

# *Transportation Data Collection Resumption in New York City*

*October 1, 2020*

The purpose of this memorandum is to lift the temporary moratorium on typical transportation data collection implemented by the New York City Department of Transportation (NYC DOT) in March, 2020, as well as to provide guidelines for future data collection. NYC DOT implemented a temporary moratorium on typical transportation data collection (i.e., vehicular traffic, pedestrians, cyclists, goods movement and transit) beginning March 11, 2020, due to atypical travel patterns, decreases in vehicular and pedestrian activities, as well as decreases in subway and bus ridership as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most transportation data collected at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic is not reflective of typical transportation conditions, but as the City has begun to reopen in phases, travel patterns and behaviors have begun to be reestablished at a baseline that can allow typical data collection and analysis to proceed. NYC DOT will continue to monitor travel patterns and changes to the transportation network and reassess these patterns. As always, NYC DOT reserves the right to suspend data collection and/or revise guidance if conditions change.

Note: Neither this memo nor the moratorium applies to signal/intersection studies as NYC DOT Signals has control over their own data requirements which the applicant must follow. Therefore, if anyone is performing a traffic signal warrant and/or all-way stop warrant, they need to coordinate directly with NYC DOT Signals to ensure that the data collection will meet their requirements.

Since March 2020, NYC DOT has been collecting, analyzing and monitoring travel patterns in the City, during the COVID-19 pandemic, which includes transit ridership (i.e., buses, subways, and ferries), vehicular volume, bicycle and pedestrian activities, goods movement, municipal parking supply and demand, and mobility surveys that assess the effects of COVID-19 on travel patterns and modes of transportation.

In order to provide and maintain social distancing during COVID-19, and provide New Yorkers access to more open space and outdoor dining, the City has implemented a number of initiatives to respond to the pandemic, including the Open Streets Program, the Open Restaurants Program, transit initiatives, bicycle lanes, etc. Specific information about these programs is included in the appendix to this document. Data collectors should be aware of these programs in the development of their data collection and analysis plans to fulfill all of their requirements.

Many of the changes implemented by the City are likely to remain and could result in long-term or even permanently altered travel patterns in the surrounding network. When combined with the behavioral changes brought on by the pandemic (e.g. fewer home-to-office trips, teleworking, social distancing, etc.), which may remain for a prolonged period of time, a steady state with respect to travel in the City is beginning to be established. Therefore, NYC DOT has decided to lift the temporary data collection moratorium and allow transportation data collection to resume starting October 5, 2020. All new data collection should follow the standards, procedures, and requirements of the NYC DOT Units to which they are being provided. Given the current COVID-19 pandemic, data collected within the last five years but prior to the moratorium may be used where available, subject to review by NYC DOT. Coordination with the respective NYC DOT Units is recommended prior to collection of data to ensure appropriate standards are followed (e.g. data collection which will be used for a traffic signal warrant should involve coordination with NYC DOT Signals Division).

For all new and existing projects where a complete set of pre-COVID data is not available at each study area location, new transportation data should be collected at all study area locations starting October 5, 2020. This data will more closely reflect the present condition that is being established which includes, but is not limited to, open street and other initiatives mentioned above.

NYC DOT recommends that new data be collected as the future analysis may require rerouting of traffic if the study area is affected by the above initiatives. Good engineering judgment should be exercised when establishing the balanced volume network to ensure that the future year conditions are properly established. However, given the current COVID-19 pandemic, and subject to review by NYC DOT, for existing projects where data has been collected within the last five years, but prior to the moratorium, or is available at all of the study area locations the previously collected data may be used. If further guidance is needed, please consult with NYC DOT as early as possible.

Based on the considerations above, NYC DOT recommends collecting new transportation data (even if pre-COVID data is available at some locations) to minimize efforts required for the development and recalibration of data to reflect current network changes/conditions as of 2020.

## Appendix

**Open Streets Program<sup>1</sup>** - Under this program, through traffic is prohibited, allowing access of the roadbed to pedestrians, cyclists, local traffic for deliveries, pick-ups/drop-offs, and necessary city services, and utility and emergency vehicles. Drivers are alerted to be extra vigilant and to drive at 5 MPH through all open streets. Open street hours are generally from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM but may vary slightly depending on local needs.

**Open Restaurants Program<sup>2</sup>** - There are two options for temporary expanded outdoor dining:

- **Open Restaurants** – Individual restaurants can use the sidewalk and/or curb lane adjacent to their business for dining tables and seating.
- **Open Streets Restaurants** – Community-based organizations, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), or groups of three or more restaurants on a single block may coordinate to host weekend-only outdoor dining on streets closed to motor vehicle through traffic under the “Open Streets” program (see above).

These programs are designed to assist existing restaurants that have been authorized by the Governor of the State of New York to re-open under the State’s Phase Two recovery guidelines<sup>3</sup> and want to use outdoor areas on a temporary basis.

**Better Buses Restart<sup>4</sup>** – The City, in consultation with MTA/NYCT, is also implementing a number of measures to improve the reliability and efficiency of bus services. This includes introducing busways (where only buses, trucks, and passenger vehicles with local origins or destinations are allowed) and exclusive bus lanes on major bus routes. These efforts are aimed at expediting bus operations and addressing the potential for greater bus demands as the City reopens in phases over time and people attempt to maintain social distancing while relying on transit.

**Bicycle Lanes** – During this pandemic, the City has seen a surge in bicycle usage as more New Yorkers use bicycles to commute to work, run errands, and seek recreational opportunities. As the City continues to reopen in phases, NYC DOT is adding more bicycle lanes to respond to these observed increases bicycle ridership, and to make cycling safer, faster and convenient for all New Yorkers.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/pedestrians/openstreets.shtml>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/pedestrians/openrestaurants.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> <https://forward.ny.gov/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/html/brt/html/betterbuses/betterbuses.shtml>