

**Streets as Connectors:  
PEDESTRIAN ZONES  
IN CITIES**



CENTER FOR CITY SOLUTIONS

## **About the National League of Cities**

The National League of Cities (NLC) is the voice of America's cities, towns and villages, representing more than 200 million people. NLC works to strengthen local leadership, influence federal policy and drive innovative solutions.

NLC's Center for City Solutions provides research and analysis on key topics and trends important to cities and creative solutions to improve the quality of life in communities.

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# Foreword

Streets are built to connect people. They are arteries of communities, connecting residents to the things most central to their lives – friends and family members, their neighborhoods, and the places where they work and learn.

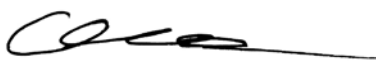
Over time, however, cities and towns have prioritized space for cars, pushing people off the streets. Now, the long-term impact of car-oriented design is becoming more apparent. Traffic congestion and air pollution are wreaking havoc in many places. And, the lack of public spaces for people to gather is driving social isolation. Unintentionally, many roads have become dividing lines.

Knowing these concerns, cities around the globe are building out pedestrian zones – areas free from cars where people can socialize and enjoy their communities without the worry of congestion and traffic incidents.

To help local leaders determine if pedestrian zones are right for their communities, the National League of Cities is proud to release, *Streets as Connectors: Pedestrian Zones in Cities*. This report provides local officials with background information, case studies and recommendations for successful implementation of pedestrian zones.

The idea of pedestrian zones existed far before the introduction of automobiles. But old ideas can be made new again, serving as solutions to our most modern problems. With this guide, local leaders can consider strategies to build people-centered communities, both now and in the future.

Onward,



Clarence E. Anthony  
CEO and Executive Director  
National League of Cities

# Introduction

City residents are increasingly seeking out spaces where they can meet friends for a cup of coffee, do some shopping, or simply stroll around and enjoy their communities. Cities have limited space, and how it is allocated is tremendously important. The denser a place, the dearer each square foot is. All over the world, cities were retrofitted to accommodate cars, giving the automobiles an outsized portion of urban space and limiting the areas in which people could walk, sit at cafes, or enjoy recreational space with friends. Whether we are looking to cities in Asia, Africa, South America, Europe or even North America, the growth of cities largely preceded automobiles. Yet, more and more, the people who live in — and visit — cities are seeking out car-free spaces. And city leaders are responding by developing pedestrian zones and spaces that reduce the impact of automobiles.

Models for pedestrian zones are borne out through innovative practice. To our north, Toronto's King Street pilot is a model, in Europe, Barcelona's superblocks are laying new ground, and in Asia, Tokyo's approach to on-street parking is exemplary.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Not to mention, in the southern hemisphere, Curitiba, Brazil, has seen long-standing success with its dedicated busways that are a model widely replicated around the world.<sup>4,5,6</sup>

We are observing a growing movement in cities globally to stem the usage of cars and close streets to unmitigated traffic. The two most prominent examples in the U.S. are 14th Street in New York

City and Market Street in San Francisco. These kinds of changes could effectively transform the ground beneath us so that it is centered around recreation, not racing.

This report outlines the emergence of pedestrian zones, and discusses the different ways cities around the world are implementing them, how the zones impact local communities, and key considerations for cities thinking about creating or expanding pedestrian zones.

## After reading this report, you will:

- Learn how cities around the world have implemented pedestrian zones,
- Discover how pedestrian zones could impact your community, and
- Uncover key considerations for their successful execution.

Rethinking urban mobility is not a new trend, but it is a timely one. As cities continue to feel the effects of climate change, high levels of air pollution and increasing traffic, local leaders are tackling one of the biggest culprits: private vehicles. With the growth of micromobility<sup>7</sup> and increased use of public transit<sup>8</sup>, residents are increasingly utilizing non-car options. And cities are rethinking and redesigning city spaces to accommodate these changes in mobility, while simultaneously addressing the environmental and health concerns plaguing urban dwellers.

## PEDESTRIAN ZONE DEFINITION

Pedestrian zones are areas that are permanently, periodically or occasionally closed to vehicular traffic. Some pedestrian zones allow public transit vehicles, delivery trucks or residents to drive in the space, while others are completely closed to vehicles. Pedestrian zones can be permanent fixtures in a city, recurring closures — such as the first Saturday of every month — or more sporadic, such as an annual or seasonal event closure.



**Rethinking urban mobility is not a new trend, but it is a timely one.**

# Background

In addition to the changing mobility landscape, cities are also experiencing a global resurgence in popularity as more and more people seek better employment options and the community amenities cities offer. Since 1920, when the urban population in the U.S. slightly surpassed the rural population for the first time, urbanization has steadily increased, reaching an all-time high in 2019 of 82.5 percent.<sup>9,10</sup> The United Nations predicts that this trend will continue and that by 2050, nearly 90 percent of the United States population will reside in cities.<sup>11</sup>

Given these trends, city leaders need to think about new ways to reduce congestion and pollution, create space for alternative mobility options like scooters and bikes, and build community spaces where residents can enjoy local amenities and socialize. Building pedestrian zones is one such option.

One of the things that is most unique about pedestrian zones is that they are equally suited to both very large and very small cities. From 14th Street in New York City to the pedestrian mall in Charlottesville, Virginia, these areas can be scaled up or down in accordance with resident and city needs. AARP conducted a survey in 2008 that found that more than half of Americans over age 50 want access to spaces where they can bike, walk or use public transportation, and 40 percent said they did not currently have access to those types of spaces.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Zipcar found in a 2011 study that over half of surveyed licensed drivers aged 18-44 agreed with the statement, “I have consciously made an effort to reduce how much I drive, and instead take public transportation, bike/walk or carpool when possible.”<sup>13</sup>

In the U.S., we have seen a rapid rise in the use of bikes and e-scooters in our cities. With this, there is increasingly a feeling that the geometry of space should not favor one very large mode of transportation over others that need room to grow and flourish. The use of shared bikes and scooters has grown tremendously in just a short period of time — the number nearly doubled between 2017 and 2018 — with 84 million shared micromobility journeys taking place last year.<sup>14</sup> In 2019, this number has only continued to grow, reinforcing the need for greater space for different mobility choices.

Americans are also facing increased social isolation, especially among lower-income groups and the elderly.<sup>15</sup> While some cities are experimenting with parklets and other public space initiatives, streets are still mostly used for private vehicle infrastructure rather than as places for social and recreational gathering spaces. Nearly half of Americans report “sometimes” or “always” feeling “alone” (46%) or “left out” (47%).<sup>16</sup> Car-centric design has degraded the social nature of cities and is proving to be detrimental to public health.<sup>17</sup>

While these studies are not showing a massive movement away from cars, which is an unattainable feat for most Americans, there is a growing desire for non-car options and spaces where driving is not necessary.



**Cities have limited space, and how it is allocated is tremendously important.**



# What Cities are Doing

Cities around the world are coming up with innovative solutions to address over-dependence on private vehicles. Bogota, Columbia, has the longest-standing and largest-partial closure, La Ciclovía, in the world — 76 miles of streets are closed to traffic 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. every Sunday.<sup>18</sup> This program began in 1974 and has inspired more than 400 cities worldwide to enact similar programs.<sup>19</sup>

There has also been an emergence of more tech-forward approaches to pedestrianizing cities. Sidewalk Lab's proposal to develop Quayside on Toronto's waterfront could eliminate the need for private vehicles by instead prioritizing pedestrian experiences and encouraging new mobility options, such as carsharing, taxis and ride-hail services powered largely by artificial intelligence.<sup>20,21</sup> Chengdu, China, is building a satellite city for 800,000 inhabitants, in which half the road space will be reserved for non-motorized traffic, and electric shuttles will help transport people.<sup>22,23</sup> Quayside and Chengdu are examples of the broader movement to prioritize pedestrians, promote public transportation over private vehicle use and integrate emerging technologies to cut carbon emissions.<sup>24</sup>

Cities in America have also been experimenting with pedestrianizing streets. Major metropolitan cities such as New York City and San Francisco have recently made commitments to pedestrianize some of their biggest and busiest streets, prohibiting through traffic from private vehicles and prioritizing public transportation, active transportation and public gathering spaces.

With less than a quarter of Manhattan residents owning cars, New York City seems like a prime place to give people more options to get around. This is just what the city has done by closing 14th street to cars and making it a dedicated busway.<sup>25</sup> What was once one of New York's most congested streets is now a spot that is friendlier for pedestrians and bicyclists, with markedly increased bus speeds. While some motorists have complained about what they perceive as a disruption, data shows that the streets to which traffic has been diverted are not more congested and former parking spaces are turning into urban green spaces.

The numbers reinforce the success of this experiment in New York City, as bus trips have accelerated — sometimes so fast drivers have to stop to let the schedule catch up — from an average of 15.1 minutes to travel between Eighth and Third Avenues before the shift to 10.6 minutes after. This is a 30 percent decrease in travel time.<sup>26</sup>

Heading out west, San Francisco's government has voted to close Market Street to cars. Market Street is one of the main thoroughfares in the city's downtown, and in many ways it epitomizes the inequalities running rampant in the city, with Twitter and other tech giants sharing space with people experiencing homelessness.<sup>27</sup>

By transforming the boulevard, the city will build a better, safer place for the 500,000 pedestrians that use the street daily. San Francisco officials' plan to reduce the size of the street, widen sidewalks, and add an eight foot wide lane for bikes and

e-scooters. With streetcars and buses still breezing down the center, people will have more choices to get where they need to go. Advocates and city officials alike do not see the plans for Market Street in isolation, but as the beginning of a broader movement to close more streets to traffic and open them to people.

The car-free movement is not exclusive to large cities nor is it entirely new. Church Street in Burlington, Vermont, and State Street in Madison, Wisconsin, both boast well-known outdoor pedestrian malls.<sup>28,29</sup> Burlington, in particular, is an old pedestrian zone built during the pedestrianization wave in the 1970s and 80s. Many of those areas did not do well, primarily due to lack

of mobility options that now accompany non-car areas. Some cities, like Baltimore, cordon off certain streets to cars at specific times of the year to allow cafes and shops to expand into the road.<sup>30</sup>

Regardless of the size of the city, scope of the project, or integration of emerging technology, the narrative is beginning to shift. While each city faces its own unique challenges, cities across America are taking inspiration from each other and from cities abroad as they continue to implement pedestrian zones.



**Models for pedestrian zones are borne out through innovative practice.**



**One of the things that is most unique about pedestrian zones is that they are equally suited to both very large and very small cities.**



# International Overview



## Barcelona, Spain

### PERMANENT CLOSURE

#### Overview

Barcelona's "superblocks" are one of the most comprehensive pedestrianizing projects. The superblock model has two main design elements: the modification of the existing road network and establishment of different routes for each mode of transit.<sup>31</sup> Three square blocks (nine total) of the city are used to create one superblock. Traffic from freight, city buses and through traffic is cordoned off to only the perimeter of the superblock. In the interior, only local vehicles (ex. vehicles driven by residents), active transportation and pedestrians are allowed, with a maximum vehicular speed of 10 km/h.<sup>32</sup> The main goals, as stated by the city of Barcelona, are to respond to the city's scarcity of green space, reduce high levels of air and noise pollution, decrease accident rates and lower sedentarism.<sup>33</sup>

The city initially faced pushback from residents around business vitality and the increased traffic on roads surrounding the superblocks.<sup>34,35</sup> Studies conducted on the first few superblocks implemented show that business performance improved — some reports say by 30 percent — in the face of pedestrianization.

Reports immediately after the implementation of the superblocks suggest that there is a modest increase in traffic of around two to three percent, due to displacement of vehicle trips. The city is well aware of the potential short-term impacts and has a multi-pronged, comprehensive and long-term approach to decrease the net trips taken by private vehicles.<sup>36</sup> This includes a plan to integrate and expand public transportation options, cycling infrastructure, and green space and corridors to encourage non-car forms of mobility.

Barcelona has implemented six superblocks to date.<sup>37</sup> The superblock in the Poblenou neighborhood was implemented for €55,000 (U.S. \$58,000), meaning that Barcelona's entire traffic pattern could be reconfigured for €50 million (U.S. \$53 million).<sup>38</sup> A study from the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal), estimates that implementation of 503 superblocks will prevent 667 premature deaths annually attributable to reductions in air pollution, noise, heat, green space development, and increased personal activity, and increase the life expectancy of Barcelona residents by 200 days.<sup>39</sup> With full implementation of the proposed plan of 503 superblocks, the city of Barcelona will free up nearly 60 percent of streets currently dedicated to car-use for public-use.<sup>40</sup>

#### Gentrification and Displacement

While the implementation of superblocks has proven to be a success in increasing foot and bicycle traffic and decreasing vehicular traffic in interior streets, the city is facing a major challenge: gentrification.<sup>41</sup> Real estate prices increased in the superblocks that have been implemented, threatening to displace lower income residents.<sup>42</sup> While the increase in real estate prices and tourism indicate that non-car spaces are desirable, they also point to a broader issue of resident displacement.<sup>43</sup> The city of Barcelona recognizes this issue and has emphasized the importance of implementing superblocks in all neighborhoods in order to provide the equal access for all.<sup>44</sup> City officials are also thinking about the integration of social housing, including housing set aside or rent-controlled for working- and middle-class residents.<sup>45</sup>



## Bogotá, Colombia

### RECURRING CLOSURE

Bogotá is host to the longest-standing and largest partial street closure, **La Ciclovía**, which encompasses 76 miles of streets that are closed to traffic from 7 am to 2 pm every Sunday and holiday.<sup>46</sup> Founded in 1974 by a small group of activists, the La Ciclovía street closure event has since become the largest mass recreation event in the world. This program has inspired over 400 cities worldwide to enact similar programs.<sup>47</sup>

This type of model is especially important for mid- and small-sized American cities, which may not possess the same political will and density to implement something as large-scale as Barcelona's superblocks. Recurring street closures are a great way to encourage a stronger sense of community, promote physical activity and garner resident support for other car-free initiatives.

## Oslo, Norway

### RESTRICTING PARKING

Oslo has taken action to remove cars from its city center. While initial proposals in 2015 called for a complete car ban in the city center, there was strong opposition from local business owners.<sup>48</sup> The city changed course to focus on removing parking spots to slowly ease business owners and residents toward a completely car-free city center.<sup>49,50</sup>

Oslo has removed the last of approximately 700 street-side parking spots, replacing them with bike lanes, benches, greenery and parks.<sup>51</sup> The 50 that remain are largely reserved for people with disabilities and the local business that rely on deliveries.<sup>52</sup> For people that do drive into the city center, there are 9,000 available spaces in parking garages right outside.<sup>53</sup> In order to ensure the success of the car-free initiative, the city has made

it more difficult to drive in the city center and has made it a priority to expand public transit and cycling infrastructure.<sup>54</sup>

American cities can use this example to grapple with the implication of parking and parking minimums in their downtown cores. When considered in conjunction with larger mobility expansion plans, reducing the number of parking spots can help free up streets to more non-car uses. This type of gradual, deliberate movement toward a car-free section of a city is a useful model for other cities to explore.



# Community Impacts

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

When cities make significant structural changes, particularly ones that impact how people move around, there are often concerns about how the changes will impact the local economy and businesses. However, there is growing evidence that creating more people-centered spaces with fewer cars is beneficial to local businesses. For example, when Stockholm’s government instituted a congestion pricing scheme in the city center in 2007, it found that the reduction in traffic had no negative consequences on retail and that two-thirds of the population favored the reduction in cars.<sup>55</sup> Another study found that over the last five years foot traffic in existing pedestrian zones increased by 2.5 percent, which is significant given the general decline in retail due to the rise of e-commerce.<sup>56</sup> This trend suggests that creating spaces where residents can eat, socialize and shop all in one place may help local businesses ward off the encroachment of e-commerce.

## TRANSPORTATION:

Pedestrian zones can play a significant role in a city’s public transportation system, particularly in large cities such as New York City. In the city’s new pilot program on 14th street, buses are allowed to enter the area, which significantly increases the timeliness of the bus service. The Metropolitan Transit Authority is hoping that this change will increase bus ridership and improve public opinion of bus services.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Market Street, a pedestrian zone in San Francisco that stopped allowing vehicles on January 29th, does allow buses to move freely along the street and private vehicles to drive across it at intersections.<sup>58</sup> In Toronto, which limits through access for cars on a 1.6 mile stretch of King Street, the pedestrian zone was created to

help the streetcar move more quickly and achieve a more reliable schedule.<sup>59</sup>

These areas are also big micromobility hubs, as scooters and bikes can move more freely. In Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain, a city with 63 “superblock” pedestrian zones, 15 percent of residents use bikes as their primary modes of transportation and 50 percent walk. This is important to consider, particularly given that since 1995 the number of people in the United States that name walking and biking as their primary forms of transportation has doubled to 12 percent.<sup>60</sup> Research conducted in New York, Portland and other U.S. cities has shown that the more bicyclists and walkers there are in a given area, the less likely it is that there will be an accident. Similarly, the *Injury Prevention Journal* found an inverse relationship between the number of cyclists and walkers and accidents with motorists.<sup>61</sup>

Pedestrian zones in cities help create both more reliable and accessible public transportation, and encourage the use of alternative forms of transportation, such as bikes and scooters. These all result in more accessible, efficient and cleaner cities for all residents.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS:

Large-scale implementation of pedestrian zones has the potential to reduce chronic air pollution, noise pollution and urban heat island effect.<sup>62</sup> For example, Barcelona currently boasts an automobile density double that of Madrid’s and more than three times that of London.<sup>63</sup> A study from the Barcelona Institute for Global Health reports that the cumulative effect of the city’s overdependence on cars (including air pollution, noise, health effects, access to green space and lack of physical



activity) had a cumulative impact of 3,000 cases of premature deaths per year.<sup>64</sup> While Barcelona has only implemented six superblocks thus far, the city has plans to implement 503 to cover almost the entire city. Full scale implementation of all 503 superblocks could reduce air pollution by 24 percent and have the potential to prevent 667 premature deaths per year.<sup>65,66</sup>

The potential environmental and public health benefits of pedestrian zones are not limited to large-scale implementation of car-free zones, such as with Barcelona's superblocks. While studies are inconclusive as to whether Ciclovía, Columbia, produces a statically significant decrease in air pollution levels, reports indicate that Ciclovía helps get residents, especially the vulnerable such as the elderly and young, out of their homes and cars and onto the streets. This in turn increases the amount of physical activity they engage in each week.<sup>67</sup> Researchers from Los Andes University demonstrated that for every dollar spent on the program, three dollars are saved on public health costs.<sup>68</sup>

A common argument against pedestrian zones is that levels of particulate matter will simply increase on neighboring streets, displacing instead of decreasing levels of particulate matter. Studies conducted on Toronto's King St. Pilot Project concluded that PM2.5 (particulate matter) levels remained similar throughout the study period, despite the possible diversion of traffic onto neighboring streets.<sup>69</sup>

Scale matters when it comes to the environmental impact of car-free zones, as does the integration of other mobility options to decrease the net number of private vehicle trips. However, recurring car-free events have the potential to encourage more active lifestyles, especially for more vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, and encourage more widespread support of permanent pedestrian zones.

## SOCIAL BENEFITS:

City dwellers are increasingly experiencing social isolation. There are a multitude of factors that contribute to the loneliness epidemic, one of which is car-oriented development. The continued prioritization of private vehicle infrastructure has led to a decline in public space for pedestrians, lowering chances for organic social interaction. Without the physical infrastructure that supports social interactions, people's sense of belonging and social networks will continue to shrink.<sup>70</sup>

The impact of social isolation on public health is immense, particularly among vulnerable groups such as the elderly and disabled.<sup>71</sup> Research from the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) reports that chronic social isolation carries the same health risks as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and increases the odds of a premature death by 26 percent.<sup>72,73</sup> An examination of Medicare spending data by the U.S. National Institute on Aging and Social Security found that social isolation among older adults is associated with an estimated \$6.7 billion in additional federal spending annually.<sup>74</sup>

Designated pedestrian zones have the potential to promote socially inclusive streets and help mitigate the public health impacts of social isolation.<sup>75</sup> The Ciclovía pedestrian zone users felt safer in the city when compared to survey results from the average Bogota resident, as well as higher social capital perception, including greater willingness to help each other, ability to get along with each other, feelings of trust and shared values.<sup>76</sup>

Whether pedestrian zones are permanent or recurring, they have the potential to provide urban dwellers with respite from their otherwise isolated lives and increase the chances of social interactions. This is particularly important in elderly populations as they create safer spaces for people to congregate and move about their daily lives.



# Case Studies

# 14 Street Station



## New York City

### 14TH STREET BUSWAY

On Thursday, October 3, 2019, 14th Street in New York City closed to cars.<sup>77</sup> While the intense congestion found on Manhattan streets is ubiquitous, this closure marks a shift toward public transportation and away from private vehicles. The city's main goal of creating the 14th street busway is to increase the reliability of service and speed of buses along one of the city's busiest routes. The M14 bus, which runs along 14th street, transported nearly 27,000 riders per day before the busway was created. Now, it boasts more than 31,000 passengers every day, a 17 percent increase.<sup>78</sup>

The busway parameters are fairly simple: From 6am to 10pm, between 3rd and 9th avenues, the only vehicles allowed to travel on 14th street are buses, trucks and emergency vehicles.<sup>79</sup> The curb policies have also been modified to prioritize short-term commercial loading and pick-ups/drop-offs. Additionally, the busway is accompanied by a new pedestrian zone around Union Square and curb extensions to shorten pedestrian crossings and ease bus boarding.<sup>80</sup>

The increase in bus speeds following the opening of the busway are considerable. The average trip time dropped by 30 percent<sup>81</sup> and some riders have reported trip times that have decreased by as much as 50 percent.<sup>82</sup> While 14th street traffic is moving much faster, some critics feared that traffic on neighboring streets, namely 12th, 13th, 15th, and 16th streets, would increase. Yet, a study from INRIX found that not to be the case. According to their data, the difference in trip speeds on neighboring roads was negligible, consistent with findings from other cities across the world that have unveiled similar programs.<sup>83</sup>

The current program is a pilot and is slated to last 18 months. During this time, cars caught violating the rule by cameras and police officers will be fined \$50.<sup>84</sup>



## Burlington, Vermont

### CHURCH STREET

The city of Burlington, Vermont, opened the Church Street Marketplace, a car-free pedestrian mall, in 1981. Nestled between the University of Vermont and Lake Champlain, the pedestrian zone draws more than three million visitors every year and boasts over 100 restaurants and shops.

The pedestrian zone was funded by a combination of grants from the federal government (\$1.6 million), the Urban Mass Transit Administration (\$5.4 million) and a voter-approved bond issue (\$1.5 million).<sup>85</sup> The upkeep and maintenance of the area are primarily funded by a “common area fee” paid by the businesses located along the strip.<sup>86</sup> The zone is run by the Church Street Marketplace District Commission (CSMDC), which is made up of nine members consisting of local business or property owners and residents. The commission members are appointed by the Burlington City Council, serve three-year terms and are responsible for setting the common area fees.<sup>87</sup>

Church Street has seen both successes and challenges in recent years, outlined in an annual report published by the commission. According to the report, Church Street bucked the trend of national

declines in retail with 64 percent of businesses reporting increased sales over the previous year.<sup>88,89</sup> The CSMDC also outlined their safety and security challenges and the steps they are taking to deal with them. In 2018, while crime-related issues did decline overall, there was a spike in calls reporting behaviors relating to exorbitant alcohol consumption or use of illegal substances. The commission responded with safety-specific trainings for local businesses that covered, among other topics:<sup>90</sup>

- How to talk to customers about people who appear to be in distress, whether from hunger, substance misuse, extreme poverty, mental illness or a combination of these conditions;
- Who to call for what issue, and when to call them;
- How to write a private trespass report; and
- How and when to call for a Burlington Police Department dispatch.

These trainings help equip local businesses with the tools they need to support members of the Burlington community. As more small cities adopt pedestrian zones, these types of trainings and community awareness projects could help ensure the success of the spaces for both residents and businesses.

## Madison, Wisconsin

### STATE STREET

While most pedestrian malls built in the 1970s did not meet the same success as their inspirational European counterparts,<sup>91</sup> State Street in Madison, Wisconsin, is a notable exception with its proximity to the University of Wisconsin on the west end and Capital Square and Building on the east end.<sup>92</sup>

State Street was a conventional four-lane undivided road until 1974, when Mayor Paul Soglin proposed turning it into a pedestrian mall.<sup>93</sup> State Street was converted into a two-lane limited access road with extra-wide sidewalks to accommodate larger volumes of pedestrian traffic, as well as restaurant and outdoor café seating.<sup>94</sup> Nearly 40 years later, State Street is a bustling pedestrian mall. Walking, cycling and bussing are the primary ways to get around.<sup>95</sup> Metro Transit ridership has increased by 31 percent since 2000, and the Madison BCycle bike share program has seen a 34 percent increase in biked miles since 2012.<sup>96</sup>

State Street's popularity has raised some challenges in recent years. Mayor Soglin points out that rental prices are rising, making it more difficult for both traditional retailers and renters.<sup>97</sup> A study conducted

on State Street's retail condition found that from 1989 to 2014, the number of retail stores dropped from 97 to 70, while the number of restaurants and bars increased from 26 to 62.<sup>98</sup> Since 2011, there has been a 36 percent increase in the number of apartment units in downtown Madison, for a total of 10,109 units built.<sup>99</sup> The average apartment rental price in Downtown Madison is \$403 more per month than the city average.<sup>100</sup> The changing demographics of downtown residents are influencing the way businesses operate and think as they respond to these changing demographics.<sup>101</sup>

State Street is a prime example of how the right conditions for pedestrianization can revitalize a city's central business district. State Street's popularity points to the increasing desirability of pedestrian zones. It also highlights why it is important to consider the changing dynamics of a space to make sure it remains accessible to both renters and businesses.



## Santa Monica, California

### THIRD STREET PROMENADE

Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica is currently one of the best-known examples of a public space that prioritizes pedestrians. It was not, however, always the bustling pedestrian mall that it is today. Third Street boasted a few years of relative success when it was initially built in 1965, before it met a similar fate to most American pedestrian malls constructed in the 1960s-80s.<sup>102</sup>


The second iteration of Third Street was constructed in 1989. During the planning process, the city held over 100 meetings over several years to solicit input from planners, designers, property owners and residents.<sup>103</sup>

Initially the plans focused on retail-only development.<sup>104</sup> The city wanted to close the street completely to traffic. However, after backlash from shop owners, Santa Monica agreed to construct a road at the end and placed removable bollards at the end of each block.<sup>105</sup> The city then experimented with blocking traffic the first weekend of every month to test it as a pedestrian mall; after demonstrating success for a few years, the streets were permanently closed to traffic.<sup>106,107</sup>

The Third Street Promenade has had nearly three decades of success. According to reports from Downtown Santa Monica, the non-profit that promotes the city's business district, the Third Street Promenade generates 37.7 percent of total sales tax revenue for Santa Monica and attracts more than 11 million visitors a year.<sup>108</sup>

Currently, the Third Street Promenade is slated for a third round of redevelopment. Last year, the Third Street Promenade was met with a six percent vacancy rate. Although incredibly low compared to most communities nationwide, this was the highest it had been since 1989. This increase is largely due to the rise of e-commerce and changing consumer preferences.<sup>109</sup> Some of these vacant storefronts have been replaced by office and mixed-used spaces.<sup>110</sup> In response to these changes, Santa Monica and Downtown Santa Monica commissioned a study to look at the street and created a redevelopment masterplan.<sup>111,112</sup>





This study recommends that the Third Street Promenade expand its offerings beyond traditional retail hours to provide a more diverse experience to more visitors.<sup>113</sup> The installation of more gathering spaces such as parkettes, moveable furniture and games would also encourage more people to stay in the space, and make patrons feel safer.<sup>114</sup>

Santa Monica's Third Street Promenade is a fantastic example of how a well-informed planning process contributes to the success of a pedestrian mall. Third Street Promenade's current redevelopment points to the need for cities to constantly respond to changing consumer preferences.

**City leaders need to think about new ways to reduce congestion and pollution, create space for alternative mobility options like scooters and bikes, and build community spaces.**

# Key Considerations:



## Community Input

Participatory planning, resident input throughout the development process and public outreach are crucial to the success of pedestrian zones.



## Cost

Cost can be a barrier for some cities as pedestrian zone creation often requires significant investment. Some cities, such as Burlington, Vermont, have utilized grants from the federal and state levels, and charged fees to businesses to help with maintenance costs.



## Zoning

Cities considering pedestrian zones should start by examining the zoning laws to determine if changes are necessary. Some common roadblocks include mandatory parking minimums, a lack of mixed-use zoning or historic preservation concerns.



## Public Safety

In areas where large numbers of residents congregate, additional safety measures may be required. Trainings to help business owners understand what procedures to follow during disturbances, and how to address resulting patron concerns, can help ensure the spaces remain enjoyable. Additionally, local law enforcement should be trained in how to interact with these spaces, as the necessary protocols may differ from traditional patrols.



## Affordability

Pedestrian zones have become increasingly attractive, leading to an increase in the price of real estate. Plans and policies should be put in place to ensure that the spaces can remain affordable to people with a wide range of family sizes and income-levels.



## Local Businesses

Ensure that retail spaces are accessible and affordable to local business owners. Include local business owners in the planning processes to ensure that the spaces fit their needs.



## Access

Pedestrian zones are ideal places for people of all ages to socialize and enjoy the amenities the spaces offer. Considerations around different mobility options (parking, bus access, bike/scooter spots) should factor into the planning processes.



## Inclusion

Mixed-use development plans should include attractions for all ages. If the pedestrian zones only feature shopping or dining establishments, they will not benefit as many residents.



# Conclusion

As city leaders are considering ways to enhance their cities and draw people in, building pedestrian zones is an increasingly viable option that pays dividends in numerous ways. Enhanced livability, decreased environmental impacts, improved public health and better social outcomes are just a handful of the positive attributes that can result from this type of development.

When people are asked what they like most about our nation's cities, almost no one answers: "The cars whizzing by on the streets." Cultural attractions, architecture, meaningful places and, of course, people — these are the things that make a city unique. By decreasing the number of cars on the street and increasing the number of pedestrian

zones, it is possible to get more of what we like and less of the noise and congestion that we do not.

There are one billion parking spaces across the U.S., and upwards of half of some downtown space are devoted to cars. Cities big and small are making foundational decisions to give more of their communities back to residents and visitors. Strategically closing streets to unmitigated traffic flows is one of those rare win-win situations.

Cars have their place in cities, but people need to be the priority. It all comes down to geometry: Since there is finite space in cities, let's make sure it's for people.

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