

STREETFIGHT

In one instance, we held a design competition asking artists to use the fifty thousand square feet of roadbed in Times Square, from 42nd to 47th streets, as a canvas for their imaginations. Artist Molly Dilworth won with a design inspired by the climatological "heat island effect" of cities. NASA's weather satellites show how city structures and blacktop absorb heat and make urban areas run hot. Dilworth interpreted a heat signature map, painting a white, gray, and blue asphalt stream along Broadway. The design visually cooled the space and recalled Manhattan's streams and ponds, which were drained or banished belowground centuries ago.

The Urban Art office worked with hundreds of volunteers to create designs and to paint miles of Jersey barriers (movable concrete blocks that transportation departments put on streets and highways to separate lanes of traffic), turning a traffic liability into a useful asset using little more than paint, and instantly transforming the streetscape for people on bikes or on foot.

We also partnered with neighborhood groups to create murals at underused spaces, such as on a wall beneath the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. Tactics like these are what the modern, rediscovered city looks like. They are a living partnership between the public and the municipal leaders who serve them to recover a public realm that serves everyone. Public art makes the urban urbane. I still think back to a time when advertisements and graffiti were about the only color or design elements a New Yorker was likely to encounter on the street. Today, the next generation of art and design students walk through a city that can be a canvas for creativity and inspire them to take their streets into their own hands.



Brooklyn's Pearl Street plaza in DUMBO, at the foot of the Manhattan Bridge, the first place-making project from the New York City Department of Transportation. Completed in 2007, it required only the basic tools already in every transportation department's arsenal—paint and space—and became the first of sixty plazas installed citywide. Eight years later, some still believe these before and after pictures are renderings, too vivid and appealing to be actual images. NYC DOT—Ryan Russo



Ninth Avenue and 14th Street, on the border of Chelsea and the Meatpacking District, the first street intervention in Manhattan. By consolidating lanes, we created an asphalt triangle big enough for a community-maintained plaza. This project solidified the instant plaza design palette and showed how smart traffic management could reprogram street space without causing congestion. NYC DOT—Ryan Russo



And then there was Broadway, where all of NYC DOT's tools came together. Just outside Madison Square Park and at the foot of the Flatiron Building, seven lanes of careering traffic became just two, and one of the longest crosswalks in New York City was made shorter and safer. NYC DOT—Heidi Wolf



In a great moment in livable streets history, students sat down with their sketchbooks just minutes after we redirected traffic. New Yorkers were hungry for new street space and this groundbreaking redesign was all the inspiration these aspiring artists needed. Courtesy of the Flatiron/23rd Street Partnership



The Crossroads of the World was a traffic crisis two hundred years in the making. Broadway, a pre-Colonial pedestrian path, sliced across the street grid, creating dangerous, irregular intersections and perpetual congestion. NYC DOT



In Times Square, 89 percent of Broadway was given over to cars, with just 11 percent dedicated to pedestrians, though their actual proportions were the opposite. The resulting sidewalk crush forced people into the street. NYC DOT



Above: The Green Light for Midtown project transformed Broadway and Times Square from the moment the construction barrels were placed in 2009. The new pedestrian space, formerly occupied only by automobiles, was filled instantly by hundreds of thousands of office workers, theatergoers, and tourists. NYC DOT

Right: To give people space to sit and take in the bright lights of the big city, we put out temporary beach chairs while long-term replacements were on order. Instead of debating safety benefits, congestion reduction, or the other merits of a remarkable urban transformation, many reporters instead kvetched about the beach chairs' kitschy color scheme.

Bruce Schaller





Before and after: The Times Square redesign was a smash hit on Broadway. With only paint, bollards, and smart traffic management, we provided a new gathering space for New Yorkers and sparked a local economic renaissance. After the redesign, retail rents for properties on the plazas tripled, six major stores moved in, and, for the first time ever, Cushman and Wakefield, a commercial real estate firm, listed Times Square as one of the top ten most valuable retail locations on the planet. *Left: NYC DOT—Heidi Wolf Right: NYC DOT—Julio Palleiro*



And the project went far deeper than asphalt. While the temporary plazas took off, we got the ball rolling on a world-class public plaza designed by one of the globe's leading architectural firms to reflect the lights and energy of the city. The economic and safety improvements of the groundbreaking redesign are now locked in, benefiting generations to come. The new pedestrian spaces make up just 2.6 out of the more than 180 acres of asphalt that have been repurposed for people over the last seven years. When construction is completed in 2016, this new direction for New York City streets will be set in stone. *Snøhetta*



Slightly to the south of Times Square, at the epicenter of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in Herald Square, Green Light for Midtown proved that rethinking your streets doesn't mean Carmageddon. By reconnecting the threads of the street grid at the intersection of 34th Street and Sixth Avenue, injuries to motorists went down by 63 percent and travel times improved by 15 percent, facts we derived from GPS data on more than 1.1 million yellow cab trips. NYC DOT—Heidi Wolf



Better streets mean better business. When the city gets the fundamentals wrong, every other indicator of thriving, vibrant communities will also be out of balance. A more orderly First Avenue, complete with world-class bike and bus lanes, turned out to be a much nicer place to visit and do business, too: commercial vacancies fell by 47 percent thanks to an uptick in bus riders and a 177 percent increase in cyclists.

Top: NYC DOT—Julio Palleiro Bottom: NYC DOT





Bikes were at the forefront of the New York transportation transformation. Over just seven years, we installed nearly four hundred miles of innovative cycling infrastructure, including the first parking-protected paths on the continent. While some projects were controversial, including one in Prospect Park West in Brooklyn, shown here in before and after photos, poll after poll demonstrated that some two thirds of city residents supported the expansion of the cycling network. New Yorkers love their lanes. *Top: NYC DOT—Julio Palleiro Bottom: NYC DOT—Nick Carey*



Support came after we proved that bike lanes were safer for everyone. Streets with protected lanes brought injuries for all users of the street down by 50 percent, not just for people on bikes. And over the last decade, while bike ridership nearly quadrupled, the risk of injury to cyclists plummeted by 75 percent. Today, you can measure the success of a street by the number of women and children getting around on two wheels. *Above: Plaza Street near Park Slope, Brooklyn. Below: Prospect Park West. NYC DOT*





Planners can learn a lot simply by observing how people already use the street. Between Sixth and Seventh avenues in the heart of Midtown, hundreds of people would cross the street midblock to access a string of pedestrian spaces that run from 51st to 57th streets rather than walk hundreds of feet to cross at the corner. We built a series of intersections to connect these spaces and give people a safe way to cross. New York's newest thoroughfare—6½ Avenue—was born. NYC DOT—Julio Palleiro



Streets serve as tracks for the city's bus system—the nation's largest but, unfortunately, also the slowest, often moving more slowly than people walking down the sidewalk. To speed things up, we rolled out the red carpet with these eye-catching dedicated bus lanes. We also added fare machines that let riders pay before they board and gave buses priority at traffic signals and consolidated stops. Webster Avenue in the Bronx was one of seven Select Bus Service lines we launched in the five boroughs with the MTA, resulting in a 10 percent increase in ridership, a 20 percent reduction in travel times, and near-unanimous support from passengers. The improvements ease service daily for two hundred thousand passengers and annually save 620 years of cumulative commuting time. NYC DOT—Taylor Reiss Gouge





We found incredible opportunities for artistic interventions to support the vibrancy of our streets. *Above:* This evolving mural in DUMBO—a space of constant reinvention since we installed the city's first pedestrian plaza there—was created with multiple layers of paint that would change with time and reveal new designs, letting us incorporate daily city street life into a part of the artistic process. *Below:* Aided by an army of volunteers, we breathed new life into concrete barriers like this one and other forgotten spaces that usually get lost in the urban shuffle.

Top: David Ellis, Pearl Street Triangle, 2012 (Two Trees Management and DUMBO Improvement District) (Location: Pearl Street Triangle at Water Street, Adams Street and Anchorage Plaza, Brooklyn). Photographers: David Ellis and Chris Keohane. *Bottom:* Abby Goldstein, Fictional Landscape, 2012 (with NY Cares) (Location: Sands Street and Jay Street, Brooklyn). Photographer: NYC DOT—Emily Colasacco



The reinvention of our streets was about much more than aesthetics—we were providing new tools for New Yorkers. *Above:* When we installed the latest generation of parking meters that allowed drivers to pay by credit card, we converted the old coin-operated meters into bike racks among sixteen thousand new parking spots we created for 2-wheelers instead of 4x4s. *Below:* We also teamed up with musician and cycling advocate David Byrne to fabricate twelve stylized, neighborhood-specific bike racks.

Top: Designer: Maarten de Greeve and Ian Mahaffy. Photographer: NYC DOT—Alex Engel. *Bottom:* NYC DOT. Designer: NYC DOT





For the first time in the modern era, we brought each of the agency's 788 bridges into good condition or started reconstruction projects. The 60 plazas and 400 miles of bike lanes we built added up to just 1 percent of NYC DOT's capital budget for the state of good repair work.

Above: The replacement for the Willis Avenue Bridge connecting Harlem and the South Bronx is floated up the East River in August 2010 below the Manhattan and Brooklyn bridges. NYC DOT

Left: We invested more than \$1 billion to resurface more than 6,500 lane miles of streets, repair 2.2 million potholes, and produce innovative asphalt that uses 40 percent recycled asphalt from other city streets.

NYC DOT—Alex Engel



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Bike Lanes and Their Discontents

"We are here today to talk about bicycles." The speaker was the chair of the New York City Council's transportation committee, and the committee room was packed. Reporters in that room far outnumbered members of the public, most of whom were sent to an overflow room down the hall to follow the proceedings on closed-circuit television.

"And believe it or not, few issues today prompt more heated discussion than bike policy in New York City," the speaker continued with an accent betraying his Bronx origins. "Biking is a good transportation alternative, but I do not believe that making it impossible to drive should be a policy our city pursues," he concluded.

By December 2010, the two-year, two-mile transformation of Broadway into a pedestrian and bike boulevard was complete from Columbus Circle to Union Square. The city's protected bike lanes had long since extended over the East River and into the streets beyond Manhattan,

through Brooklyn, on to Brooklyn's Kent Avenue in Williamsburg, and, just five months before the council meeting gaveled to order, transportation crews installed a soon-to-be-controversial bike lane along Prospect Park West.

But this hearing wasn't a victory lap. It was a cross-examination. Just weeks before, the *New York Times* headline blared: Expansion of Bike Lanes in City Brings Backlash. "Surging bike ridership has created a simmering cultural conflict," the story claimed, with bike lanes in particular leading to "unusual scenes of friction." In blunt, tabloid terms, bikes were New York City's Public Enemy No. 1.

It's probable that as we spoke, attorneys at a white-shoe Manhattan law firm were waiting to read the transcript of my testimony as they prepared a legal challenge to the Prospect Park West bike lane. Three avowed lane foes involved in that suit were on the hearing's list of speakers that day, including Brooklyn's borough president. What happened in that hearing room was not just a debate about this or that bike lane, the loss of parking spaces, or a War on Cars. The hearing and its testimony was a major battle in the fight for New York City's streets and a challenge to an idea about what city streets are and who they are for.

You'd be forgiven for thinking that New York City had bigger issues to confront. Maybe there would be heated debate around transportation issues like the chronic underfunding of the public transportation network or what's needed to stop traffic violence, which killed 271 New Yorkers that year. But there were no transportation committee meetings on traffic safety that day. The focus was the Bloomberg administration's alleged obsession with bike lanes, of which I was the chief architect. The obsession, such as it was, amounted to about \$8 million invested over three years to create the nation's best bike lanes. For perspective, earlier that year the Transportation Department started a \$508 million project to paint the Brooklyn Bridge and rehabilitate its approaches. Another \$612 million went for the replacement of the little-known Willis Avenue

Bridge crossing the Harlem River from Manhattan to the Bronx, which opened two months before the committee meeting. Together, these were just two of the DOT's 789 bridges, elevated roads, and overpasses. At this rate, it would take 195 years of bike-lane building to match the cost of painting just the Brooklyn Bridge. By the year 2433 we would have spent the \$1.1 billion needed to paint just these two bridges.

But nobody asked about infrastructure investment in the carnival atmosphere at that morning's council hearing. The cross examiners were on to something: New Yorkers held very strong opinions about cyclists and bike lanes. The most-quoted testimony from that day came from Brooklyn borough president Marty Markowitz, who sang his statement to the melody of "My Favorite Things":

MARTY MARKOWITZ: [Singing]

*Lanes fit for Fido and lanes made for lovers,
hikers and bikers, significant others.
A lane just for Santa, but please don't complain.
These are a few of my favorite lanes.
Strollers and schlepers and skaters and joggers,
holiday lanes just for all the egg noggers,
Let's not forget cars, it's getting insane.
Welcome to Brooklyn, the Borough of Lanes.
When the horn honks, when the dog bites, when the bikers stray,
I simply remember my favorite lanes and then I just say, "oy vey."
Thank you, members of the committee.*

The fight would get a lot worse. Just a few weeks later the most disabling snowstorm in many years would cripple the New York City region and embroil the administration in questions about its readiness. A long, dark winter was about to be lit up by blaring media headlines in a snow-encrusted backlash.

Oy vey indeed.

Never underestimate the anger directed at bicyclists. They ride too fast, terrorizing pedestrians. They ride too slow, dangerously obstructing drivers. They don't wear helmets or reflective bike gear, jeopardizing themselves. They look ridiculous riding around in those helmets and reflective bike gear, more like Mad Max marauders than human beings. They shouldn't ride in streets, which are hostile, car-only zones. They shouldn't have their own lanes because there aren't enough of them to take away space from cars. Yet there are so many of them that they're running down pedestrians and therefore shouldn't ride on sidewalks.

Bikes and the people who ride them elicit more passions than any other way of getting around. Tempers flare up on city streets every day on every continent, and the dispute over riders' presence on the street has spilled over into social science research, media coverage, and commentary. Anonymous attackers spread tacks on bike lanes to puncture the tires of cyclists in Melbourne. In New York City, saboteurs spread tacks on the Queensboro Bridge's bike path, in Central Park, and one attacker pulled a wire across the path of a cyclist in Brooklyn's Prospect Park, sending him over his handlebars, breaking six ribs and fracturing his elbow. Similar bike lane sabotage attacks have been recorded in London, Portland, Oregon, and in large and small cities, and violence erupting between drivers and cyclists has been posted on YouTube. Thousands of blogs, articles, essays, and Internet posts abound, tagged with variations on "I Hate Bicyclists." A Facebook community named "God I fucking hate cyclists using the road" claims 2,542 likes and growing as of October 2015. The bile is not just reserved for the trolling backwaters of the Internet. A columnist for *The Washington Post* found widespread sympathy when he debated running down loathsome cyclists in the District of Columbia: "It's a \$500 fine for a motorist to hit a bicyclist in the District," he wrote. "But some behaviors are so egregious that some drivers might think it's worth paying the fine."

The antipathy doesn't end with people who ride bikes; it extends to

the painted lanes that they ride on. Bike lanes don't simply rob taxpaying motorists of driving space that they bought and paid for. They seem to reward bike riders for their bad behavior. And bike lanes are a dangerous lure, giving would-be riders a false sense of security that it's safe to ride on streets. Streets are dangerous places, the thinking goes, *and they must be kept that way!*

"What I compare bike lanes to is swimming with the sharks," former Toronto council member Rob Ford said in 2010. "Sooner or later you're going to get bitten. And every year we have dozens of people that get hit by cars or trucks. Well, no wonder: roads are built for buses, cars, and trucks, not for people on bikes. My heart bleeds for them when I hear someone gets killed, but it's their own fault at the end of the day."

After being elected mayor and having the power to act on that sentiment, Ford in 2012 ordered the removal of a bike lane on Jarvis Avenue, an erasure that was delayed only briefly by protesters who lay in the path of work crews. Ford wasn't unique in his thinking, but rarely is this



Lane reversal in Toronto: Protesters delay but don't deter the removal of a bike lane on Jarvis Avenue in 2012. Shawn Micallef, Spacing Toronto

throwback perspective expressed so starkly: streets are places for cars, and people on bikes and walking must avoid them for their own safety. Instead of doing something about the sharks, Ford and transportation departments around the world have ordered people out of the water.

The cultural and political backlashes surrounding the growth of biking and new cycling infrastructure on city streets are not limited to New York City, Washington, D.C., or Toronto. New Orleans, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, London, and even supposedly progressive cities like Vancouver, Seattle, and San Francisco are just a few that have faced venomous opposition to bike riders and proposed lanes. The resistance often ranges from claims that biking makes streets more dangerous and congested at best to, at the other extreme, arguments that reapportioning streets for any use other than driving or parking is an ideological "War on Cars."

In the end, what you see on city streets depends on how you get around. Drivers see the street as a territory granted to them that is needlessly interrupted by signs, signals, and interlopers—pedestrians obliviously checking their Twitter feeds, lane-blocking buses, and dim-witted other drivers. From the view of those in the driver's seat, though, the tipping point into road rage is the new kid on the block: *F@\$!ing cyclists and their bike lanes! They're the ones who are causing all the traffic.* From a transportation planner's perspective, however, the driver's victimhood isn't the whole story. Whatever annoyance or unpredictability pedestrians and cyclists pose on the street, drivers are the ones in each other's way. They are never stuck *in* traffic. They *are* the traffic they are stuck in.

Enter pedestrians. They are the antithesis of the car. Their only protection against a car's two tons of mass is the attention of the driver and the centimeters of flesh that protect their bones. Yet they have largely tuned out cars and the dangers they pose. Pedestrians have learned to read, and listen to, the street. They know when to dash across the street

between waves of traffic. Mostly. Within those waves, a pedestrian is killed every two or three days in New York City, a small fraction of the 270,000 killed around the world annually, yet the term "pedestrian rage" hasn't yet caught on.

Enter the bike. Drivers and pedestrians may hate each other, but if they can agree on one thing, it's that they both hate cyclists. Drivers and pedestrians haven't learned to read the street and to see or hear bike riders. They aren't expecting them or aren't looking for them. Every pedestrian has a story about being nearly killed by an aggressive, wrong-way-riding, Lycra-clad ninja cyclist. From the view of a pedestrian stepping into the street, bikes are simply too slow, too sleek, and too silent to be as easily noticed as people in cars. Pedestrians have learned to detect an oncoming car, relying on peripheral vision and the sound of an approaching vehicle's engine. But people on foot still don't know how to read the presence of bikes. I've startled pedestrians on my bike even when I've been stopped, waiting for a red light. I've been cursed at for appearing "out of nowhere" when riding with the signal in a bike lane. But even when I've done nothing wrong, I can see that the fear and instinct for collective punishment are no less real. Bike riders exist on a totally different frequency, moving at speeds seemingly incompatible with people who drive. They're cheaters, cutting the line in front of law-abiding people behind the wheel, running lights as if the rules don't apply to them. The stereotypical urban biker rides a fixed-gear bike with a lock and chain slung across his One Less Car T-shirt, like a bandolier. A regular two-wheeled, holier-than-thou, rolling lifestyle protest. *And they seem so damn smug about it.*

A pedestrian killed by a cyclist is guaranteed front-page news status for days on end in New York City, with saturation coverage and outrage. It's likely because of its rareness that even a "near miss" is appalling to the point of backlash. But rarely is a bike rider's death beneath the wheels of a car, bus, or truck regarded with the same reverence or out-

rage. More frequently, the mere fact that someone dared to ride in the street in the first place is Exhibit A that the rider was "asking for it," especially if he or she wasn't wearing a helmet. After all, that's what you get when you swim with sharks.

As with most cities, New York City's streets were not designed to accommodate bikes. Riding atop two tires and just twenty pounds of steel, bicyclists feel invisible on the street, as vulnerable as someone walking yet expected to behave like a motor vehicle driver along one-size-fits-all roads, weaving in and among the cars, buses, and trucks, avoiding potholes and car doors swinging open. My advice to people annoyed by cyclists is not to judge them until you've ridden a mile in their lane.

So why would anyone want to ride in the first place? Just as Mayor Rob Ford declared in Toronto, many city leaders and residents think that riding a bike on city streets is suicidal. *Bikes don't belong on the road.* Some cities even require that bike riders wear helmets, and politicians and bike opponents routinely suggest that bike registration or insurance would make streets safer. I think what's crazy is that anyone would be content with city streets so dangerous that only a lunatic would ride a bike on them, or that some think the only way to deal with cyclists is to require that they armor themselves or to ban them from the road. If death-wish speed racers are the only ones lured to your streets, and if a helmet is the only counter weapon, the problem is a lot bigger than bike riders.

The fault is not in our cyclists, but in our streets. A century of bad design has left us with streets built for cars, trucks, and buses, yet serve everyone, but no one well. Road rage directed at bike riders obscures the underlying design flaws of streets that bring riders, walkers, and drivers into conflict in the first place. Bike riding shouldn't be an act of bravery, and transportation leaders should redesign their streets so that they don't depend on armor or surrender to survive. Arguing that streets are built for cars and are too dangerous to bike on is an argu-

ment for a safety intervention to upgrade those streets. Every epithet yelled at a passing cyclist is a demand for more and better bike lanes. Safe, inclusive street designs have the power to settle these arguments before they escalate into conflict and danger. Designs that protect people who ride bikes reinforce the variety of street uses, making the entire street safer by making people more visible and predictable. If cities really want to deal effectively with bike riders and create safer streets for everyone, they can start by building bike lanes.

In launching bike infrastructure programs, cities also embark on a controversial policy: daring to take street space that for decades has been used exclusively by vehicles and do something else with it. City planners will inevitably hear the International Bike Objection: "We're not Amsterdam! We're not Copenhagen!" This cry has been invoked in Washington, D.C., London, Auckland, Sydney, Pittsburgh, New York, and dozens of cities big and small. The rationale is that their streets are different. Too hilly, too spread out. We drive. Nobody bikes. It's too dangerous. It's too hot. It's too cold. It will cause traffic. It will hurt businesses. It's just not in our culture. We're different and we pride ourselves on not being like those fruity Europeans.

Having biked around Amsterdam and Copenhagen and seen the creative ways those cities have built biking into the street, I'm moved to ask, What's not to like? Hundreds of cities that aren't Amsterdam have bike lanes. Why would a city be proud *not* to attempt something that has been so successful elsewhere? Are Amsterdam and Copenhagen so freakishly well organized that their biking culture wouldn't roll in rough-and-unready car-based cities in North America and Down Under? Not exactly. Even Amsterdam and Copenhagen weren't always Amsterdam and Copenhagen. Both cities adjusted their streets for cars following World War II. It was only after public disgust and protests over traffic deaths in the 1960s that national leaders started to build bike lanes and bike parking facilities. European cities pioneered bike

lanes that are completely segregated from car lanes and pedestrian traffic, and regulated by traffic signals timed so that cyclists need not come to a full stop. This in turn stimulated growth in ridership and infrastructure over decades, not overnight. This approach is the backbone for the incredible 48 percent of traffic in central Amsterdam who bike, and 36 percent of trips in Copenhagen. Neither biking nirvana was built in a day.

Bike commuting outside of European countries is so small that it could be tagged as a semisocialistic novelty. Portland, Oregon, has by far the highest bike mode share among big American cities, with 5.9 percent of commuting trips by bike. Many people see in these numbers the proof they need that there is no demand for cycling infrastructure and that leaders shouldn't even bother trying to catch up with the rest of the world. Yet despite the weighty burden of not being Amsterdam, dozens of cities around the world have launched ambitious plans for vast bike networks, some even inspired by what they saw occurring in New York City. Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel announced plans to build one hundred miles of protected bike lanes, with protected paths already installed on Dearborn Avenue. Car capital Los Angeles installed its first protected paths on Reseda Boulevard and on South Figueroa Street, feats that would have seemed impossible ten years ago. Indianapolis used an eight-mile bike and pedestrian path to link its cultural attractions. Auckland, known as a "City of Cars," is trying to reverse the development that has emptied out the city center by adding new bike lanes, including the first bike path across the Auckland Harbour Bridge.

For its part, New York has had a long and bumpy relationship with bike lanes. The city designated the nation's very first lanes in 1894, along five miles of pedestrian walkway on Ocean Parkway, a tree-lined Brooklyn boulevard, perfect for pleasure cruisers. Mayor Ed Koch in the 1980s laid barrier-protected bike lanes during the first of his first three terms, which New Yorkers roundly blasted. Koch quickly ripped

them out. Bikes were seen as bad politics—there was little constituency aside from the urban pioneers—and bike programs were jettisoned if they were inconvenient. By 2007, the 220 miles of bike lanes in New York City were little known beyond the small core of people who dared to bike New York's streets.

While New York City lagged, cities around the world started to wake up to the benefit of becoming great biking cities. Biking infrastructure is a basic feature in cities such as Paris, which in 2007 launched its Vélib' bike-share system with seven thousand bikes, or Portland, which more than doubled the number of bike commuters in half a decade.

Coming to the job in 2007, I saw no reason why New York couldn't also be one of the world's great biking cities. New York isn't Copenhagen or Amsterdam (as had been abundantly established), but New Yorkers are nothing if not proud. Why should we let European cities eat our lunch on safer, more bike-friendly streets?

New York is relatively flat and most trips in the city are less than three miles, making it perfect for biking. Riding on city streets was a pastime dating back to my childhood. As commissioner, I rode the forty-mile Five Borough Bike Tour around the city, biking along the FDR Drive, Queensboro Bridge, the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, and the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge with Mark and our son, Max. We rode with the tour's savvy director, Ken Podziba, a former city sports commissioner, thrilled by the sensation of riding in bridge and highway lanes usually forbidden to anyone not in motor vehicles but for this one day a year. I also rode with my bike team, including Ryan Russo and Josh Benson, scouting potential corridors for new bike lanes, and seeing where just a couple blocks of connecting bike paths could close gaps in the network. PlaNYC in 2007 didn't mention bike share, a system of bikes publicly available for low-cost rentals that functions as a kind of public transportation. But it was specific about building lanes on New York City streets at a rate of about fifty miles a year.

In my first months on the job in 2007, I visited Copenhagen (New York not being Copenhagen, I had to travel there), taking with me my deputy commissioner for traffic management, Michael Primeggia, to see how the Danes built bikeways. We toured the city with Jan Gehl, the globally influential architect and urban planner. Gehl pioneered the idea of designing cities from the perspective of pedestrians and cyclists. This perspective, according to Gehl, generates the kind of intimacy and street life that makes cities into attractive places.

One of Copenhagen's bike lane designs is radically simple: curbside bike lanes protected by a lane of parked cars. Most American city streets allow parking along the curbside lane—probably even the street in front of your house or on the route to work—while a traditional bike lane is placed on the moving-traffic side of a parking lane. As discussed in earlier chapters, a parking-protected lane reverses the traffic syntax, placing the bike lane at the curb while moving the parking lane into what used to be a moving traffic lane. This puts bike riders next to a sidewalk on one side and parked cars in the “floating” lane on the other. It separates bikes and vehicles, reducing the chance that a vehicle will illegally block the bike lane and organizing the street better for pedestrians, with safety islands that reduce crossing distances.

I was convinced of this design. But it was critical to get the buy-in of the chief traffic engineer to make the changes I wanted in New York, and that's why he was with me on that trip. Primeggia at first seemed skeptical about this approach. With more than twenty years at DOT, he was steeped in the standardized engineering defined in manuals and reinforced by decades of risk-averse practice. With a new directive (PlaNYC) and a new commissioner, it was as if the shackles were off. This was no small change.

I was delighted during the trip to Copenhagen when Primeggia knelt down and measured the dimensions of a protected bike path along a main street. The wheels were turning as he mentally compared

the Danish dimensions with New York's avenues. Cars parked along the curb were as common as parking meters in New York, just as they were in most big cities. I asked Primeggia if there was anything in his manuals that required parking spaces to be along the curb in New York. He admitted there was nothing that explicitly barred the Danish design. But there was nothing explicitly authorizing it. Primeggia knew that neither the engineering nor the manuals posed any problem for making a parking-protected lane work in New York. It would be with New Yorkers. Would they accept this design?

As expected, when we brought our Copenhagen-inspired idea home, many even within the agency thought it was crazy. Having witnessed it work well in another city, Primeggia and his team continued designing what would become the first parking-protected bike lane in North America. The location was Ninth Avenue, in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood. Ninth Avenue is not as famous as its avenue cousins, Fifth, Madison, or Lexington, yet it's always been a wide traffic workhorse, on the section we were targeting—from 23rd to 16th streets, near one of our first plazas.

Simply describing the bike lane design to the local community was difficult. I had to mime the design with my hands and fingers but eventually realized there was no avoiding the need for well-drawn street design renderings to show how the new street would look. The ten-foot-wide protected bike lanes were wide enough to accommodate fire trucks, ambulances, sanitation trucks, and the largest emergency vehicles. The new bike lane design needed citywide coordination and the support of the commissioners who were affected by the new designs. A key principle of the Bloomberg administration was to work together as a team—no silos. For example, many fire departments across the United States object to street designs that change the width of traffic lanes or alter the street's function, but Fire Commissioner Nicholas Scoppetta and his chiefs had no problem figuring out that the designs left ample

room for their companies (it helped that Scoppetta's chief deputy was a bike enthusiast). Our engineers met with fire officials to run tests of their engines-and-ladders to ensure that they could actually make the turns that worked on paper.

We also needed the buy-in of the police department, which raised questions about signs, traffic flow, and enforcement. If a car was parked in a floating parking lane, could it still violate the rule against parking within fifteen feet of a hydrant? (Yes.) Did protected bike lanes require the installation of bike traffic lights? (Not necessarily; we built them on Ninth Avenue but not on most of First Avenue, and both ways seem to function well.) These changes are not popular with police departments across the country, and it took the leadership and support of Police Commissioner Ray Kelly to get the department's sign-off. Another player in the game was Sanitation Department Commissioner John



The first parking-protected bike path in the United States, on New York City's Ninth Avenue in 2009, placed a row of parked cars in a floating lane, offset from the curb,

Doherty, a bike rider himself, well disposed to bike lanes, and who bought the city's first snow plows to clear them.

The design was presented to the local community board, which approved it. While the plan was for a bike lane, our borough commissioner explained that it would also benefit older New Yorkers who lived in the neighborhood. The redesign would lop twenty-five feet off Ninth Avenue's seventy-foot crosswalks, dramatically decreasing the space in which they were exposed to car traffic.

By October 2007, the bike lane took shape. It wasn't an exact copy of a traditional Copenhagen lane. We used only markings, no street reconstruction that would raise the bike lane a few inches higher than the rest of the road, and no curb, median, or barrier aside from the row of parked cars. This was an only-in-New-York design using only paint for the lane and concrete for safety islands—the transportation depart-



and forming a barrier between the bike lane and moving traffic. The success of the initial lane led to its extension, pictured here. NYC DOT—before: Joan Scholvin; after: Inbar Kishoni

ment's stock-in-trade. Because it was a new design, we also made all of the lane markings as clear as possible, slightly narrowing and aggressively delineating all the remaining car lanes, including dashed lines through the intersection to give drivers visual cues that kept them from drifting.

The idea of altering the street for bikes seemed jarring at first. Most New Yorkers were so used to their streets that they had no idea they could be changed, and the idea of riding a bike was foreign. Some believed that bike lanes cut the space needed to process traffic and to park. Some businesses feared the lanes would make it harder to get deliveries. Others objected that the lanes disrupted the street code that delineated where pedestrians and cars were supposed to be. The street might be dangerous, it might be inefficient, oppressive, and counter-productive, but New Yorkers were used to it.

Yet the successful installation of the first bike lane—and the initial lack of opposition—led to a series of rapid-fire projects, with new bike lanes set in motion on nearby Eighth Avenue; Vernon Boulevard along the Western Queens waterfront; in the Greenpoint neighborhood of Brooklyn; on Staten Island's Bay Street; and Grand Concourse in the Bronx; plus a vital, interconnected system of feeder bike lanes connecting the East River bridges to local bike lane networks in Manhattan and Brooklyn. By 2009 we had completed the most rapid installation of bike lanes ever executed in any city, repurposing former car space to create two hundred miles of bike lanes in three years, nearly the equivalent distance of a bike lane running from the Grand Concourse in the Bronx to the Boston Common. Jan Gehl would later remark that more lanes were built during this transformative period of building bike infrastructure in New York City than in fifty years in bike-friendly Copenhagen. I guess Copenhagen isn't New York!

Another appeal of bike lanes is their low cost. Federal funding, par-

ticularly transportation clean-air funds that could be used to help build bike lanes, paid for 80 percent of our bike lane expenditures; the rest we paid for with a local match. For 20 cents on the federal dollar, millions of New Yorkers enjoyed redesigned streets for a fraction of the price of a single subway train.

While most of the first two hundred miles of bike lanes were welcomed or unremarked upon by New York's neighborhoods, the exceptions highlighted the tensions among New York's diverse communities and foreshadowed the coming bike backlash. One of the first bike lane battles ignited on Manhattan's Grand Street—a cluttered crosstown street that cut through SoHo and into Chinatown. Grand Street had one moving traffic lane, two parking lanes, and a bike lane. We converted the existing on-street bike lane into a bike path placed at the curbside, and we pushed the parking lane away from the curb, creating a Ninth Avenue-style floating lane and a protected bike lane. The street still had one moving lane, two parking lanes, and a bike lane, simply in a different order that all but eliminated the possibility of double-parking.

There were the same number of lanes before and after the change, but merchants and local residents claimed that we had removed a traffic lane and also eliminated a parking lane. Others claimed that the change was made unilaterally, without any public notice. A mayoral candidate, sensing an easy political win, declared, "I'm in favor of bike lanes but you can't put bike lanes in without speaking to the community." In fact, the bike lane had been duly presented to the local community board, which supported the project in a 33–1 vote. This bears repeating: the street had the same number of traffic and parking lanes before and after the project, but with better organization. We sent reporters pictures and copies of the authorizing resolution from the community board. Reporters quoted local business owners who claimed the design eliminated a lane, despite clear, photographic evidence that this wasn't the case.



A protected bike path on Grand Street through Manhattan's SoHo and Chinatown helped organize a chaotic street but led to one of the earliest bike controversies. NYC DOT—Heidi Wolf



Some voices whispered that the change stopped fire trucks from turning—exactly the eventuality we had anticipated and engineered into our plans. Still, the headlines blared “‘Grand’ FDNY Pain.” Despite official FDNY statements that the lane had no impact on their trucks’ response times, anonymous firehouse sources allegedly claimed that the bike lane “is a problem, [and] it’s something we’ve been talking about. We’ve been changing our routes when we’re driving around this area.” In reality, the changes on Grand Street were comparable to the width of thousands of other city streets. Fortunately, these concerns got no further than a one-day headline, nor did the political candidate win any elections with his comments.

Across the East River in Brooklyn, a lopsided 39–2 community board vote supported building a bike path on Kent Avenue, which runs parallel to the rapidly developing Brooklyn waterfront at the edge of the Williamsburg neighborhood. Historically populated by Hasidic Jews, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans, Williamsburg’s population burgeoned during the 2000s with an influx of younger professionals and hipsters. The Kent Avenue bike lane would be a bike superhighway connecting with DUMBO, Fort Greene, and Greenpoint, and become a local link in a biking greenway that one day will link neighborhoods along Brooklyn’s fourteen-mile waterfront. Kent was a notorious late-night speedway. It was too wide for two-way traffic, particularly at night, when the long, dark corridor lures thrill-seeking drivers. Yet it was too narrow to add bike lanes while keeping parking on both sides. The greenway plan for Kent envisioned a two-way bike lane that was physically protected from moving traffic with curbs and plantings, creating a waterfront route for bikes and, by narrowing the roadway, slowing down the speeders.

Because a separated lane would require long-term construction, we implemented an interim bike lane project to provide an immediate two-way connection. That design eliminated two hundred parking spaces to

give riders enough buffer from passing vehicles, compensated for by modifying parking regulations on side streets to provide more spaces. These spaces would have been removed eventually in the community-approved greenway design. Still, manufacturing industries along Kent protested that they couldn’t make or receive deliveries and had nowhere to load trucks.

Even worse, there was the issue of women. *On bikes*. They were lured by bike lanes to Williamsburg’s neighborhoods of observant Jews dressed year-round in conservative, body-covering outfits. “Hasid Lust Cause” read the headline. “It’s the Hasids vs. the hotties in a Brooklyn bike war.” Reporters fanned out all along Kent Avenue to shoot pictures of the Ladies of the Lanes, no doubt because the lanes “are popular with North Williamsburg hipsters—many who ride in shorts or skirts.”

A cultural and parking battle flared up before David Woloch, who ran DOT’s intergovernmental office, pulled together the threads. While industrial shop owners on Kent objected to the loss of parking, the problem for Jewish leaders with scantily clad shiksas wasn’t on Kent but on a parallel bike lane on Bedford Avenue, one installed well before my tenure. The Bedford bike lane ran even more directly through religious Williamsburg. In meetings with the agency, Jewish leaders were clear that they would gladly turn Kent Avenue upside down so long as it took the tank-topped and stretch-panted women cyclists away from Bedford Avenue.

We mapped out a redesign for Kent Avenue, including a parking-protected, two-way bike path alongside two parking lanes. In a single stroke, the plan reinstated hundreds of parking spaces and restored loading zones. We expected pushback to the proposal, which also changed Kent from a single traffic lane in both directions to a one-lane, one-way car traffic street. But that didn’t seem to faze neighborhood opponents when they saw how much parking would be restored. Through community consultation, a street design was negotiated that was more radical than the one it replaced. Had we started by proposing

what we ultimately built on Kent, we would have been tossed from the Williamsburg Bridge.

The downside to the redesign was the controversial erasure of the bike lane on Bedford. It was hard to explain how this seeming retreat actually advanced the biking agenda. But with the new Kent Avenue lane, we have the best bike lane in Brooklyn just a couple of blocks parallel to the one we removed from Bedford, which still connects riders with the Williamsburg Bridge. Today, it is one of the most heavily used sections of bike infrastructure anywhere in the city, or in the nation. I would have loved nothing more than to have won every battle and side skirmish. But this single action instantly stanching a potentially deep political wound and made possible hundreds of miles of future bike lanes in New York City. And to this day, hundreds of people still bike down Bedford Avenue daily in the blank space where the bike lane used to be—just as it is legal to bike on any other city street. Stretch pants, short-shorts, miniskirts, and all.

The biggest bike controversy of all—one that engaged some of New York City's most powerful political figures in a highly public, bitter, and vitriolic battle—centered not on busy Times Square or on any of Manhattan's raucous avenues but miles away, in Brooklyn, on an otherwise quiet street, Prospect Park West. A nineteen-block, .9-mile stretch of road jutting southwest from Grand Army Plaza, Prospect Park West runs alongside the park for which it is named, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, the creators of Central Park and dozens of other city parks. Tree-lined and home to upscale co-ops and multimillion-dollar town houses, the five-lane street somehow never feels crowded even when full of families pushing strollers or locals hitting the park's running or biking paths or filing out for its summer concerts, food events, and fireworks displays.

Speeding on Prospect Park had been an issue for years, and the transportation department had previously floated plans to convert the

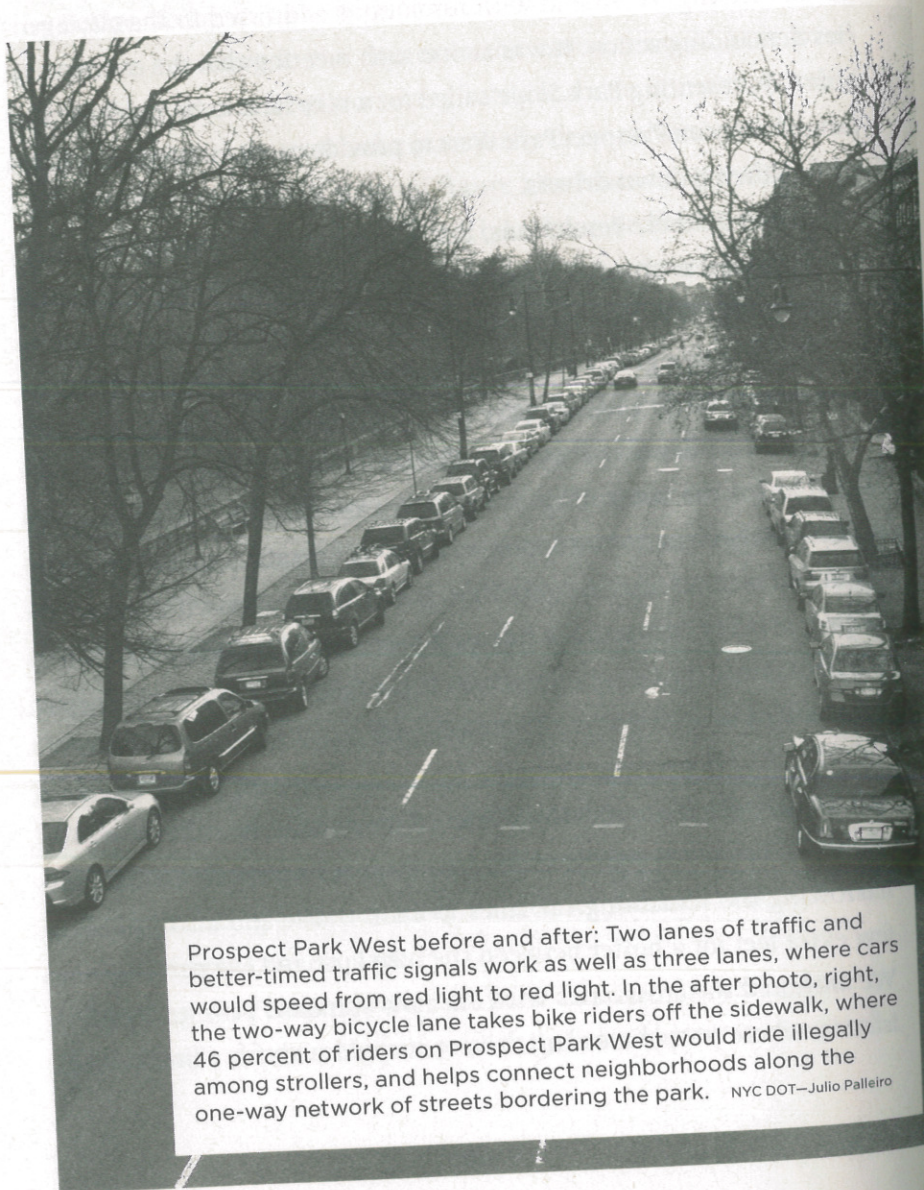
street to two-way traffic. As neighborhoods started to see the changes coming to city streets, a new generation of urban activists were starting to trickle into the New York City's Community Board system. These unelected bodies are appointed by borough presidents and city council members and given authority to conduct meetings and advise city agencies on local issues. Though they lack the actual authority to approve or veto projects, their support is widely viewed as important. Community board meetings often end with resolutions addressed to the city agencies demanding action. It was at one such meeting that the community board representing Park Slope called for a bike lane to be implemented immediately on Prospect Park West to provide room for people on bikes while slowing down drivers.

Backed by these resolutions, our bike team came back to the community board with a fuller analysis of the problem: 74 percent of cars monitored on the street were speeding, making the street feel more like a highway than a grand boulevard. Forty-six percent of bikes that used the one-way street rode illegally on the sidewalk. Cyclists didn't want to be on the sidewalk. They were frustrated onto it because the street didn't offer the route they wanted to use—traveling north toward Grand Army Plaza, in the opposite direction of traffic on Prospect Park West to reach adjacent neighborhoods and destinations. The presence of people riding bikes on the sidewalk was as much a frustration line as a desire line, a signature of how the street failed to keep up with how people used it.

Following the people along the street, we designed a two-way protected path, similar to that installed on Kent Avenue, by converting one of the street's three vehicle traffic lanes into a two-way bike path and narrowing the remaining car lanes to calm traffic and also provide a few extra feet for a buffer between the bike lane and the parking lane. We anchored the crosswalks with our now-standard pedestrian safety islands, where people crossing the street could wait for a break in the

STREETFIGHT

traffic before crossing two lanes of moving car traffic instead of three. The board voted to support the proposal, reinforced by a petition signed by 1,300 people. As implementation day drew closer we held open houses to present the proposal to reach an even wider public audience. This support on its own would have been more than enough community involvement to implement a project in any other neighborhood. But not this time.



Prospect Park West before and after: Two lanes of traffic and better-timed traffic signals work as well as three lanes, where cars would speed from red light to red light. In the after photo, right, the two-way bicycle lane takes bike riders off the sidewalk, where 46 percent of riders on Prospect Park West would ride illegally among strollers, and helps connect neighborhoods along the one-way network of streets bordering the park. NYC DOT—Julio Palheiro

BIKE LANES AND THEIR DISCONTENTS

"She is a zealot" came the voice on a local radio station one morning. The deep, Brooklyn-blunt voice was unmistakably that of the borough's president, Marty Markowitz. The "she," I realized over my morning coffee, was me.

"I have supported bicycle lanes, throughout the borough," Markowitz continued. "But where I feel bicycle lanes would have an adverse effect my job is to speak up for it."



Local cheerleader Marty Markowitz is known for his mouth. Whether he's sinking his teeth into a Junior's cheesecake, extolling the virtues of the Brooklyn Nets, or, in this case, leading the charge against bike lanes, Markowitz used the same vocal intensity to cheer on projects or to bury them, with all the subtlety of a shovel in the face. Borough presidents have little actual authority, legislative or otherwise, save for a small discretionary budget. But then there was his mouth.

This was the same guy who sang his bike lane version of "My Favorite Things" to the City Council four months earlier. Speaking with a reporter in a local paper, Markowitz questioned, "What is our objective in this city? To stigmatize the use of cars? To make it difficult to park? *Do we want Brooklyn to replicate Amsterdam?* These are legitimate policy issues" (emphasis added).

With the "zealot" thing, Markowitz shifted the terms of the debate. The impending construction of a bike lane on Prospect Park West, Markowitz's turf, wasn't a safety issue or a neighborhood-requested project. It was about me and my purported personal war against cars: "I'm acutely aware that she wants to make it hard for those that choose to own their automobiles," Markowitz said. With one well-timed, well-modulated bark into an all-too-willing reporter's microphone, the nature of this game was established: it was my bike lane in his backyard.

Despite Markowitz's preconstruction denunciation, the building of the bike lane in Prospect Park West went ahead in the early summer of 2010 with little drama. I heard reports that my predecessor as transportation commissioner, Iris Weinshall, who lived in a well-appointed high-rise along Prospect Park West with her husband, influential United States senator Charles Schumer, was skeptical about the lane. We had heard that some locals planned strategy sessions to mount an organized opposition to the lane, but nothing much materialized that summer.

The bike lane was a sensation from the moment work started. The design reconfigured one of Prospect Park West's two parking lanes into

a two-way bike path. The parking lane was moved away from the curb, taking one of the three vehicle travel lanes. Combined with retimed traffic signals, the same amount of moving traffic would rely on two lanes instead of three. Having seen the "less is more" model work well in Midtown, and with so many streets in Brooklyn moving more traffic on as many lanes, we were confident that the new design would work on Prospect Park West. Reducing the number of lanes changed only the speed of traffic and its impact on the neighborhood, not the street's ability to process all vehicles. The new, broad cycling lane took riders off the sidewalk, giving them a direct route to and from Windsor Terrace, Crown Heights, Park Slope, Prospect Heights, and points in between that were previously circuitous scrambles. By July, when the paint on the lane was still barely dry, Prospect Park West was a different street. None of the prophesied traffic pileups came to pass, no chain-reaction crashes, no reports of people mowed down by bike riders in the lane. Anyone watching the street might be lulled to sleep by the gentle traffic cycles. We succeeded in making the street better for everyone.

Enter two groups of local residents, Seniors for Safety and Neighbors for Better Bike Lanes, both apparently formed for the sole purpose of opposing the Prospect Park West bike lane. Such great names. Who could be against seniors or safety, or oppose neighbors who want better bike lanes? In the new lane these groups saw an aesthetic calamity that spoiled the grand avenue and made it harder for people crossing the street to see oncoming cars and bikes. A better alternative, they offered, would be a two-way bike lane on a road within Prospect Park itself. There were three major holes in this modest "compromise." Putting the lane inside the park would do nothing to reduce speeding on Prospect Park West or prevent people riding bikes on the sidewalk, the project's two original goals. And there was only one bike-accessible park entrance on the street between the extreme ends of the park. Riders would need a new bike lane on the street just to reach the bike lane in the park. This would be capitulation, not compromise.

In the bike lane's fledgling months, these two groups cobbled together a strategic campaign against the lane, targeting reporters and news outlets with allegations about the lane. The anti-laners alleged that we had dodged community notification and approvals. Yet the lane had been requested and approved by the neighborhood's community board numerous times. The subsequent public process made Prospect Park West the most thoroughly vetted and enthusiastically supported bike lane in human history. Plus, the lane worked, and so it stayed. So did the controversy.

Newspapers and local blogs ginned up the drama with claims and counterclaims by local residents. Anyone who learned about Prospect Park West from the headlines might think that children were being run over by city bulldozers and speared by bike riders carrying lances. "It's a Bike Lane War on Prospect Park West!" "Bike Lane Controversy Spurs Shouting Match." "Pedestrians Argue That Zippy Cyclists on Prospect Park West Bike Lane Put Safety at Risk."

The most illuminating coverage during the period came from *Streetsblog* and its sister platform, *Streetfilms*, which was run by Clarence Eckerson. Eckerson used his storytelling talents to create short, energetic, but documentary videos about transportation projects, cooling the rhetoric that surrounded the lanes by showing how they really looked and operated. Street designs lose something in the translation to print. But the videos that Eckerson and his team produced, including a four-minute segment about Prospect Park West in late 2010, a few months after the bike lane's construction, showed the peaceful coexistence of pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers.

The new lane brought new riders to the streets. Women were attracted to it in increasing numbers. People no longer thought it was crazy to ride with small children. "I can ride safely with my daughter," one rider told *Streetfilms*, "and not have to worry about traffic and being hit by a car." A young woman in the video reported that she was a relatively new

biker on city streets because she was "pretty scared of cars." The design of the new bike lane, protected from moving traffic by parked cars, meant she wasn't frightened of "someone dooring me; I'm not scared of someone parking in the bike lane or pulling into the bike lane."

"People who are critical of the bike path have claimed that it was sprung on them in the last couple of months but nothing could be farther from the truth," Eric McClure said in the video. McClure lived near the bike path and helped lead the fight to build and keep the lane. "The truth is that the community has been asking for traffic calming on Prospect Park West, including a protected bike path, for at least four years."

Six months after the lane was finished and a month after my city council cross-examination, Assistant Commissioner for Traffic Management Ryan Russo attended a meeting in a Park Slope church two blocks from the lane. Relying on the data about how the street had held up in the months since the lane had been installed, he was ready to answer questions from the community board that requested the project and ready to face the dozens of bike lane supporters who came out in force alongside a cadre of anti-laners.

Walking in about halfway through the meeting was my predecessor as commissioner, Iris Weinshall. She took a seat a few rows behind the rest of the crowd. Her name had appeared in news reports as an ardent opponent of the bike lane. Just weeks earlier, Weinshall had cosigned a letter to *The New York Times*. "When new bike lanes force the same volume of cars and trucks into fewer and narrower traffic lanes, the potential for accidents between cars, trucks and pedestrians goes up rather than down," she wrote. "At Prospect Park West in Brooklyn . . . our eyewitness reports show collisions of one sort or another to be on pace to be triple the former annual rates."

The statistics told a far different story. Russo clicked through the presentation as reporters lurked around the auditorium. Speeding on the corridor—the original impetus behind the project—bottomed out,

from 74 percent of cars on Prospect Park West speeding before to just 20 percent after. Sidewalk bike riding dropped from 46 percent of riders on the sidewalk before the project to just 4 percent after—and many of these stragglers were children, who are legally allowed to ride on the sidewalk. The number of crashes actually resulting in injuries dropped 63 percent, from an average of slightly more than five for every six-month period to just two in the six months since the lane was installed. Traffic volumes and driving time remained unchanged. Before the redesign, cars sped from red light to red light. Now they cruised at a slower, steadier pace with few, if any, stops. A survey conducted by Brad Lander, the community-minded council member for Prospect Park West's district, found that most people surveyed who lived near the park supported the changes.

Some of the meeting attendees wanted to make constructive adjustments, such as installing concrete pedestrian refuge islands, adding raised stripes to the bike lane that would cause bikes to "rumble" as they approached crosswalks, and changing parking regulations to provide more drop-off zones. Weinshall didn't speak at the meeting, and the opponents were strangely muted. That night, we celebrated a successful meeting that had gone even better than our best-case scenario. It looked like the lane was there to stay.

The community board said it was going to review the data we presented and issue a resolution regarding the lane's future. Opponents of the lane were also looking at the data that night and had already given their take on it to a reporter. "B'klyn Nabe Disputes Lane 'Success'" read the next day's tabloid headline. The story continued: "A battle over a Brooklyn bike lane is in high gear," with a group of well-organized residents accusing the city of "fudging the numbers of bicycles using the lane to support the city's drive to make the pathway permanent." No mention of the community request or support for the lane. Opponents of the lane had collected their own "data" (video of the lane shot

from the penthouse of a resident) and said they saw vastly fewer riders in the lane than our counts. Their counts were collected at only one extreme end of Prospect Park West, the equivalent of counting the number of passengers riding a train by counting how many are on at the last stop, but the tactic played well in the media and riled up bike lane opponents. The underlying bike lane battle wasn't a factual, data-based argument but a cultural and political fight that was rapidly devolving into a backlash, one that, as we soon discovered, would be resolvable only in a court of law.

The bike backlash of early 2011 peaked with the fight over this project, and they were the toughest months I've ever endured professionally. Newspapers, radio stations, and blogs delivered damning quotes from shopkeepers, people in cars, schoolteachers, and crossing guards to inflame the debate. We were accused of ignoring community views and ramming projects down communities' throats, making streets dangerous and killing businesses. Every day brought new stories of misery, not just about Prospect Park West but about every bike project old or new, plazas already constructed, and phantom projects that hadn't even been proposed. "Don't worry, Sis," my brother John Sadik-Khan told me, "you know the scouts always get the arrows."

A reporter questioned a bike lane project on Manhattan's Second Avenue that ran near the Israeli consulate. "Imagine if the man on the bike was a terrorist!" On Columbus Avenue on Manhattan's Upper West Side, store owners organized around a protected bike path, prompting elected officials to call for changes to address concerns that the lane made deliveries and parking more difficult. The dialogue over this controversy was constructive, but it was represented in the media as an acrimonious fight. We updated parking regulations and established more metered parking spaces on side streets.

A writer for *New Yorker* magazine lamented that city officials "some-

times seems intent on turning New York into Amsterdam, or perhaps Beijing." These policies, however noble, represented the views of "a small faddist minority intent on foisting its bipedalist views on a disinterested or actively reluctant populace." Another columnist had no patience for such fussy language and dubbed me the "wacko nutso bike commissioner." The backlash landed on the cover of *New York* magazine with a photo illustration containing every urban streetfight cliché: two aggressive men riding bikes the wrong way; horrified pedestrians; a car blocking a bike lane; and the headline "Not Quite Copenhagen. Is New York Too New York for Bike Lanes?" For the record, a bike lane opponent answered: "We will never be Amsterdam, never be Copenhagen."

The stories were as thick and immobilizing as the frozen snowdrifts from a destructive blizzard that winter, all centering on the same theme: a commissioner, as loved by some as she is loathed by others, faces backlash for her radical bike agenda. One local magazine put my face on the cover with multiple-choice boxes: Love or Hate. I worried about what the mayor thought about the tsunami of bad press and asked Marc La Vorgna, our media contact at city hall who became the mayor's press secretary, what he made of the love/hate dichotomy.

"Whatever. I checked love," he shot back. The article "says you have big ideas and don't accept the status quo."

It was hard to take comfort in these kind words as still more stories landed. One tabloid harshly criticized me for what it viewed as a lackluster response to a devastating blizzard that winter, and saw my defense as a criticism of Police Commissioner Ray Kelly, a close ally of mine. Blistering critiques of the bike backlash and my starring role in it fueled a major story in *The New York Times*. The lead quote in that piece came from Anthony Weiner, a Queens congressman and candidate for mayor to replace Bloomberg, who said that during his first term, "I'm going to have a bunch of ribbon-cuttings tearing out your fucking bike lanes." Talk about going off half-cocked.

Opponents of the Prospect Park West bike lane took to the courts, filing legal papers that claimed the transportation department's decision to build the bike lane was "arbitrary and capricious." The suit accused the department of giving false or misleading bike lane data to the public and claimed that the lane should have been studied for "various environmental impacts, including but not limited to exhaust and noise pollution," and possible violations of the city's landmarks preservation code.

The news reached every part of the city. My son, Max, asked me if I was being sued, saying that all the kids at his high school in Brooklyn were talking about it. My husband, Mark, a law professor at New York University, helped me explain to Max how the law worked and that I was being sued in my official capacity as commissioner. Not exactly the kind of conversation I ever expected to have with my child, especially about a bike lane. I counted on Mark's counsel and humor more than anyone. Every night we talked through the issues of the day. Mark told me that many of his colleagues at the law school had seen the story in the *Times* and were impressed, thinking that I must have been doing something right to be given such prominence in the papers. Others pointed out sexist assumptions they saw in the story. Another common refrain, only half in jest, was that "as long as the story doesn't include the word 'indictment' and has a good picture, it's a winner."

As the stories mounted, the administration closed ranks. Bloomberg's director of public affairs, Frank Barry, told *New York* magazine, "Janette is doing exactly what the mayor expects of all his commissioners: pioneering innovative new ways of serving the public, no matter what the politics. . . . There will always be some who resist change, but in the case of bike lanes, the community boards have strongly supported them—and the safety numbers show they're saving lives."

In response to a *Daily News* editorial that alleged that many projects were forced upon unwilling communities, we sent a memo to the

paper pointing out that despite vocal opposition to some bike lanes, local community boards supported and specifically requested them. The paper brushed aside the message and the PDF copies of the board resolutions and authorizations. "You can dismiss all this as inaccurate if you like," the editorial writer e-mailed us, "*but people are saying this.*" Contradicting factually inaccurate claims wouldn't eliminate them from public discussion; it only helped keep the controversy alive.

Deputy Mayor Howard Wolfson was the best colleague, friend, and bike lane defender I could ever hope for. He became an inveterate bike commuter as deputy mayor. People in the administration jokingly accused me of being responsible for his Lycra attire at city hall, rolling his bike past security. Nope. It was all Howard and he was the person you wanted on your side when things got tough. And they did.

He shot back with a memo to reporters filled with statistics documenting our extensive outreach on bike lane projects and the majority support they enjoyed with New Yorkers at large. "It's official," he added in a separate post. "Bike lanes have become a metaphor. For some they symbolize the 'nanny state' run amok—as if the City were forcing drivers out of their cars and compelling them to get around on two wheels instead. But to paraphrase that great cyclist Sigmund Freud, sometimes a bike lane is just a bike lane." Wolfson's memos and tweets were the media equivalent of air support, strategically helping us in the debate and also boosting morale.

Newspapers that hoped to harass Mayor Bloomberg or whip his aides into a froth to fire me and tear out the bike lanes were bitterly disappointed. "I've always said that if you want lifetime employment in our administration, you just get the *Post* to demand that I fire you," he said.

As that was apparently the tabloid's goal, and because it was obvious that the mayor made decisions based on facts and data and not headlines, the *Post* responded in kind with a sarcastic, reverse-psychology editorial entitled "We ♥ Janette," demanding that I be kept on as commissioner.

"This one's a keeper," it concluded. "*Pleeeeeease* don't fire her."

He didn't, and I kept that editorial at my desk for the remainder of my tenure.

As the Winter of Bike Discontent thawed into spring, there were fewer hit pieces, and broadcast media moved on to other drive-by topics. The advocacy community also pulled together, just as they had at Prospect Park West. Paul Steely White and Caroline Samponaro from Transportation Alternatives spoke out at community meetings, drafted op-eds and letters to the editor, and always made themselves available to reporters writing about bike controversies. Supporters delivered 1,700 thank-you letters at an event on the City Hall steps, thanking the mayor for the string of street changes. They were led by savvy leaders like Kate Slevin, of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, and Gene Russianoff, from New York's Straphangers Campaign, and backed by officers of the Natural Resources Defense Council and the New York League of Conservation Voters. "We're here today to say thanks to Janette Sadik-Khan and Mayor Bloomberg," Slevin said. "It's safer to get around New York City today than at any time since record-keeping began."

There may have been a more practical explanation for the end of the media frenzy: the polls started coming in. A Quinnipiac University poll found that 54 percent of New Yorkers said that bike lanes were "a good thing." This was the first of many polls that would be released in the coming months, two putting bike lanes' popularity as high as 66 percent—higher than the approval numbers for most New York politicians. Judged by the polls, most New Yorkers either didn't read the papers or didn't relate to the controversy. What sounded like a chorus of opposition in the media was actually a small but determined section of the population. Influential news columnists also began to take up the issue, as headlines about conflict were replaced with kinder words like "Thanks," and "Bicycle Visionary" from *Times* columnist Frank Bruni, who helped expand the media vocabulary.

It became clear that the fight wasn't about me or Bloomberg, and we didn't win the public debate by outwitting the opposition. The battle was won by the projects and by New Yorkers themselves. New Yorkers were way ahead of the press and the politicians. They took to changes on the street with an enthusiasm immune to the government that built them, to the advocates pushing for the changes, and to the opponents arrayed against them. They were just looking for new ways to get around and saw in the transformation of the streets the fulfillment of a long-dormant promise. *Change is possible*. They weren't Lycra warriors or ideologues out for blood, and in fact there was less blood on the street than there was at the start of the process. And it wasn't about bike lanes. It was about an idea about our streets and who they are for.

We succeeded in building as many bike lanes after the bikelash as before it. The number of riders doubled from 2007 to 2013, representing a fourfold increase measured over a decade. Judged from the street and by the sight of ordinary people riding bikes as basic transportation and not as a political statement, a new road order for cities had become a self-evident fact on the streets of New York.

"The biggest mischaracterization about the infamous New York Cycling War is that there's a war at all," wrote a columnist for *The Wall Street Journal*. "Look all around you. The bikes have won, and it's not a terrible thing."



9

Bike Share: A New Frontier in the Shared Economy

Just after eleven p.m. my e-mail inbox exploded with messages from viewers tuned to *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. I was out that night at an event and had missed the entire show, but quickly figured out that Stewart had just given Citi Bike the full comic treatment.

"There are a lot of important stories in the world right now," Jon Stewart said to open the show, and "one of the most important is happening right here in New York City."

Then came the footage of Citi Bikes. "Oh my god," Stewart said, anticlimactically. "We have basically imported Europe's most boring idea." Stewart unspooled clips from recent news reports that Citi Bike had launched amid concerns that the system was buggy, that bike-share riders don't have to wear helmets, and that locals had complained that the racks were ugly and arbitrarily placed in neighborhoods.