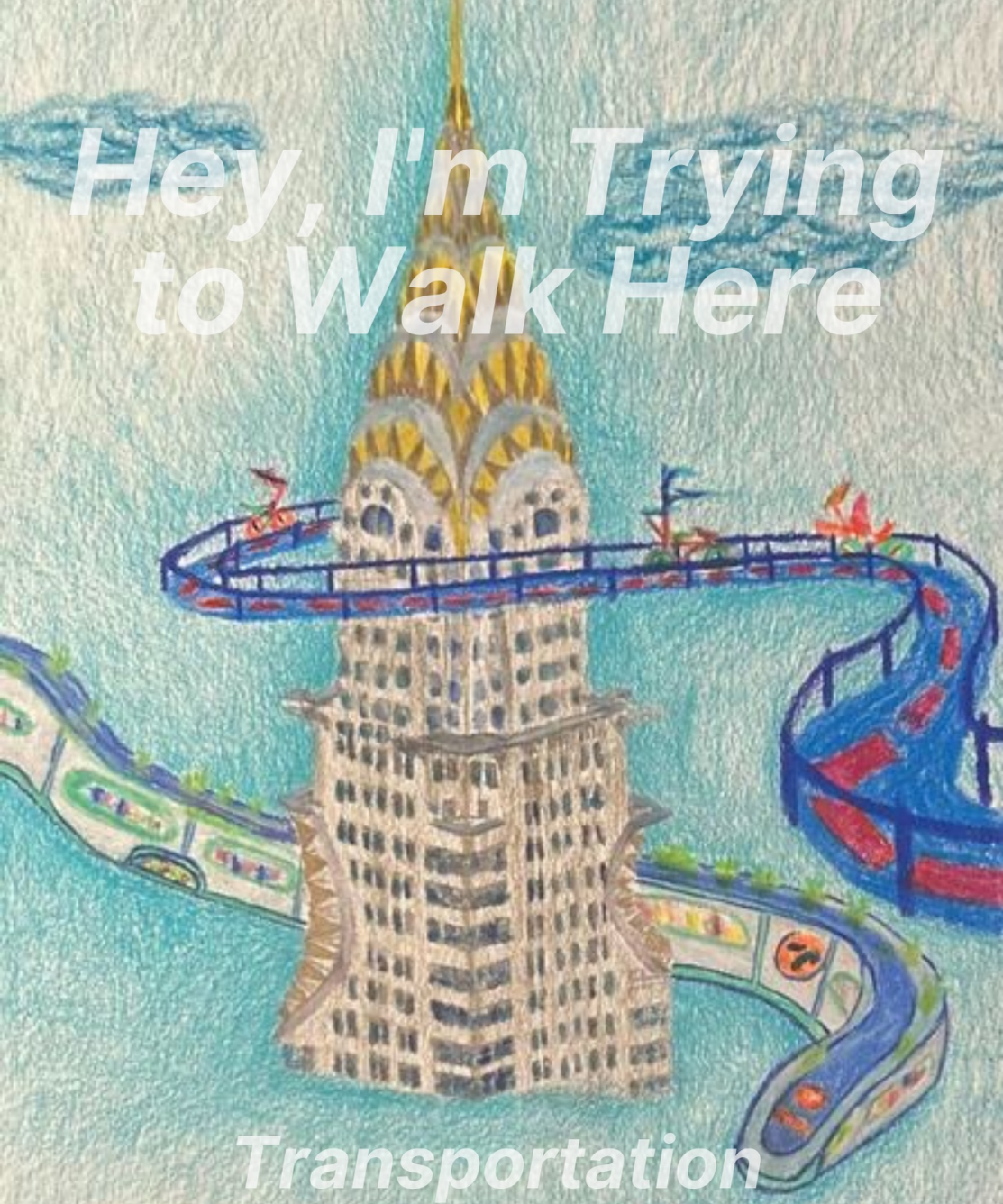
Hey, I'm Trying to Walk Here



Transportation Alternatives Field Team 2024

Who are we?

Transportation Alternatives is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that has advocated for transportation, sustainability, and equity in New York City for over 50 years. Transportation Alternatives operates in all five boroughs to bring more accessible, safe, and more equitable transit solutions to the city we hold dear. Transportation Alternatives seeks to utilize grass-roots organizing and citywide advocacy to make present the future of community-centered transportation.

We are the 2024 **Field team** canvassing in all five boroughs and educating residents on our active campaigns, hearing about their local transportation-related issues from lived experience, and supporting community and committee engagement to address the transit challenges at a local level and make our streets safer for all New Yorkers. To see some of our campaigns in your area, visit us at *transalt.org/our-campaigns*.

Ready to support walking, biking, and transit in NYC?

NYC versus the World

by Laura Hughes

Public transportation plays a vital role in any urban ecosystem, offering mobility, reducing congestion, and promoting sustainability. While New York is known for having the best transit system in the United States, it still falls short compared to the world's top performers. Cities in Europe and Asia, such as Berlin, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Stockholm, demonstrate how to efficiently allocate street space and prioritize public transit, offering valuable lessons for New York City and other car-centric areas of the U.S.

New York City: The Best in the U.S., But Still Behind

New York City is the transit powerhouse of the United States. It is the only city in the nation where most households do not own a car (1). As a result, its transit ridership is about twice that of the next six highest cities combined, making it an essential part of life for millions of residents (2). Despite its widespread use, New York City still dedicates over two-thirds of its street space to cars, undercutting its potential as a transit-first city.

New York's transit system dates back to the 1920s, and many of its parts are still in use today, particularly in the subway, which connects New Yorkers along 665 miles of track. Yet, age comes with challenges. Frequent delays, old infrastructure, and environmental vulnerabilities such as station flooding are common problems that reduce the system's overall efficiency. Additionally, "transportation deserts" in outer boroughs — areas with insufficient transit access — compound the issue of inequality in transit coverage.

While New York's transit system provides a diverse array of options—subways, buses, ferries, and even bike-sharing programs—it still has much room for improvement, especially in reliability, cleanliness, and convenience. This is where global comparisons offer valuable insights.

Hong Kong: A Transit Utopia

Hong Kong's Mass Transit Railway (MTR) is one of the world's most efficient public transit systems, offering valuable lessons in design and accessibility. With over 166 stations, the MTR is easily accessible, rarely more than a short walk from any location in the city (3). It operates with minimal delays, making it a reliable option for commuters and visitors alike. Beyond the MTR, Hong Kong integrates buses, ferries, and trams, allowing for seamless transfers between different modes of transport, all supported by excellent pedestrian infrastructure.

The city prioritizes walkability with features like railed pedestrian refuge islands, clearly marked crosswalks with warnings such as "Look Left/Right" for safety, and car-free zones that encourage walking (4). These combined efforts result in one of the world's highest public transportation utilization rates and a traffic fatality rate less than half that of New York City's (5). For New York City, Hong Kong's success highlights the importance of prioritizing pedestrians and public transit over private cars. By enhancing pedestrian safety, expanding car-free zones, and focusing on intermodal transportation, New York City could significantly improve its own transit experience.

Global peer cities are safer than NYC when it comes to traffic violence

New York City has as many fatalities per million people as Tokyo, Berlin, and London combined.

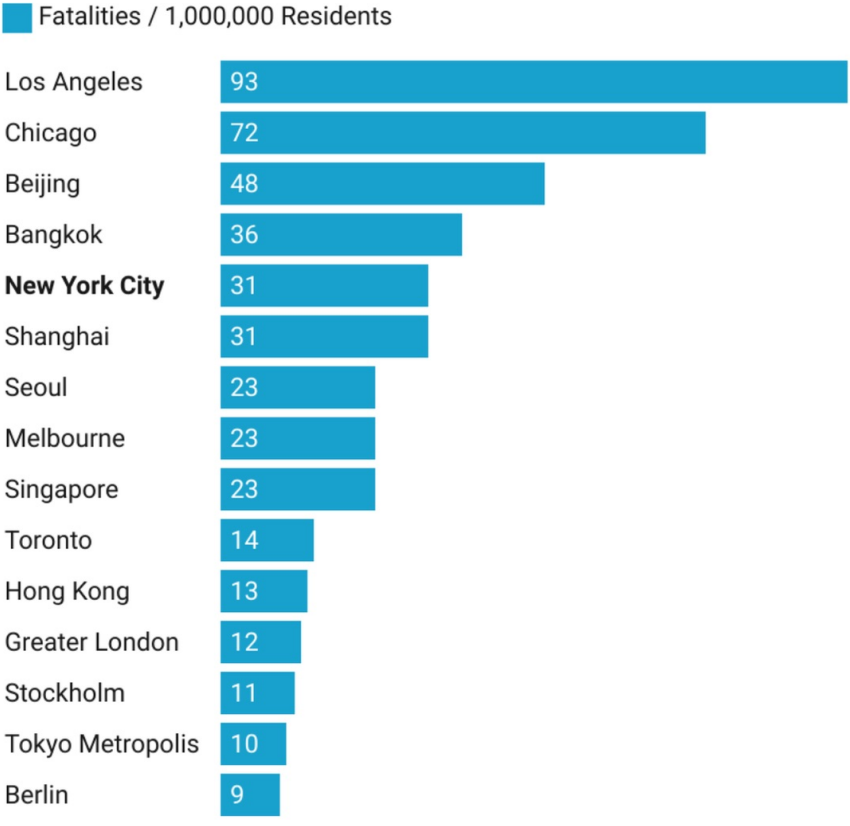


Chart: Road Traffic Accident Statistics • Source: Hong Kong Transport Department • Created with Datawrapper

Berlin: A Multi-Modal Marvel

Berlin's public transportation system is a model of efficiency and accessibility. Its BVG network seamlessly integrates buses, trams, subways (U-Bahn), and commuter trains (S-Bahn) to connect the entire city and its surrounding regions (6). This integration makes it easy for passengers to travel across the city, supported by affordable pricing and user-friendly navigation through transport maps and apps.

In addition to its strong public transit system, Berlin encourages walking and cycling with extensive infrastructure, including bike lanes and wide pedestrian areas. Frequent, on-time services make public transport more convenient than cars for most trips. New York could learn from Berlin by improving the integration of its transit systems, enhancing pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, and focusing on affordability and reliability to shift more people from cars to public transportation.

Singapore: Efficiency and Innovation

Singapore's public transit system is a model of efficiency and innovation. One of the oldest and best-funded systems in the world, the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) is well-connected, with stations spread throughout the city, ensuring that most residents have easy access to public transportation (7). Singapore's emphasis on technology helps optimize operations, delivering frequent, on-time services through a fully automated system, with continuous investments to ensure reliability and modernization. Additionally, pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, including footpaths and cycle lanes, is seamlessly integrated into the city. With congestion pricing, advanced transit infrastructure, and policies that limit car ownership, public transit remains the most convenient and affordable option for residents.

Singapore's dedication to system maintenance and modernization offers valuable insights for New York. Its automated system synchronizes trains and buses in real-time, ensuring smooth operations, while MRT stations are equipped with platform screen doors, Wi-Fi, elevators, climate control, and accessibility features. The Land Transport Authority reinforces this commitment by awarding excellence in system management, safety, and innovation to companies, transit workers, and citizens. Adopting Singapore's tech-driven and crowdsourced approach could significantly enhance New York City's public transit network.

Stockholm: Sustainability and Accessibility

Stockholm is widely recognized as a model for sustainable and accessible transit. The city's Storstockholms Lokaltrafik (SL) network, which includes buses, subways, commuter trains, and ferries, runs entirely on renewable energy, making it one of the greenest transit systems in the world (8). With strong government support to reduce emissions and limit car usage, Stockholm has prioritized eco-friendly transportation to foster a more sustainable urban environment.

In addition to its environmental focus, Stockholm ensures its public transit system is inclusive, serving all residents, including the elderly and people with disabilities. The city has also made significant strides in pedestrian safety and walkability, with car-free zones and pedestrian-first urban planning contributing to its reputation as one of the most walkable cities globally. Notably, Stockholm is the birthplace of Vision Zero, a strategy introduced in Sweden in the 1990s to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries while promoting safe and equitable mobility.

What can NYC learn from other global cities?

The Future of Public Transit in New York City

For New York City to truly thrive as a transit-oriented city, it must reclaim space for the majority of New Yorkers who walk and take transit. Three quarters of New York City's street space is currently allocated to cars, which not only makes the city more congested but also less accessible and sustainable (9). Cities like Hong Kong, Berlin, Singapore, and Stockholm have shown that prioritizing public transit and pedestrian infrastructure creates a more livable urban environment.

Incorporating technology, improving infrastructure for cycling and walking, and fostering better connectivity between different transportation modes are all critical steps in making New York's transit system world-class. By learning from these cities, New York City can transform its public transit system into one that is not just good for the United States, but globally competitive.

Laura Hughes is a field team ambassador and Brooklyn native with a passion for sustainability and equity. Having organized in New York and Chicago for over 8 years, Laura is excited to advocate for safer and more equitable streets for NYC residents. In her free time, you can find Laura reading in the park or tending to her many house plants.

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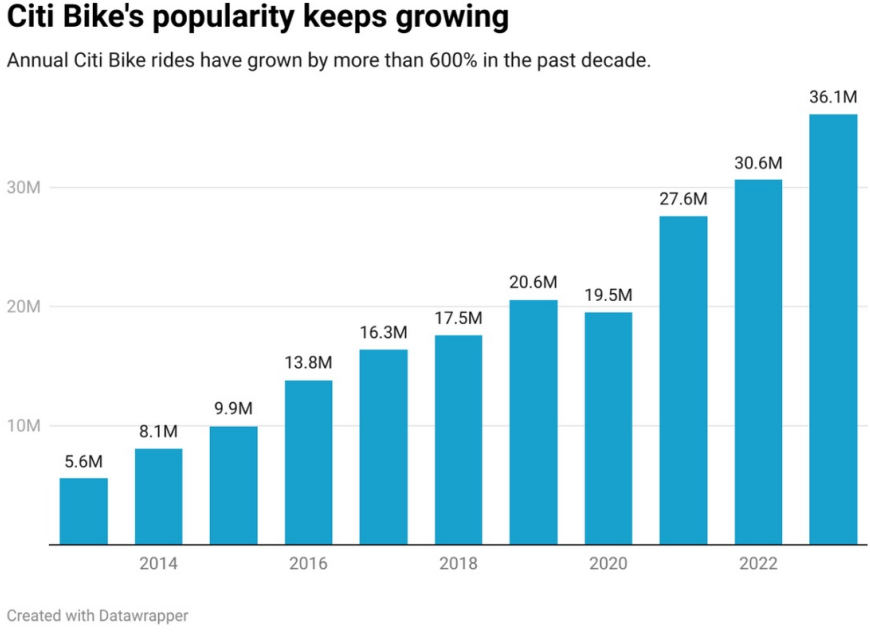
Celebrating NYC's Citi Biking Boom

by Michael Burkhardt

Citi Bike is one of New York City's most valuable assets and is one of the biggest things that sets it apart from other US cities. Ridership has more than doubled since 2018, reaching 35 million Citi Bike trips in 2023 (1). Citi Bike has especially been growing because of e-bikes, which account for over half of the rides, despite making up less than a quarter of the fleet (2). Due in part to e-bike popularity, Citi Bike has become a cornerstone of commuting around the city. During the summer, Citi Bike ridership is similar to the PATH train between New York and New Jersey (3).

E-bikes in general are a popular alternative to car ownership, with 71% of e-bike buyers using their cars far less after buying an e-bike, replacing 3.4 round trips in a car on average (5). E-bikes make New York City a lot more accessible, allowing users to travel to places that might not be possible on the subway. At the very least, you can probably travel a lot faster than the subway would, especially if your commute requires a transfer or two to complete it. You can also negate subway delays entirely, as your commute gets put in your own hands. They're also great for our climate. If 15% of car trips were taken by e-bike, we could reduce transportation-related emissions by 12% (6). Most e-bike trips are being used for different purposes than standard bicycles, truly opening doors for new possibilities.



Transportation Alternatives has done a lot to improve Citi Bike (and the biking experience as a whole) around the city, with campaigns to publicly fund Citi Bike, make it more accessible for students, and also advocating for additional bike lane construction around the city, with recent wins such as Bedford Avenue in Brooklyn. To support this invaluable asset to our city, visit *act.transalt.org/a/citi-bike-4-students*.

Michael Burkhardt is a field team canvasser and an avid fan of all things tech and transit-related. Since moving to New York City at the age of 10, he loved taking the subway and transit became an interest of his. He started at TA in 2023 as a high school intern, and worked on the beginnings of the Bike More campaign, petitioning for affordable Citi Bike access for students. In his free time, he enjoys coding, and has a couple iOS app side projects.

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Inequity of Green Spaces and Its Subsequent Effects

by Wasim Majeed

In the bustling metropolis of New York City, a hidden crisis unfolds under the canopy—or lack thereof—of its urban landscape. The uneven distribution of green spaces starkly reflects broader racial and economic inequalities, exacerbating environmental and health disparities.

Neighborhoods with limited tree cover, particularly those in low-income and predominantly Black and Latino areas like the South Bronx and East Harlem, face severe heat conditions compared to more affluent neighborhoods (1). This disparity is not coincidental but rather a legacy of historical disinvestment practices such as redlining in the 1930s, which left these areas with fewer green spaces and deteriorating infrastructure. Consequently, these neighborhoods experience significantly higher temperatures, increased pollution, and greater flood risks, all of which contribute to higher rates of heat-related illnesses and mortality.

Tree canopies offer crucial benefits, including shade, improved air quality, and increased ground permeability. They play a vital role in cooling urban areas by reducing heat through shade and enhancing soil infiltration, which mitigates stormwater runoff.

Yet, in many marginalized communities, the lack of trees exacerbates heat islands—urban areas significantly warmer than their rural surroundings (2). This heat disparity is not just a matter of discomfort but a serious public health issue, with heightened risks for conditions like asthma and cardiovascular disease, particularly among the elderly and low-income populations (3). Around 350 New Yorkers die from heat exposure every year (4).

A recent study sheds light on how heat risk-related land cover (HRRLC) characteristics, such as tree canopy and impervious surfaces, vary across racial and ethnic groups in the United States and Puerto Rico. The findings reveal that Black, Asian, and Hispanic populations are more likely to live in areas with high HRRLC, characterized by less tree canopy and more impervious surfaces, compared to non-Hispanic White populations (5). This likelihood increases with higher levels of residential segregation, which correlates with poorer HRRLC conditions due to factors such as higher population densities and the concentration of minorities in these areas.

The study underscores that residential segregation contributes to environmental inequalities, as higher population densities and poorer infrastructure exacerbate the negative effects of limited green space. Urban factors like population density and metropolitan area size also influence these conditions, though home ownership and poverty levels play secondary roles.
In response to these challenges, cities are implementing measures such as tree-planting programs and providing air conditioners to vulnerable residents. However, these solutions face hurdles, including issues with improperly fitted air conditioners in public housing and persistent urban heat islands.

One promising solution is enhancing urban tree coverage. Research indicates that tree roots can significantly improve stormwater management by increasing soil infiltration rates, even in compacted sub-soils typically resistant to water absorption (6). For example, black oak and red maple trees have been shown to boost infiltration rates by an average of 153% in compacted soils, while green ash trees improved it 27-fold. This natural infiltration reduces runoff and enhances groundwater recharge, addressing both stormwater management and cooling needs.

Moreover, the USDA Forest Service's i-Tree software assists communities in planning urban forests and assessing the benefits of trees (7). By integrating trees into urban stormwater management plans, cities can mitigate runoff, enhance water quality, and reduce reliance on expensive engineered solutions.

Ultimately, the inequitable distribution of green spaces highlights the urgent need for comprehensive environmental justice initiatives. Addressing these disparities involves increasing tree coverage in underserved areas and tackling the broader social and economic factors fostering environmental inequities. By prioritizing equitable green space distribution, cities can create healthier, more resilient communities and combat the adverse effects of climate change.

Wasim Majeed is a Field Team Ambassador with Transportation Alternatives. He is keen on contributing to promoting and improving urban planning and street safety for the public. Wasim is currently majoring in physics, passionate about the fundamentals of operational sciences and research. In his spare time, Wasim enjoys visiting new places, frequenting diners, and listening to music.

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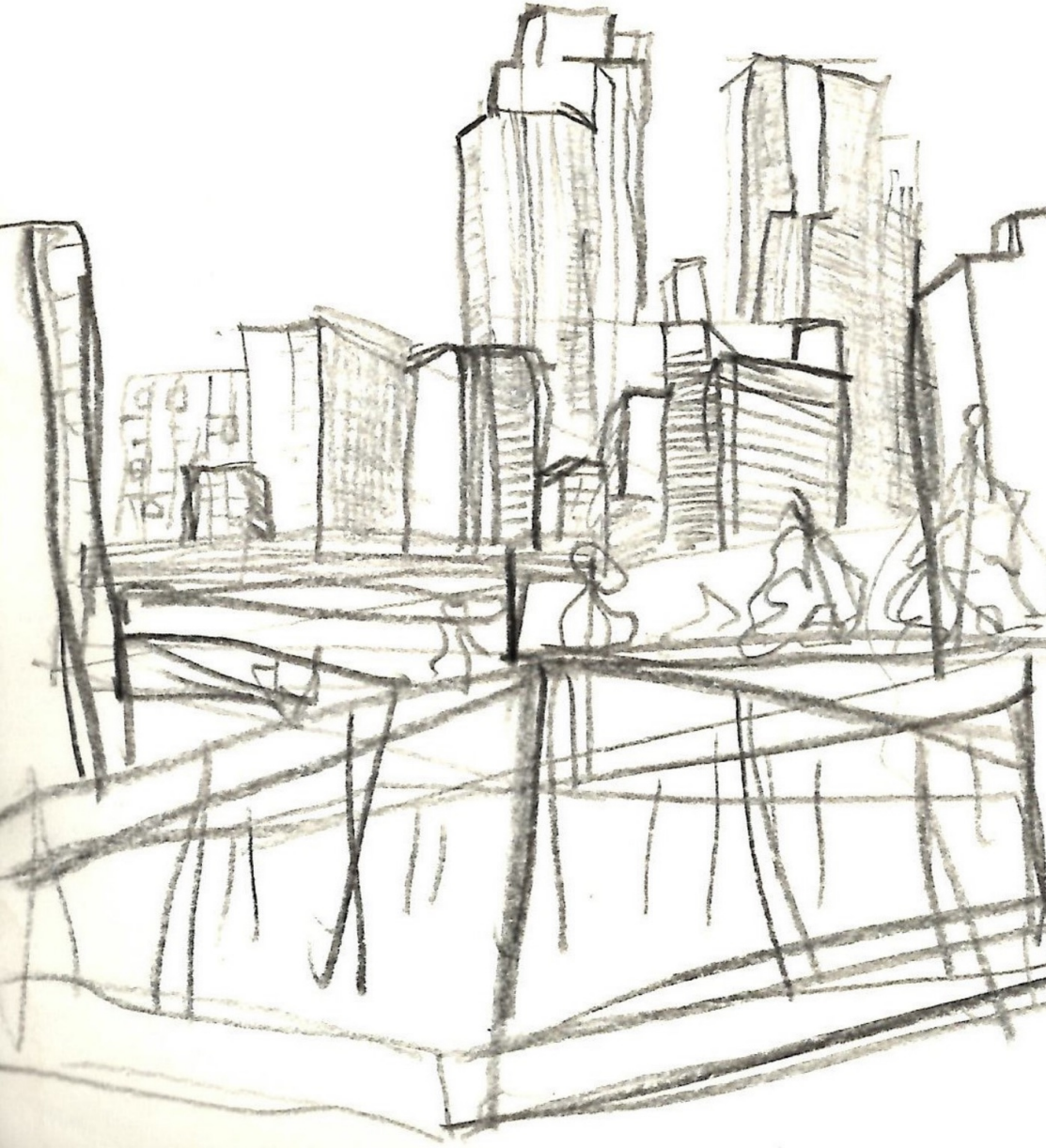


Fewer Cars, Better Transit

by Kanza El Hamel

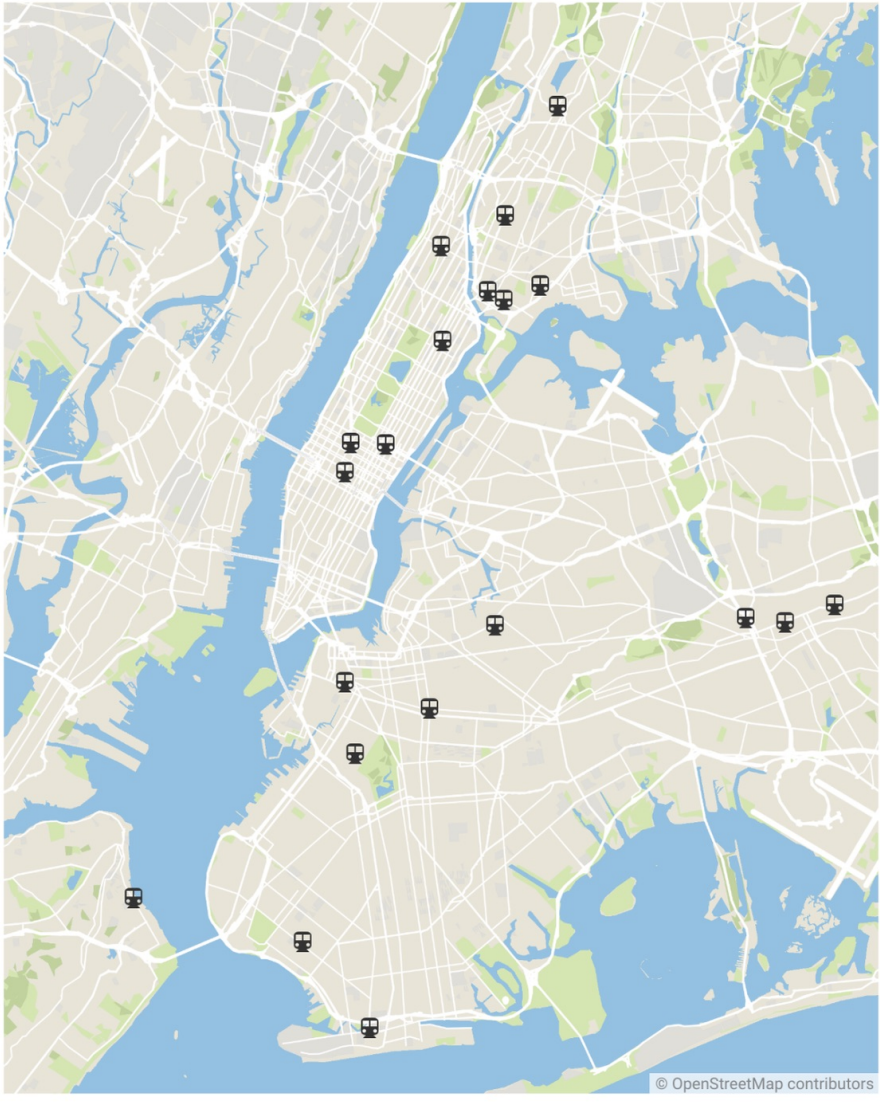
Cities like Singapore, London, Stockholm, and Milan have successfully implemented congestion pricing, a strategy that New York City has yet to adopt despite being the most congested city in the U.S. and with 87% of New Yorkers prioritizing congestion reduction (1). Since its introduction in 1975, Singapore has seen significant reductions in air pollution, traffic delays, and accidents, with London, Stockholm, and Milan reporting similar outcomes (2).

A key issue in the congestion pricing debate is funding. Over ten years, London collected £2.6 billion ($3.4 billion), investing half in public transport and infrastructure improvements (3). New York City is projected to generate about $1 billion annually for vital projects like ADA upgrades, flood protection, security enhancements, and bus depot improvements.

New York's subway system, which expanded during the Great Depression, requires urgent upgrades. Currently, protected bike lanes are primarily found in affluent areas, and more investment is needed to ensure all residents have safe and accessible transportation options (4).

Congestion Pricing Funds Accessibility Upgrades

Accessibility upgrades such as elevators and ramps have been indefinitely deferred at 20 subway stations without capital funding from congestion pricing.



Stations with upgrades at risk

Source: MTA • Created with Datawrapper

Additionally, improved bus services are essential for outer-borough commuters who rely on cars to access job opportunities.

Congestion pricing also aims to mitigate the health impacts of car emissions. Daily, millions of vehicles emit PM2.5, a harmful air pollutant that contributes to over 1,000 premature deaths and thousands of asthma cases in the city (5).

While the daily fee will impact low-income drivers, especially those living in the congestion pricing zone, tax credits may alleviate some burden. Importantly, for every outer-borough commuter affected, an estimated 38 working-poor residents will benefit from enhanced public transit services (6). In the long run, congestion pricing promises to create a safer, more accessible city for everyone.

Kanza El Hamel is the Field Team Coordinator with Transportation Alternatives. After graduating with a BA in Sustainability, a minor in French, and a Master of Legal Studies with a track in Sustainability all from Arizona State University, she taught English at middle school and high school levels in France for 2.5 years. Traveling throughout Europe, Morocco, around the States, South Korea, Japan, and Thailand inspired her to return home to the states and apply all she learned about cities to use in her own home of NYC. Novelist, painter, avid reader, runner, daily biker, friend, and daughter, Kanza keeps her time out of work full of her other passions and loves.

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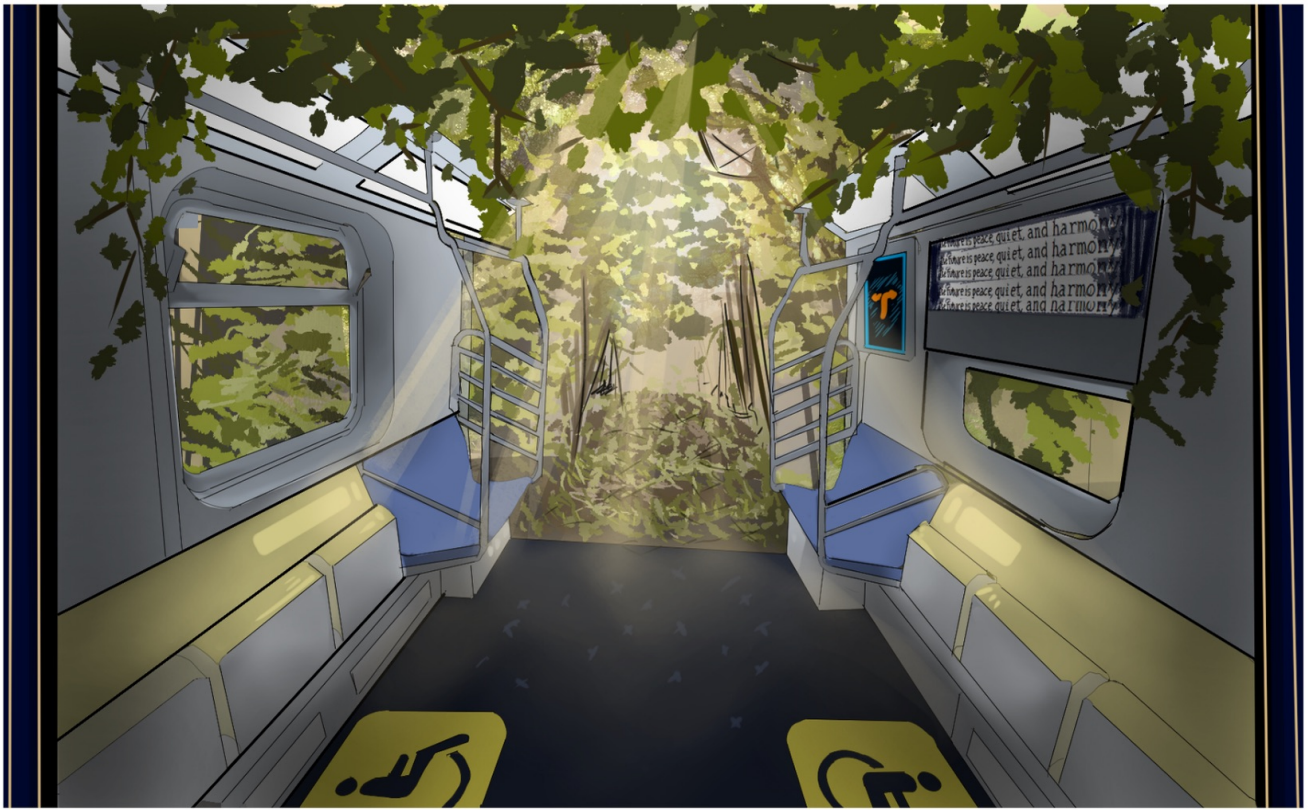


The future of cities is green.

What Can You Do to Make Transit Safer?

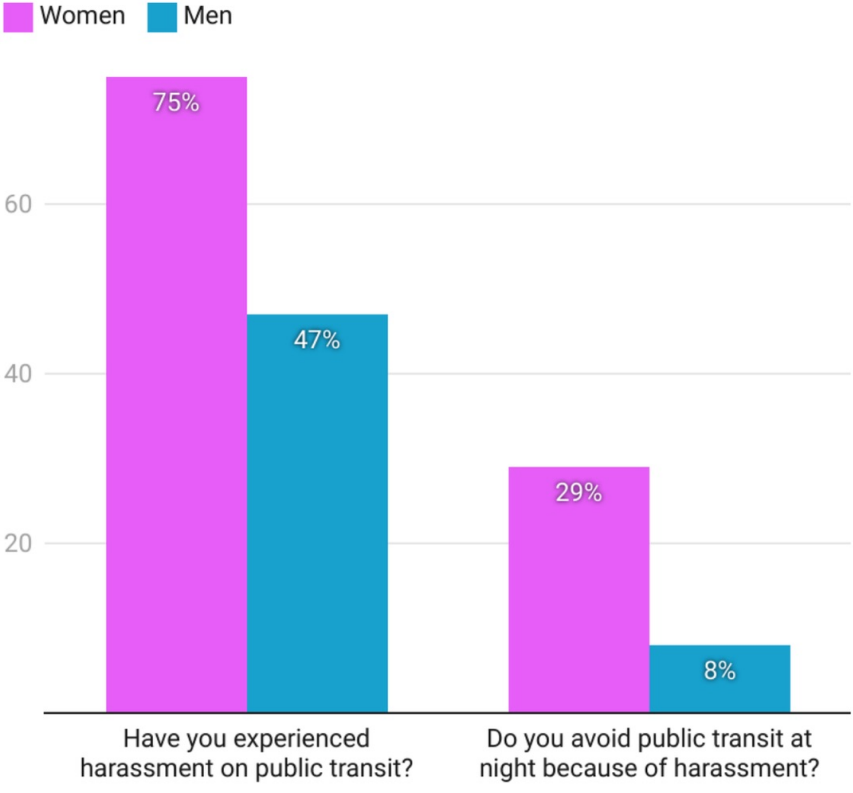
by Kanza El Hamel

Maria wiped the sweat from her brow, juggling her three kids on a sweltering Brooklyn day. Running through her mental list: today Ava needs to go to the doctor, Jamal needs to be dropped off at school, Kaya needs to be dropped off at Grandma's so she can get this all done but not before picking up groceries for Grandma first. All before work at 12:30. She can all walk to the grocery store, subway with the groceries over to Grandma's and drop off Kaya, pick up the bike with seats for the kids she left at Grandma's last visit, bike through the areas with protected bike lanes, get off and walk on the sidewalk along the dangerously congested bikeshare street, drop off Jamal at school, bike Ava to the doctor, bike Ava back to Grandma's, and finally, take the bus to work.

Women like Maria are primary caretakers, managing 75% of unpaid care work while traveling with children and seniors (1). They often carry groceries, push strollers, work part-time, and make more stops. Less likely to use cars, women are more reliant on public transportation options. Because women frequently trip-chain for all their varied responsibilities, feeling comfortable with mixed transportation options is essential for their safety and convenience.

Harassment Influences Women's Travel Choices

Three out of four women report suffering harassment on public transit. As a result, they are over 2.5x more likely than men to avoid public transit late at night.



Source: NYU Wagner • Created with Datawrapper

However, women do not always feel comfortable on all modes. Between 2018 and 2021, men's bike ridership in NYC grew by 12.5%, while female ridership declined by 3%, the first drop since 2006 (2). This is an increase in Citi Bike stations from 746 in 2018 to 2,095 in 2024, women still feel unsafe without protected bike lanes (3). Female ridership increases significantly on routes with at least 80% protected bike lanes, boosting participation by 4% to 6% (4).

These statistics highlight the need for high-quality infrastructure for women's multimodal transportation. Safety is crucial for boosting female ridership. BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and immigrant women are particularly in need of multimodal transportation for all these safety reasons to accommodate the diversity of their trip-chained commutes.

Safety extends to other modes too. Women often bike instead of using public transportation at night to avoid harassment, with 75% reporting incidents on transit compared to 47% of men (5). Consequently, 42% feel safest using rideshares like Uber or Lyft, spending up to $1,200 more annually for safety

Transportation Alternatives' vision to increase street activity directly benefits women; increased pedestrianization, improved bus services, elevator-accessible subway stops, open streets and outdoor dining all help to make trip-chaining safer and more comfortable while increasing eyes on the street.

To get involved in this mission for more equitable transportation, you can sign up to join your borough's TA committee! Be sure to check out partner organizations like Right to Be, Black Girls do Bike, and WE Bike which also work on these intersectional goals to foster female safety while navigating the city.

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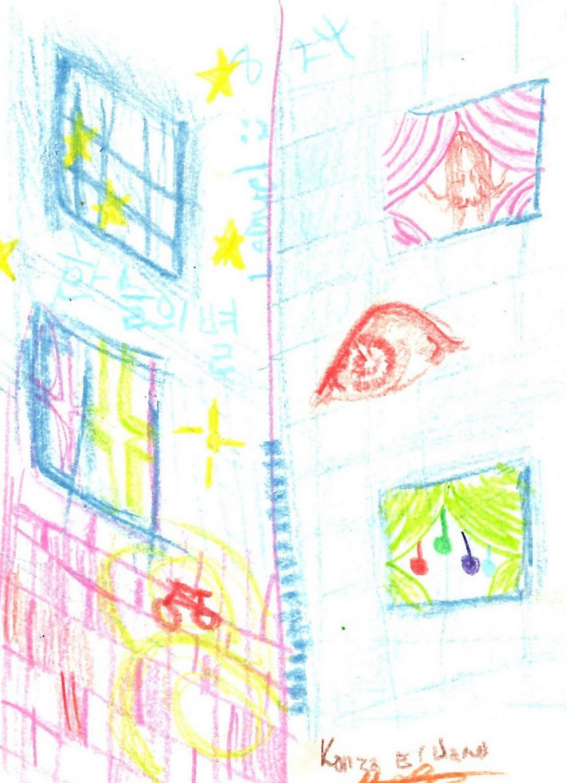
What do safe streets look like?



Get Involved

by Jack Greenwood

Transportation Alternatives is helping transform New York City's streets. Our activist-led campaigns for walking, biking, and transit improvements are spread across the five boroughs. Looking to shape your neighborhood? Here's how.

Sign a Petition

transalt.org/our-campaigns

Join us in our fight for safe, equitable streets by signing a petition addressed to your local representatives. From bus stop shelters to protected bike lanes, better mobility starts with adding your name.

Join a Committee

transalt.org/committees

Join activists in your neighborhood! Committees in the Bronx/Uptown, Brooklyn, North Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, Eastern Queens, Staten Island & South Brooklyn, and a Youth Committee offer plenty of opportunities to stand up and reshape your local streets.

Activist Training

transalt.org/your-city-your-voice

Ready to take your activism to the next level? Take our training! Hear from seasoned community organizers on how their tools and tactics helped win hard-earned political victories. Use your new skills to lead a campaign of your own.

Families for Safe Streets
familiesforsafestreets.org
Were you or a loved one involved in a crash? Join the nationwide network of traffic violence victims working to prevent future carnage. Reference our post-crash resource guide, tap into our support gatherings, and take action to support safer street policies.

School Communities
transalt.org/schools
“Safe streets for all” includes children. For the budding urbanists in your life, explore how your school can apply for an open street, connect to a local bike bus, or join the Youth Activist Committee.

No matter how you plug in, there’s always room to walk, bike, roll, and stroll with Transporation Alternatives for safer, greener, healthier New York City streets.

Jack Greenwood is a dedicated researcher for Transportation Alternatives. Throughout his career in Dallas, Portland, New Orleans, and now Brooklyn, he's championed walkable, bike-friendly street design. When he’s not diving into data, you’ll find him riding his bike, strolling through Prospect Park, or doing his best to keep his houseplants thriving.

Visuals

Steven Castro is incredibly passionate about equitable streets, good gate design, and urban infrastructure. He is excited to work on campaigns throughout the city fueling his passion for envisioning unique solutions in his own and neighboring communities.

Steven is also an avid bike rider, basketball hooper, MMA enthusiast, and anything outdoors. In his free time this summer, he will be strategically biking most of New York City, scoping out the best areas to rest, sketch, and finish reading the Posthuman.

Lemuel Neale grew up in Brooklyn and is dedicated to serving his Borough. He is passionate about transit equity and public infrastructure and wants to create an environment of enhanced accessibility and environmental sustainability. He graduated from Georgetown University with a Bachelor's in Physics and wants to expand New York City's great transit network. He often spends time researching various aspects of the New York City train lines, and his favorite stop is Broadway Junction.

Transportation Alternatives' mission is to reclaim New York City from cars, transforming our streets into safe, sustainable, and equitable places to walk, bike, take transit, gather, and thrive.

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