes, like you said, Green Light for Midtown, which kind of established a new way of thinking. But then over the years, we've been able to evolve.

00;16;02;05 - 00;16;11;27

David Breen

We've been able to constantly make changes, tweaks here or there, building on the success, right? And that's we wouldn't be able to do that if it was all built out in concrete right from the start.

00;16;11;29 - 00;16;28;13

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

That's a good point. I mean, I kind of want to turn the tables on you guys, and I think this is a good time to do it, because terminating Broadway in the squares and then having it, you know, access again, all we really thought about was the squares, how they're going to work, how they're going to be maintained.

00;16;28;13 - 00;16;57;01

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And the plazas that we created along the way down in the Garment district and the street was like, it'll be much calmer. It'll be one lane with parking. We can have a bike lane. I mean, we did all the engineering, but really the focus was on the squares. What we didn't realize, I don't think, at the time, was that we had sort of freed Broadway from the burden of having to carry anybody downtown anywhere.

00;16;57;04 - 00;17;22;13

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Right? And so this is where you guys came in and started to realize that you had a lot of flexibility on that street. It taught me a huge lesson in incrementalism, because what I've watched you do over the past 10 years is nothing short of remarkable. There's no street that works the way that Broadway works now, which is to say block by block treatment. Could be in a different direction.

00;17;22;13 - 00;17;32;12

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Could be a plaza, could be, you know, a shared street. It's incredible. And so I want to hear about how you got to that. If I can turn the tables on you.

00;17;32;15 - 00;17;49;14

Emily Weidenhof

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Yeah. We reached a point where Green Light for Midtown really had catalyzed a complete paradigm shift along the corridor. You know, we saw pre- Green Light for Midtown, about 1500 vehicles in the peak hour using Broadway.

00;17;49;14 - 00;18;09;01

Emily Weidenhof

We looked back at those same points in Time Square and a few years later, it was like in the 350 vehicle in the peak and even less further further down the corridor. And we saw these amazing jewels along the necklace.

00;18;09;07 - 00;18;09;14

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Yeah.

00;18;09;16 - 00;18;13;15

Emily Weidenhof

Or the charms along the bracelet and whatever is more, current.

00;18;13;16 - 00;18;16;23

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

You saw the bracelet! We saw the charms.

00;18;16;28 - 00;18;17;29

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

That was all we cared about.

00;18;18;00 - 00;18;42;07

Emily Weidenhof

Exactly. So we had these charms along the bracelet, and we realized that actually, the way to kind of keep creating pedestrian and cyclist priority corridor in an incredibly dense part of New York City that had been developed around vehicles for so many years, was to think about the necklace itself.

00;18;42;07 - 00;19;29;24

Emily Weidenhof

And a huge part of the shift was moving beyond the binary of the street is either open or closed. And think more about a sophisticated gradient. And it sounds a little counterintuitive, but to actually leave the cars on some of the blocks, opened up some incredibly grand potential for, pedestrian and cyclist prioritization. And we did hit this, you know, one one very kind of, pivotal point in our, design and planning thinking was, was one day when David came to the table and said, well, what if we just reverse that block of Broadway, between 24th and 25th Street at Worth Square?

00;19;29;27 - 00;19;35;19

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Emily Weidenhof

And that really opened up, a tremendous new set of, of opportunities.

00;19;35;21 - 00;19;52;06

David Breen

Yeah. I think the key thing, though, was just as you said, Andy, Broadway was no longer a through street. So we didn't have to think about that from a transportation perspective anymore. It allowed us to think about the street block by block. What does this block need and how do we cater to it?

00;19;52;08 - 00;20;12;24

David Breen

What does the next block need and how do we cater to that? So it was not it was thinking about Broadway as a series of connected public spaces. It's a network of public space, but still being able to manage it on the individual block by block basis. But at Flatiron at 24th Street, we had the very same problem that you were trying to resolve in 2009 at Times Square.

00;20;12;25 - 00;20;38;27

David Breen

We had this moment where you had these three points of traffic all arriving at the same time, and there was no good traffic solution to it. So the question was, well, how do we maintain access along the Broadway corridor for vehicles? But take it out of the traffic equation? And so that how the Flatiron shared Street was born. It was well, we could keep access to this block of Broadway, but just flip the direction.

00;20;39;03 - 00;20;59;10

David Breen

So it was no longer needed at that intersection with Fifth Avenue and 24th Street. And then that solved the traffic problem straight away. Then we found ourselves with this block where the traffic volumes would be extremely low, like our after accounts of this Flatiron shared street, it went down to five vehicles per hour in.

00;20;59;12 - 00;21;21;12

David Breen

And then we've so we found ourselves thinking well, now we have a street that has thousands of people as pedestrians that are interacting with it, but less than ten vehicles. So let's completely flip the balance. And that was how the first shared street was born. It was this moment coming from a traffic solution, but then realizing that it completely unlocked this, this new pedestrian realm.

00;21;21;12 - 00;21;43;29

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

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That was such a great idea. And just while you were talking, I was just thinking, I'm sure most of the audience are, you know, transportation folks. Right? But, you know, transportation is a means to an end. It's not an end in and of itself. Like we're not looking around for a place to put a shared street because they were excited about that idea.

00;21;43;29 - 00;21;46;03

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Right? It solves a problem.

00;21;46;03 - 00;21;46;15

David Breen

Right.

00;21;46;17 - 00;22;22;24

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And when you look at that corridor from 2009 to now, the redevelopment that's gone on, the rebranding that's gone on, the billions, literally billions of dollars that have gone into retrofitting buildings so that they have ground floors now that are active, they have restaurants, they have cafes. You can sit out in the street, you know, what's going on in Times Square is, I mean, the hotels, the Marriott completely reinvented itself to present to the Broadway in the plazas where it had completely turned its back on it before.

00;22;22;26 - 00;22;42;11

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

So it's an amazing combination of unlocking the potential of the street to throw off all of this, not just public life and public realm improvements, but also boost what people can do in a city and what the city can be for, and all the different things that can happen there. It's astonishing.

00;22;42;13 - 00;22;57;11

Emily Weidenhof

And, you know, speaking of of incrementalism, for the longest time and technically still at this very moment, it is only the the bow tie blocks in Times Square that are built out permanently.

00;22;57;11 - 00;22;57;23

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

That's right.

00;22;57;29 - 00;23;24;25

Emily Weidenhof

And that created a tremendous opportunity, again, working in close partnership with, these amazing bids along the corridor to continuously iterate and tweak and fine tune these

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blocks. And, you know, everything from us noticing that cyclists are using this corridor to way. So let's figure out how we do that in a way that facilitates that safely.

00;23;24;25 - 00;23;41;17

Emily Weidenhof

And, you know, further, enforces, cars to, to drive more slowly, taking more blocks out of the grid. You know, one of our, one of our greatest successes was when we closed, Broadway at Greeley Square. And it was no big deal.

00;23;41;19 - 00;23;44;25

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Yeah, that was a bridge too far for us.

00;23;44;25 - 00;23;45;09

David Breen

Right.

00;23;45;11 - 00;24;08;07

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And, you know, you guys have just been nibbling away at this now for ten years. And it's it really shows. And it's really taught me as someone who advises other cities that, you know, it doesn't need to be everything everywhere all at once, right. It can be take a little bit and get people comfortable with that.

00;24;08;09 - 00;24;25;14

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And then they might say, you know what, maybe we could do this on a two way street. Or maybe we could do this on a bus route, or maybe we could do this on a street with, you know, 10,000 cars on it and, you know, build out the sidewalk here like this. And so you as people learn and they watch these things, they grow and they change.

00;24;25;16 - 00;25;04;09

Emily Weidenhof

Absolutely. And you see it along Broadway, too. Every single time we did a project, we evolved and we got a little bit better and we tried to, you know, figure it out. And again, fine tune, some of these, some of these issues, I think it's also, an incredibly exciting aspect of our work kind of post-pandemic with the success of open streets, tunnels, so many different kinds of neighborhoods and communities, you know, not your typical business corridor looking for slow, local, calm, corridors in their neighborhoods.

00;25;04;11 - 00;25;22;27

Emily Weidenhof

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It's just been incredibly exciting to take what we've developed along Broadway and translate that to many different corridors across the city. 34th Avenue in Jackson Heights, Berry Street and Brooklyn, 31st Avenue in Astoria. Really, really exciting.

00;25;22;27 - 00;25;30;16

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

It is really exciting. Every city in this part of some part of this lesson from the pandemic.

00;25;30;19 - 00;26;03;25

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Every city saw people out in their streets and they saw fewer cars. And they understood that, like this, there was something that could potentially change. And most cities came away from the pandemic with some lesson from that. And and we definitely came away. You definitely came away with some big lessons and, you know, and the other piece of it is the the outdoor dining piece, which I mean, was an enormous leap of faith, was just an enormous trust given back to people to say, go ahead, operate.

00;26;03;25 - 00;26;28;29

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

We'll inspect you later. We need these businesses to stay open. We need restaurants to stay open. Nighttime in the city without restaurants is, I think it was Marcus Samuelsson who said restaurants are night time retail. Right. That's like that's what enlivens the street at night. If my walk home didn't take me past you know, a bar and a couple of restaurants, those are the those are the bright points on my walk home in the dark.

00;26;29;01 - 00;26;46;06

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And so we trusted people and they really delivered. And they also showed us, you know what? Maybe we don't need I mean, 15,000 parking spaces is a lot of parking spaces. So I think that that was really tremendous. And I give your former commissioner, Polly Trottenberg a lot of credit for being able to make that leap.

00;26;46;06 - 00;26;48;11

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And you guys, a lot of credit for making it work.

00;26;48;14 - 00;27;21;10

Emily Weidenhof

And that's one of the, kind of newest updates to some of our rules in the concession model that you helped spearhead here, is allowing for concessions on open streets and having those businesses partake so that, again, there's this physical local value, but then that value also locally goes back into, the space itself and the partners and really helping to support the energy that's coming out of all these amazing neighborhoods across New York City.

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00;27;21;10 - 00;27;39;05

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

No, it's it's great. It's really great. And it's really it's exciting to be here and watch this stuff happen. And I think a lot of cities have something to learn from the way that you've done things here. And, I try to bring some of those lessons around and I always give you credit, so. Ha ha ha

00;27;39;07 - 00;27;58;05

Emily Weidenhof

Nice! And I think the other thing that we've known about Broadway, but it has really become all the more important as we work on some of these other corridors, is the importance of the larger transportation network and ecosystem around the Broadway corridor.

00;27;58;05 - 00;28;30;19

Emily Weidenhof

So one of the things that has made Broadway such a success, in addition to, to everything we've been talking about, is the fact that there has been so much work done to shape, the bicycle network, the transit network around Broadway that allows for the faster through routes for everybody that needs to get everywhere else. And that kind of balance, that, that environment of 'and not or'

00;28;30;21 - 00;28;30;25

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Mhm.

00;28;30;25 - 00;28;35;04

Emily Weidenhof

Has created a real culture shift on Broadway. And I think that's a call that we're seeing, a need that we're seeing as we work in the gridded neighborhoods of 34th Avenue, of Berry Street and so on. Like, what else do we need to be building in and around, this corridor to really support a major transformation? Because there are more people walking, biking and riding transit in New York City every day because of all the amazing people that have worked here now and in the past.

00;28;35;06 - 00;29;04;24

00;29;04;26 - 00;29;11;15

David Breen

So, Andy, a question that we love to ask all of our guests here on the podcast is, what is your biggest public transportation pet peeve?

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00;29;11;18 - 00;29;24;05

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

It's people eating on the subway. And I understand that some people really are busy, right. And they're going from one place to another and they have to eat on the subway right.

00;29;24;08 - 00;29;40;09

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And that's just, you know, they have three jobs and that's just where that needs to fit into their lives. But like the the two things do not mix for me. Just the subway environment and food ...no. So I, I walk away.

00;29;40;12 - 00;29;43;19

David Breen

I feel the same way about people eating and meeting rooms. Ha ha ha

00;29;43;21 - 00;29;49;11

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Oh, really I used to do that all the time. I figured it was better than the subway.

00;29;49;13 - 00;29;49;29

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah,

00;29;50;01 - 00;29;52;03

David Breen

Yeah.

00;29;52;03 - 00;29;59;07

Emily Weidenhof

And, Andy, what are you most enthusiastic about for the future of transportation?

00;29;59;10 - 00;30;07;03

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

I want to see where this is all going. You know, I was reading a report, a couple of weeks ago that was written 10 years ago.

00;30;07;03 - 00;30;21;20

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And this report had figured, you know, you can work this out now, but in ten years, it'll all be, you know, autonomous vehicles, and this whole thing's going to change. So, you know, you have to worry about that too much. And of course, that didn't that didn't come about. And we're looking at why. And we're thinking about it.

00;30;21;20 - 00;30;50;22

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Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And this whole issue with micromobility and just the way people are getting around, I think it's exciting. I'm sure this is sort of everybody's answer, but watching it evolve, watching us figure these things out. The bicycle Amazon trucks, right? This is all kind of fascinating. And sometimes it goes through these little like ugly phases, you know, and then we figure that out and then, you know, and then we move on to the next problem.

00;30;50;22 - 00;31;15;13

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

And I mean, I'm really excited to see how we're going to figure out dealing with, you know, mopeds and electric vehicles. Because it's a real conundrum and it is everywhere. But it's, you know, particularly here, how are we going to figure out where they fit into the system or how to make the system so that it fits, because it's a great way to get around.

00;31;15;15 - 00;31;24;02

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Right? But right now we haven't figured that one out. And I think just watching the whole system adapt to these different things is going to be really fascinating.

00;31;24;04 - 00;31;42;29

Emily Weidenhof

Great. Well, thank you so much for your time. It has been amazing, thinking about and working and and shaping Broadway with both of you over time. We're at an exciting moment where this administration has contributed, upwards of \$300 million

00;31;42;29 - 00;31;43;03

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

That's so great.

00;31;43;03 - 00;31;45;19

Emily Weidenhof

to make a lot of this work permanent.

00;31;45;19 - 00;32;01;20

Emily Weidenhof

So we're finally going to build out a few more blocks than those that we have. So, excited for the future. And thanks for coming back and sharing all that, that history with us. And yeah, excited to keep on figuring it out.

00;32;01;21 - 00;32;08;25

Andy Wiley-Schwartz

Yeah, yeah. Well, you guys are doing an amazing job. And thank you for asking me here. It's been really great to come back.

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00;32;08;27 - 00;32;36;03

NYC DOT Commissioner Ydanis Rodriguez

Hi. My name is Ydanis Rodriguez, commissioner of the New York City Department of Transportation. Thank you for listening to Curb Enthusiasm by New York City DOT. This episode was produced by Michael Santos with video support from Sigurjon Gudjonsson, and Juan Vega.

00;32;36;07 - 00;32;42;03

NYC DOT Commissioner Ydanis Rodriguez

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