Streetscapes of New York

pocket zine
by the NYC Public Design Commission

What are streetscapes?

Streetscapes do not only consist of roadbeds where vehicles drive and park. They also consist of the sidewalks and plazas where people walk and socialize. Moreover, streetscapes are made of the bike lanes, the street furniture (including benches, lampposts, and bike racks) and the trees planted along the streets. Streetscapes ensure that people can move around the city and connect with one another. They help to make the city more resilient and sustainable by managing stormwater with bioswales (see p. 8) and by limiting the negative effects of heat waves with shade provided by street trees. Streetscapes promote healthy lives and wellness by allowing people to exercise and come together. Most importantly, streetscapes are the places where community thrives and where people can express their right to protest and assemble. Finally, streetscapes are part of the public good: they belong to everyone.
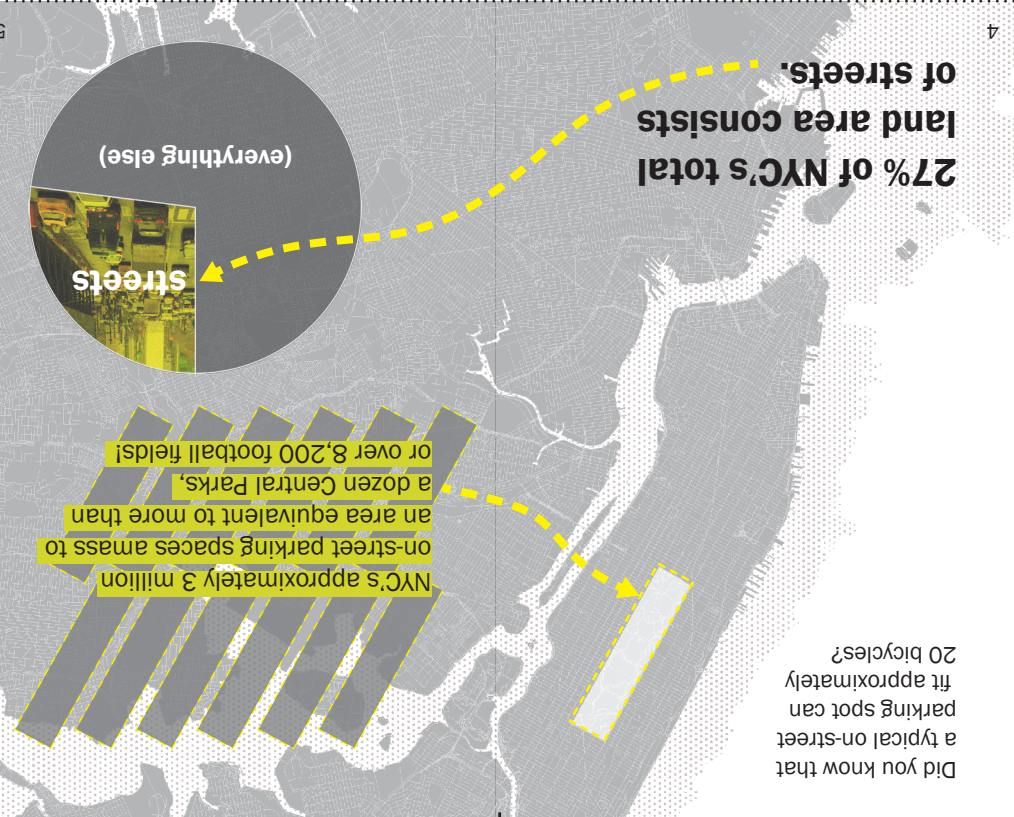
1

NYC has around 8,000 miles of streets!

That's a distance that could stretch between NYC and Los Angeles three times!

Compare that distance to the 1,250 miles* of bike lanes in NYC, which stretched out would only reach halfway to L.A., but could still extend from NYC to Florida!

* NYC has nearly ten times the amount of bike lanes it had twenty years ago. This number does not include the nearly 100 miles of Open Streets or approximately ten miles of temporary bike lanes that have been installed since the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020.

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27% of NYC's total land area consists of streets.

NYC's approximately 3 million on-street parking spaces amass to an area equivalent to more than a dozen Central Parks, or over 8,200 football fields!

streets

(everything else)

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Did you know that a typical on-street parking spot can fit approximately 20 bicycles?

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Streets are shaped by many and affect everyone.

The NYC Department of Transportation is the primary agency in charge of NYC's streets. There are also close to 3 dozen other agencies and partners, including business improvement districts (BIDs) that are involved in the planning, design, construction, and maintenance of street furniture, infrastructure, planting, and underground utilities.

DSNY · Recycling Bin · Citi Bike Dock · DCP · DOT · DoITT · LinkNYC kiosk · DCLA · Temporary security blocks · Street Tree Pit · DPR · LPC · DCA · CityRack · MOCTO · Newsstand · Signal Pole · Telecommunications box and antenna · NYCEM · EDC · FDNY · Planter · MTA · Bollard · NYPD · DDC · NYCT · Flood-proof Subway grate · DEP · Emergency Call Box · MOPD · PDC · CityBench

NYC's streets are designed to provide:

- resilience
- sustainability
- stormwater drainage
- reduction of fossil fuels
- emergency response & access
- broadband & WiFi access
- accessibility & mobility
- health, wellness & sanitation
- safety & security
- communication

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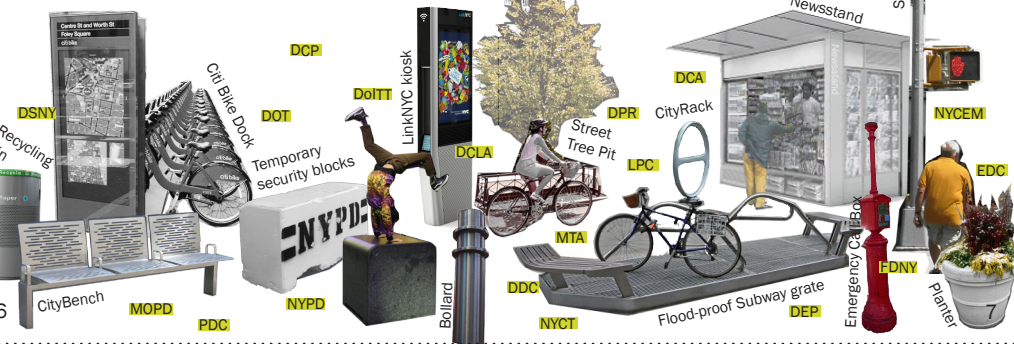
Streets should provide safe transportation options and contribute to a greener, healthier city.

Since the launch of NYC's bike share program, CitiBike has reported over 82 million rides and has contributed to a 225% increase in bicycle ridership within NYC over the past two decades, helping to reduce citywide emissions.

Bioswale rain gardens are a type of green infrastructure that reduces stormwater runoff and sewer overflow, keeping our streets and waterways safer and healthier.

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Good urban design makes this possible.

What is urban design?

Urban design is the practice that shapes the city to create good places for people to live, learn, work, play, exercise, socialize, rest, or simply walk. Urban design focuses on the relationship between the streetscapes and the buildings, and how this relationship affects people's experiences. The NYC Department of City Planning came up with four urban design principles for building a city that can be enjoyed by all:

1. Good urban design creates and reinforces the sense of place and character of a neighborhood.
2. Good urban design ensures that public spaces are accessible and enjoyable by all.
3. Good urban design cares about details.
4. Good urban design ensures that public spaces are comfortable and feel safe to all.

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The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted how we use our streets.

During a time when people must maintain physical distance to protect the health and wellness of the public, new emphasis has been placed upon public space. Cities worldwide must consider how streets can be reconfigured and rethought to allow people to safely navigate a dense urban environment, and to access food, essential services, and space for exercise, play, and fresh air. Streets should be able to adapt to differing restrictions, public health guidelines, and neighborhood conditions. NYC has implemented temporary rapid-response infrastructure to help reapportion street space for people.

Share The Road
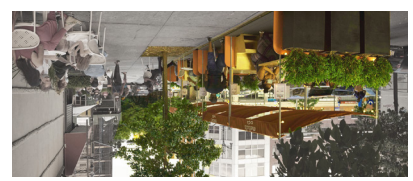Do Not Enter
Except Local Traffic

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How is NYC addressing these new needs?

Open Streets

To rapidly address NYC's need for additional space to allow for physical distancing among pedestrians, NYC developed a plan to open 100 miles of Open Streets throughout the five boroughs. These streets are closed to through-traffic during daytime hours and are open for to the public for walking and biking, play and relaxation.

Protected Bike Lanes

In March 2020, when NYC shut down in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Transportation noted substantial upticks in bicycle ridership. In a continued effort to ensure safer, easier cycling routes within the city, DOT has been restriping roads and creating miles of temporary cycling corridors that may have the opportunity to become permanent fixtures in our streetscapes.

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Open Restaurants

Because indoor dining has been limited due to public health concerns, NYC's Open Restaurants program expands exterior seating options for food establishments by allowing outdoor dining in the sidewalk and/or roadbed. And, the Open Streets: Restaurants program allows community based organizations, BIDs, or groups of restaurants to apply for permits to temporarily close an entire street to traffic for expanded dining space.

Cool Streets

During heat emergencies, spray caps are installed on hydrants in designated shaded locations to provide cooling.

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How do you use NYC's streetscapes?

walking
biking
driving
scootering
skateboarding
riding e-bikes
running
playing catch
cooling off in a hydrant
taking a break
catching up with friends
talking on the phone
hosting block parties
having a cookout
waiting for the bus
vending
advertising
taking the dog out
playing music
dining
protesting
assembling
delivering food
sleeping
jogging
strolling
relaxing
enjoying fresh air
marching
commuting
skipping
hanging out
rollerblading
playing hopscotch
drawing with sidewalk chalk
charging a phone
accessing free wifi
buying a newspaper
window-shopping
hailing a cab
picking up take-out
loading and unloading
exercising
sightseeing
taking photos
viewing public art
exploring

WE Walk: Streets for Connection
PARK(ing) Day 2020, New York, NY

Subgrade infrastructure

More exterior dining?

Designated hours for Open Streets?

Temporary art installations?

Fewer cars on the streets?

Wider crosswalks?

Increased accessibility at pedestrian ramps?

Planted tree pits?

Open Streets barricade

Space for play?

Planted medians?

Electric vehicle charging?

Multi-lane bike corridors?

More bike racks?

Add cycling signals?

Sidewalk shed

Add bioswale rain gardens?

More benches and movable seating?

Signal Pole

Street Trees

Street Pole

Since the pandemic began, have you noticed any changes to the streetscapes in your neighborhood that you would like to see continued in the future?

Are there any other streetscape elements you would change?