

the waterside highways. The project will stretch twelve miles along the river, connecting to forty-four neighborhoods across 808 acres of former roadway. Near the riverside park, Gaviria wants to see mixed income housing and the removal of physical and social barriers to public space. During my visit to Medellín, city planner Pérez sketched out the project area on a beer coaster—which I furtively pocketed—showing how the design would bring people of all classes together. Breaking ground months before the end of the mayor's term and starting with the most difficult construction left the project well under way by the time he left office and his successor more likely to see the project through to completion.

Medellín isn't the first city to be transformed socially, economically, and politically by its transportation system—it's not even the first city in Colombia to undergo such a rapid reshaping of its public realm. And as we've seen throughout these chapters, it can take very little to transform a street's use. The clearest example I've seen of this was during one of my first trips abroad as commissioner, to Bogotá, Colombia's capital, 154 miles southeast of Medellín. Bogotá spent much of the last decade reclaiming its streets from cars and building one of the world's great bus rapid transit networks, but the most enduring example of how easily the city changed its streets is an idea called *Ciclovía*. A Bogotá tradition since its origins in the 1970s, *Ciclovía* (Spanish for bikeway) is simply the act of closing streets to cars, in Bogotá's case from seven a.m. to two p.m. every Sunday and also on holidays, and letting city residents take to the streets on foot, on bikes and roller skates, roller blades—however they wanted to get around.

The *Ciclovía* idea didn't take hold until the early 2000s, when Bogotá mayor Enrique Peñalosa's brother, Gil Peñalosa, left a lucrative post heading a television station to become the city's parks commissioner. At the time, Gil Peñalosa told me, *Ciclovía* was "just a few miles and a few thousand people," unloved by the transportation department

that ran the car-free event. Department engineers were afraid that expanding the event would only underscore its unpopularity and cause traffic problems. Gil Peñalosa made them a proposition: give him control of the event for one day and see if he could increase attendance. For one day he expanded the route to fifteen miles. It attracted forty thousand people, a sharp increase from typical weekends, and he called his former media colleagues to cover the event. "It was the number one story on the news that night and the front page of all the papers the next morning," he told me, proving that expansion would give the event the critical mass it needed to be successful.

Peñalosa said his inspiration was Frederick Law Olmsted, who created New York City's Central Park and countless other North American parks. In the 1850s, he said, there was social and racial strife among blacks, whites, natives, and immigrants, rich and poor—social conditions that were reinforced by a physical stratification within the city. These New Yorkers didn't know one another, didn't live in the same buildings. Their kids didn't go to school together and they didn't move within the same orbit. Olmsted saw Central Park as a place where people of every social stratum could meet as equals. A century and a half later, that idea is still relevant. Peñalosa told me, "I thought that *Ciclovía* could be the Central Park of any city of any size anywhere. It could be an exercise in social integration."

Today, *Ciclovía*'s route runs more than seventy miles and attracts more than one million people to the streets every Sunday and holiday. Car-free or "open streets" events have spread around the world, from Los Angeles and Minneapolis, to Johannesburg and several cities in India, in cities with populations ranging from twenty thousand to twenty million. Peñalosa says that the automotive dominance is instantly tamed by car-free events as people have an opportunity to connect again with their streets: "All of a sudden people see that the streets are public space and belong to all of us, and things start clicking into other possibilities."

Peñalosa saw Ciclovía as a kind of Central Park of the streets, but when I saw it in action during a visit to Bogotá in 2007, it seemed foreign to the image of New York City's streets. Still, I thought it worth trying back home. Our interpretation, which we gave the hopeful name of Summer Streets, would turn seven miles of New York streets from the Brooklyn Bridge to Central Park at 72nd Street into a human-powered late-summer causeway for riding bikes, running, walking, or curbside dance classes. At first I imagined what it would look like on Broadway, but Michael Primeggia, my traffic deputy, noted that nearby Park Avenue would be easier logistically, as it is wide enough, with a planted median in the center, which would let more people run on their own power in both directions. We picked three consecutive August Saturday mornings for the event, when traffic in New York City was at its lightest, and to avoid conflict with the countless parades, street fairs, and other events that close city streets through the summer.

Before the first Summer Streets event in 2008, our biggest concern was that no one would show up, that it would rain, that the closures would foul traffic and become a black eye for us and for the mayor. We wondered if streets themselves would be enough to motivate blasé New Yorkers to come out on a Saturday morning even if there were no food booths, live music, or festival rides. Instead of food and festivities, Summer Streets offered physical fitness activities—kickboxing classes, dance lessons, rock wall climbing. Not exactly the stuff people line up for. Perhaps most unknown was whether New Yorkers, banished from the street for a century, would continue to turn their backs on their own street out of force of habit. Closing the street would be one thing. Making people feel safe and welcome was another.

We shot for the stars to gin up interest in the first event, and were thrilled when hip-hop mogul Jay-Z agreed to turn out for a press conference, a connection made through my old friend and ace communica-

tions consultant Joe DePlasco, who had worked with me at DOT over twenty years earlier. We were pleasantly surprised that celebrities would be willing to lend their fame to get New Yorkers to the street. Lance Armstrong, long before his fall from grace, joined us at a press conference with Mayor Bloomberg to call on people to dust off their bikes and pump up their tires, and even the legendary musical genius and bike rider David Byrne signed on to give street cred to the effort.

None of us slept the night before the first street closure. I know I didn't, turning over every worst-case scenario in my mind and checking the weather report obsessively for any chance of rain. I checked my messages every five minutes from Dani Simons, who project-managed the event. Waking well before dawn on the first day, I rode my bike up and down the route before police had even closed off the hundreds of side streets. I made it all the way across the Brooklyn Bridge before returning to Foley Square downtown to fire the starting gun for a seven a.m. route run and officially start the first Summer Streets. I was frazzled and bleary eyed from the days of preparations and the early start.

As the runners made their way up the route and the morning sun shone through the cross streets and into the asphalt and glass canyons, I started seeing people. Maybe it was their routine to walk, bike, or run on Park Avenue on Saturday, but we never noticed them because of all the car traffic. Maybe they came out after seeing Jay-Z on the evening news or in the papers. But I realized I shouldn't have worried. New Yorkers knew exactly what to do with a car-free street, and they came out in droves for those three Saturdays, seeing views never before visible to a person on two feet or a bike. We were all giddy looking at the happy faces riding, running, or strolling on Park Avenue that morning. I ran into Clarence Eckerson, the indefatigable filmmaker at Streetfilms, who helped bring our street transformations to life with a series of video segments. We high fived, both of us grinning like maniacs.



Car-free streets in dozens of neighborhoods, like this one on Montague Street in Brooklyn Heights, showed how quickly and easily a street could be transformed into inviting public space, revealing the street's hidden potential using little more than artificial turf. NYC DOT



The video clips Clarence shot and posted online and the blog posts written by its sister division *Streetsblog* were hugely important in getting out the word. More than 150,000 people came to the three Summer Streets events that summer, a number that had doubled by 2013 as the annual event became a New York summer staple.

Removing cars for a few hours revealed the city hidden beneath and within. A statue of railroad magnate Cornelius Vanderbilt, for decades visible only from cars driving along the viaduct that wraps around Grand Central Terminal, became a surprise attraction. Dozens of people stopped to snap pictures and pose for selfies. Notorious shoe gazers, New Yorkers in these first summer Saturdays started looking up, unafraid that they would block traffic or get hit by a car. Once we saw the possibilities of car-free streets, the options were irresistible. We added new attractions like zip lines, and set up courts for tennis and basketball atop the blacktop, and added golf courses and sand castle contests in plazas. We teamed up with a local entrepreneur to bring "Dumpster" pools next to Grand Central, letting New Yorkers take a free dip in converted shipping containers that had been lined with PVC (and equipped with a high-performance filtration system). The demand to wade in the pools was so intense that we had to use a wristband system, scheduling swim times hours in advance.

The full transformative force of Summer Streets came in 2013 when we opened a car-only tunnel below Park Avenue to pedestrians for the first time. The tunnel, which runs from 34th to 40th Street, opened in 1834 and was first used for horse carts, then replaced with cars—but no pedestrians in all that time. Instead of blank concrete, the tunnel was opened to the public as a portal of sound and light created by artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, bringing the space to life with three hundred theater spotlights that flashed and pulsed onto the walls of the tunnel in time with a system of sound amplifiers.

Summer Streets brought New Yorkers closer to their city and also

brought the people in our agency closer among ourselves. On the route, I remember seeing Leon Heyward, the resolute deputy commissioner for sidewalk inspection and maintenance. He was also tasked with overseeing special events and responses to emergencies, but the biggest part of his job that day was to enjoy the street and let the people do all the work. All the resources of the agency had been put into creating an opportunity to let New Yorkers experience their streets. I rode along the route with my son, Max, who shot free throws at a basketball clinic sponsored by the New York Knicks and was given pointers on his shooting style. My husband, Mark, Max, and I biked together and hung out by the Cornelius Vanderbilt statue, an opportunity for everyone at the agency to meet my family and for me to meet theirs. Coworkers brought their partners, friends, and family for a special moment when the professional and the personal merged.

Seeing streets in Manhattan opened for free-range activities, communities in every borough started clamoring for their own versions of the event. An application-based program called Weekend Walks was created so neighborhoods could nominate streets for closures. In 2011, the first year, eighteen neighborhoods held events; by 2013, the number had increased to twenty-four neighborhoods. Decades from now these car-free events should be as much a tradition as the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and the New York City Marathon.

While we accomplished a lot with paint and partnerships to make changes quickly and cheaply, we also set up new administrative processes that put the power of public space and its long-term management more directly into the hands of communities. The application program for these neighborhood car-free events reflected the model of our plaza program. It wasn't about simple empowerment—letting people ask for a plaza or a car-free street—it was necessary to establish a community management plan to keep the new spaces and events alive, and to maintain and help pay for them.

"It turns out that changing the space from a place for cars only to a place that invites pedestrians is the easy part," Andy Wiley-Schwartz told me. "Making the space successful, maintaining it and keeping it active in the long term, that's where it's vital to have a process and a partner to sustain it."

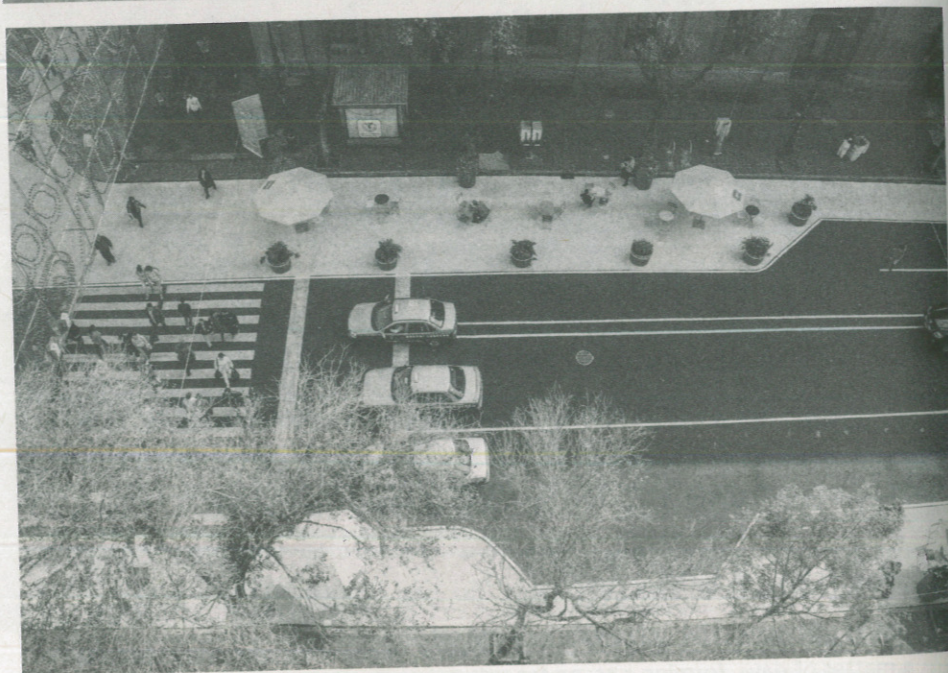
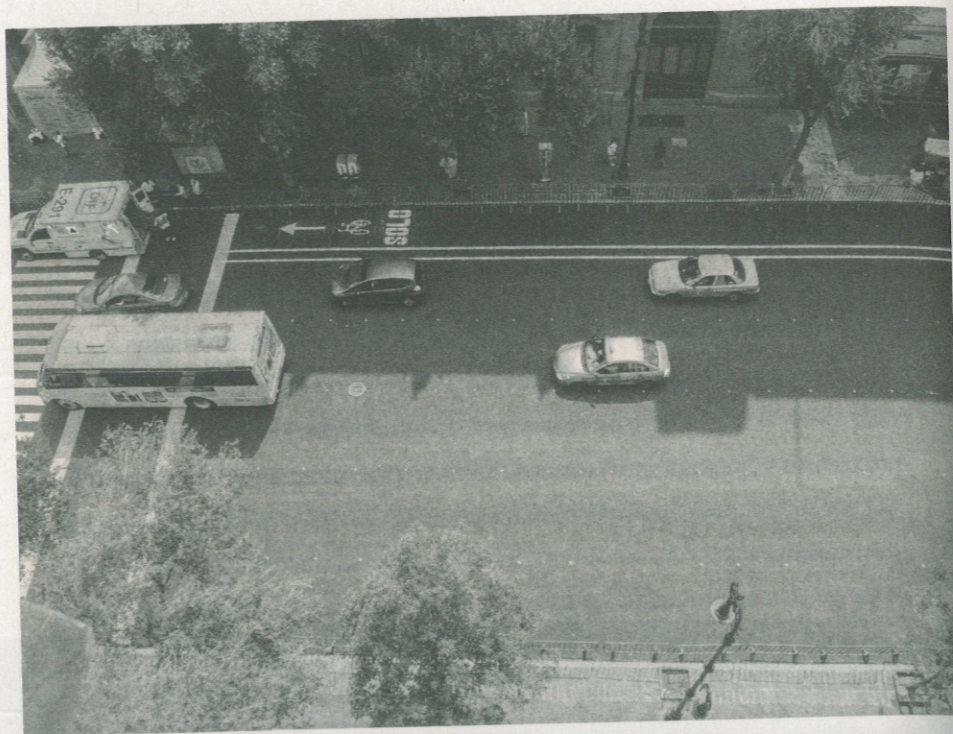
Cities have different models for managing public space. Our model was based on the public-private partnership approach used by New York City's parks department. Taking a page out of their book, we set up a system that turned each of our plaza projects into a partnership between the city and local community or business groups. These organizations pooled their resources, which they put toward maintenance of a plaza: putting out tables and chairs, taking them in and securing them in the evening, and replacing those that become damaged or disappear; sweeping up trash left from hundreds of visitors, removing any graffiti, watering plants, and shoveling paths after winter snows. These groups perform functions that government is less adept at doing. "Programming" is what we call any activity that animates a public space, drawing in people with its own energy as opposed to passive recreation. Perhaps it is a food truck event that draws crowds and generates a little revenue that the local community group can use for plaza maintenance. Neighborhood groups host performances, lending libraries, holiday markets, and craft fairs.

Not all neighborhoods have a nonprofit group to represent them or the resources to hire staff to maintain their spaces. But a public space policy needs to include all communities, not solely areas that have economic strength. To address this and help fill the gaps in New York's neighborhoods, we helped establish a nonprofit Neighborhood Plaza Partnership (NPP) with the help of Chase Bank and local foundations. NPP is one of the legacies left by Wiley-Schwartz, who was the planning and logistical force behind the more than sixty plaza projects launched over seven years. This program continues to bring new plazas

to the street. NPP advises neighborhoods with little green or public space, guiding them through the application and administrative process, training them on how to maintain a plaza, and connecting them with private sponsorship funding. The program is a marriage of the Association of Community Employment and the Horticultural Society and connects less-well-financed neighborhood groups with the manpower needed to maintain the spaces. It helps train people who have been previously in jail or homeless in landscaping and maintenance skills in the process, providing a transformative connection for communities that need help, a valuable public amenity and employment opportunity.



An underused service lane in Corona, Queens, became a community space in a matter of days, forming a stage for cultural performances and activities. View a time-lapse video of the plaza's creation at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvkfXZfkn2o>. Neshi Galindo



Along Avenida 20 de Noviembre in Mexico City, former vehicle lanes have been transformed into pedestrian space and a bike path at the gateway to the Zócalo, the central gathering place in the nation's capital. Nick Mosquera for Bloomberg Associates/Hector Rios for Mexico City

## STEALING GOOD IDEAS

NPP is one of several programs that turned the public planning process on its head. Instead of government presenting ideas to communities, we established a process enabling community organizations, business and cultural groups, and others to request projects that would change their neighborhoods. Parents, schools, activists, businesses, and elected officials are now fluent in traffic calming, way finding, curb extensions, and road diets, even though they barely knew these concepts existed just a few years ago. Giving communities a menu of options and a way to request them also sharply reduced the feeling within communities that they have been "planned to." It's an inspiring example that other cities can borrow; they too can unlock the power of their streets by empowering people to change it themselves.

While we imported great ideas from around the world, we also exported them.

In 2009, San Francisco started experimenting with New York City-style rapid-implementation plazas, painting a plaza at Market, Castro, and Seventeenth streets, the first of several similar projects across the city. The design looked like any number of projects in the Bronx, Brooklyn, or Manhattan, right down to the buff color, planters, and stone barriers. In Mexico City, Avenida 20 de Noviembre was a high-volume traffic corridor delivering endless columns of cars north to the Zócalo, the nation's cultural and political epicenter, even though virtually all of them were bound for destinations far from the center. Working with Dhyana Quintanar, director of the city's public space department, my team at Bloomberg Associates came up with a plan to look at these old streets in new ways, and redesign them from the perspective of the most vulnerable people on the street. The new designs calmed the vehicle traffic approaching the Zócalo and opened large stretches of space for people to walk, establishing a true gateway to the nation's central square and extending its grandeur and inclusiveness farther south.

Beneath the city's highways in Coyoacán, the city cleared vacant lots and turned these spaces into food courts, bakeries, convenience stores,



A pocket park in Coyoacán, Mexico City, one of dozens that repurpose unused street space to extend sidewalks for seating, gathering, eating, and people watching. Seth Solomonow

and fitness areas. Quintanar's public space department is invigorating neighborhoods with new community plazas (*parques de bolsillo*, or pocket parks) to serve as bulwarks against invasion by parked cars. City leaders have also started to create a viable network of bike lanes as bike-share stations and protected bike paths have emerged along busy Avenida de la Reforma and in the areas around the historic city center. Five bus rapid transit routes today operate along sixty-five miles of dedicated bus lanes where cars used to sit idle, becoming part of the city's transportation network, moving 900,000 daily passengers at full speed past lanes of stopped cars.

Little by little, the redesign of streets creates spaces that invite people and opportunities beyond cars. These strategies are more than just novelties. They may ultimately be part of Mexico City's long-term salvation—and the salvation of all cities.

A problem in many cities is finding your way around. Plazas give pedestrians new destinations, but without a system of signs indicating where they are, neighborhood landmarks like these can easily remain off the grid. While streets are cluttered with street name signs, one-way signs, stop signs, and totem poles of parking information, many cities don't have so much as a sign or an arrow for people walking. But even pedestrians need infrastructure. We've all experienced the frustration of being lost or pointed in the wrong direction by a seemingly knowledgeable local. Taking a page out of London's successful wayfinding playbook, we put New York neighborhoods on the map with the city's first coordinated sign system for pedestrians. While digital maps can be called up on any smartphone, there's still enormous convenience in having physical, freestanding maps on sidewalks, like those that Transport for London positioned along city streets—known as Legible London. We placed the sleek, eight-foot-high monoliths mostly within the sidewalk curb zones, inviting people to determine their location and their next step without being stampeded.