



PARK SLOPE CIVIC COUNCIL

LIVABLE STREETS COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

MARCH 22, 2015

FINAL REPORT

On March 22, 2015 some 40 members of our community came together to take a fresh look at our streets from four perspectives: Aging in Place, Independence of the Disabled, Public Art, and Streets/Sidewalks/Curbsides/Streetscape. The last time the Park Slope Civic Council convened a community workshop specifically to look at livable streets in our community was in February 2009. Those who took part in the 2009 workshop – including some of the participants in the March 22 workshop – looked at many aspects of our streetscape, what worked and what did not.

Much has changed since 2009 while much else has not. The City’s Vision Zero initiative is well underway and one of the early results has been a reduction in the City speed limit to 25 m.p.h. We now have the Park Slope Street Safety Partnership, Families for Safe Streets, and Vision Zero Youth Council at MS 51, all of which grew out of tragedy and necessity. In 2009 street safety was the province of government agencies and advocacy groups. Today moms and dads and friends and neighbors have taken up and drive the cause. At the same time there are other aspects of livable streets that deserve our attention, and some of these are embodied in our discussion groups: Public Art, Aging in Place, Independence of the Disabled, and Streets/ Sidewalks/Curbsides/Streetscape.

These workshops really can make a difference. One of the major results of the 2009 workshop was the Civic Council’s landmark public forum, “The Future of Fourth Avenue,” in March 2010. Out of that forum arose the Civic Council’s very active Forth on Fourth Avenue Committee and the Borough President’s Fourth Avenue Task Force, which in turn led to zoning changes for new buildings along Fourth Avenue and renewed impetus to reopen the east station house at the Fourth Avenue – Ninth Street subway station. The 2009 workshop also helped spur significant changes to Grand Army Plaza and Union Street that have made it safer for all users as well as more accessible and attractive.

This workshop was not meant to be a “one-off.” We were looking for concrete initiatives to arise from the group and we were very successful in that effort. The Civic Council will lend its resources, and work with community partners and the workshop participants, to ensure these initiatives get moving.

Thanks to the many people who made this workshop possible; to Congregation Beth Elohim for use of their space; to our moderator, Ben Fried, Editor-in-Chief of Streetsblog, and to our discussion leaders:

- | | |
|---|---|
| Aging in Place | Judy Willig, Executive Director, Heights and Hills |
| Independence of the Disabled | Joan Peters, Executive Director, Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled |
| Public Art | Abby Subak, Director, Arts Gowanus |
| Streets/Sidewalks/Curbsides/Streetscape | Adam White, Principal, Law Office of Vaccaro & White |

Park Slope Civic Council
Livable Streets Committee
Michael Cairl, Josh Levy, Lauri Schindler

Workshop Process

To help develop ideas into fully fleshed-out proposals, the participants put each of them through the paces of the “5 Ws and an H,” namely:

WHAT	the proposal is?
WHO	would be responsible for making the proposal a reality (private organizations, government agencies, even individuals)?
WHEN	should this happen?
WHERE	should this happen?
HOW	should this happen? Consider funding, permits, etc. Possible solutions might be crowd-sourced fund-raising (e.g. Kickstarter), Park Slope Civic Council grants, etc.
WHY	is this so important to the community?

Each group identified its top proposals and the table captain reported these proposals to the whole group. They are reproduced in full in this report. Other proposals are presented in summary form.

The range of proposals is truly remarkable. More proposals concerned Fourth Avenue than anyplace else, something that occurred in the 2009 workshop as well. Many proposals concern sidewalks in particular (curb cuts, narrow sidewalks, obstructions, other issues).

Next Steps

The Civic Council’s Livable Streets Committee is charged with following through on these proposals and working with the workshop participants to develop these further. Following the release of this report, the Civic Council will start to organize the workshop participants and anyone else who is interested around these proposals. The object is to present concrete, fully developed proposals to various public and private entities to move them to reality. The Livable Streets Committee will report back from time to time on the progress of this work and will schedule follow-up events. All progress reports and events will be posted on the Civic Council’s Web site.

Top Proposals

GROUP	Streets/Sidewalks/Curbsides/Streetscape; Aging in Place
WHAT?	Park Slope Shuttle (30 feet long, hybrid or electric)
WHERE?	Park Slope and vicinity
WHY?	Replace shuttle that serves only the elderly with one that serves the community, and shuttles New York Methodist Hospital patients and staff. This is a good way to pool resources and consolidate a variety of shuttle needs into one service.
WHO?	Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce (enlist as spearhead); enroll primary sponsors such as New York Methodist Hospital, Whole Foods, the Lighthouse Group)
WHEN?	
HOW?	Funding from Federal Transit Administration, sponsorships from retailers, user fees, Gowanus development entities, Business Improvement Districts, Participatory Budgeting
AND ...	Heights and Hills has a shuttle bus for the elderly and it underutilized. The Park Slope Civic Council will explore with Heights and Hills how better use might be made of this shuttle, as the first step toward establishing a bus circulator. A bus circulator is not a new concept; many small transit agencies operate bus services that in effect are circulators, and larger cities such as Washington, D.C. have them.

GROUP	Public Art
WHAT?	Mural on 4 th Avenue
WHERE?	Con Edison building on 4 th Avenue between 1 st and 3 rd Streets
WHY?	To beautify the streetscape
WHO?	
WHEN?	
HOW?	Commission an artist; seek funding from Con Edison

GROUP	Aging in Place/Independence of the Disabled
WHAT?	Community conversations regarding bike lanes and traffic enforcement
WHERE?	
WHY?	To start a constructive dialogue among affected individuals
WHO?	NYPD 78 th Precinct, Transportation Alternatives, Park Slope Civic Council, other advocacy groups
WHEN?	Over the next year (2015 – 2016)
HOW?	

GROUP	Streets/Sidewalks/Curbsides/Streetscape
WHAT?	Signage for Leading Pedestrian Indicators (LPI)
WHERE?	All intersections with LPI
WHY?	Education
WHO?	New York City Department of Transportation
WHEN?	As soon as possible
HOW?	Install “Delayed Green” signs when LPIs are implemented

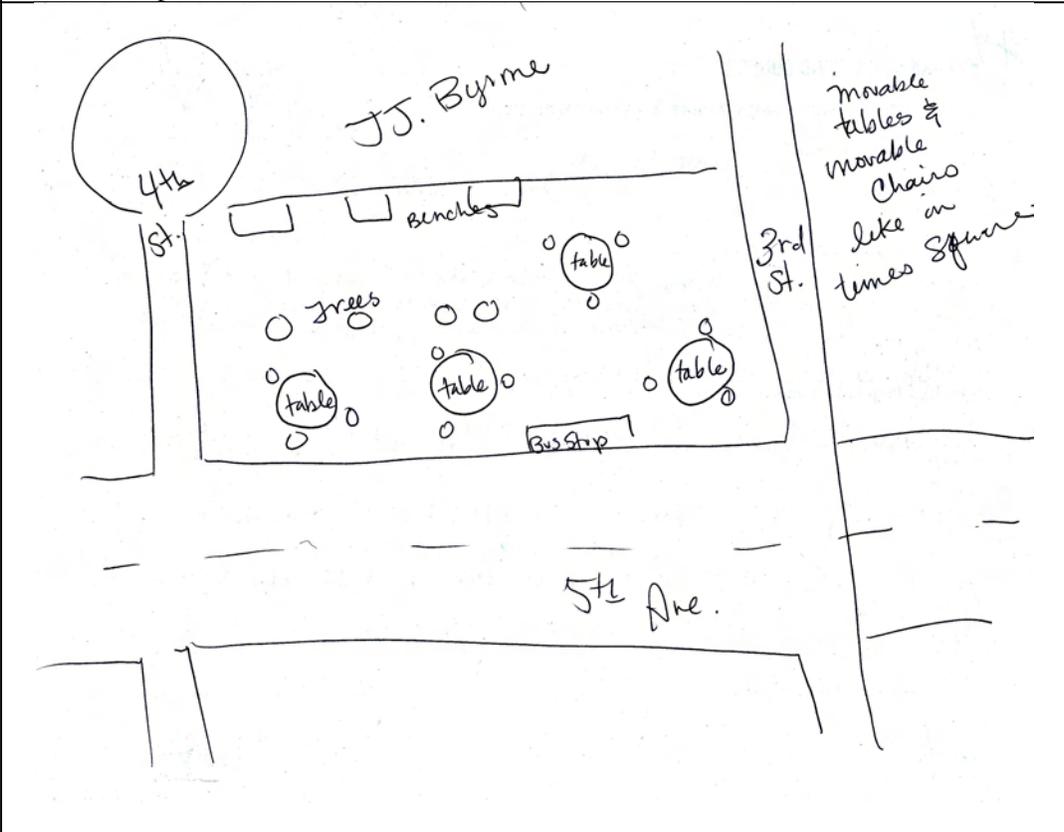
GROUP	Public Art
WHAT?	Public murals painted in roadway at collision-prone intersections
WHERE?	Along Union Street and at 3 rd Avenue at 3 rd Street
WHY?	Traffic calming and beautification
WHO?	Community installation; could even engage families
WHEN?	Any time
HOW?	

GROUP	Aging in Place
WHAT?	More benches on commercial corridors; wider sidewalks; sidewalk repairs; remove sandwich board signs
WHERE?	5 th Avenue and 7 th Avenue
WHY?	Permit shoppers to rest
WHO?	
WHEN?	
HOW?	Participatory budgeting in the 39 th Council District, NYCDOT, property owners, local merchants
AND ...	Widening sidewalks was a concern of many in the workshop. The author of this proposal noted “not just for nannies pushing strollers.” Sidewalks in much of the community are very narrow, in particular on 7 th Avenue north of Lincoln Place.

GROUP	Streets/Sidewalks/Curbsides/Streetscape
WHAT?	More neckdowns on avenues; LPs, “daylighting” corners, “Play Streets” during after-school hours
WHERE?	Fifth and Seventh Avenues and other streets
WHY?	Traffic Calming; Intersection Safety
WHO?	
WHEN?	
HOW?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) “Hot Spot” surveys to identify appropriate locations (2) NYCDOT to review CrashStat data as part of Vision Zero (3) Walkabouts

GROUP	Streets/Sidewalks/Curbsides/Streetscape
WHAT?	More comprehensive and safe bike lanes to connect Park Slope to other neighborhoods
WHERE?	Protected bike lanes on 4 th Avenue and on streets such as 3 rd Street
WHY?	Except for the Prospect Park West bike lane there are no really safe routes in and through Park Slope and other neighborhoods. These would also serve bike-to-work and bike-to-school commuters.
WHO?	NYC Department of Transportation (NYCDOT)
WHEN?	In connection with the reconstruction of 4 th Avenue between 8 th and 18 th Streets
HOW?	Expand CitiBike and protected bike lanes.

GROUP	Public Art
WHAT?	Engage P.S. 321 community and strategically bring them into the public art discussion
WHERE?	Chain link fence, 100 feet long and 15 feet high, along 1 st Street west of 7 th Avenue, next to P.S. 321
WHY?	Engagement
WHO?	P.S. 321 students and professional artists
WHEN?	!
HOW?	!

GROUP	Streets/Sidewalks/Curbsides/Streetscape
WHAT?	Public space with tables and chairs (as in Times Square). Outdoor placemaking.
WHERE?	Sidewalk in front of J.J. Byrne Playground (5 th Avenue between 3 rd and 4 th Streets)
WHY?	Community open space, tables and chairs, town square
WHO?	
WHEN?	As soon as possible
HOW?	 <p>A hand-drawn site plan of the J.J. Byrne Playground area. The plan shows a rectangular playground bounded by 4th St to the north, 3rd St to the east, and 5th Ave to the south. Inside the playground, there are several elements: a large circle labeled '4th St.' at the top left; a horizontal line labeled 'benches' near the top; several small circles labeled 'trees'; three circles labeled 'table' scattered throughout; and a rectangular box labeled 'Bus Stop' near the bottom right. To the right of the playground, between 3rd St and 5th Ave, there is a note: 'movable tables & movable chairs like in times square'. The drawing is simple and sketchy, using lines and circles to represent the layout.</p>

GROUP	Public Art
WHAT?	Unique sculptural tree guards/benches as on Myrtle Avenue
WHERE?	7 th Avenue between Lincoln Place and 9 th Street
WHY?	Increases livability, adds vibrancy to struggling shopping street without a Business Improvement District (BID)
WHO?	Open call for artists, selection by committee
WHEN?	Any time
HOW?	

GROUP	Streets/Sidewalks/Curbsides/Streetscape
WHAT?	Brainstorm: Curbside Management – Wipe the Slate Clean
WHERE?	To be determined
WHY?	Our curbsides don't serve us well
WHO?	A group of residents, merchants, clergy, schools, New York Methodist Hospital, grocery stores, et al.
WHEN?	As soon as possible
HOW?	Assess needs, look at other cities for ideas, develop a plan, and advocate for it. Perhaps other communities could join us and we could get a talented moderator/facilitator to lead the way.

One of the workshop participants had two proposals on historic markers in the community. One made it to the top proposals reported by the Public Art group but we feel both are worth detailing here.

GROUP	Public Art
WHAT?	Iron plaques detailing history of some kind (serious or humorous)
WHERE?	Various locations throughout Park Slope
WHY?	
WHO?	A subcommittee of the Park Slope Civic Council
WHEN?	
HOW?	
GROUP	Public Art
WHAT?	Site-specific paper historical plaques to be wheat-pasted throughout the community. Already proposed in detail for Gowanus in response to Brad Lander's call for public art. A Park Slope logo would be included in each plaque.
WHERE?	Very flexible. On wood panels around the Old Stone House turf field, bringing in baseball history, etc. On the walls of Artist & Craftsman Supply store on 2 nd Street.
WHY?	Easy to get community buy-in. Budget friendly. Ties in community history with current communities.
WHO?	Rich Garr. Artist. Tour Guide. Dad. Christine Kelly. Artist. Mom.
WHEN?	You tell me. Surrounding the existing Park Slope/Windsor Terrace Art Walk in the fall.
HOW?	Present this at a Park Slope Civic Council meeting?

The workshop generated a great many proposals, and inevitably many addressed similar issues. So we have combined these by subject. The fact that more than one proposal addressed the same subject testifies to their strength and importance.

WHAT?	WHERE?	WHY?	WHO?	WHEN?	HOW?
Turning signals	Major intersections	Allow for safer pedestrian crossing	NYCDOT		
<p>Sculptures.</p> <p><u>Big Picture</u>: Continuous public art (sculptures) in addition to adding grass, raising curbs, widening lines, bike lanes.</p> <p><u>First Steps</u>: shop owners. Bring smaller public art projects to introduce art to the community.</p>	<p>4th Avenue medians but also other locations without medians. Private walls and spaces. Blank walls, fences, abandoned sites.</p>			Now!	<p>USDOT Urban Program Funding</p> <p>Park Slope Civic Council grant</p> <p>Community funding, Brooklyn Museum</p>
<p>Public relations campaign: Park Slope as a community that is inclusive of all ages and abilities</p>	Throughout the community and beyond	<p>Sensitize all users of our streets to the needs of others. Addressing many of the issues faced by seniors in Park Slope would prove beneficial to all other segments of the community. Examples include bathroom access, ramps, curb cuts, drainage at intersections, countdown lights, cyclist behavior, traffic controls, sidewalk congestion, sandwich signs, benches.</p>	Park Slope Civic Council to spearhead. <u>Everyone</u> would benefit from improvements in these areas.		
<p>An overarching vision for beautifying 4th Avenue with greening and public art, as well as individual arts projects for tree beds, street benches, and signage with neighborhood history</p>	4 th Avenue, 5 th Avenue, 7 th Avenue	Wayfinding and public safety, as well as community-building and engagement	Park Slope Civic Council as conservancy	Now and forever	<p>Coordinate with NYCDOT, Department of Parks, Brooklyn Museum, local arts organizations</p>

WHAT?	WHERE?	WHY?	WHO?	WHEN?	HOW?
Add permanent sculpture to 4 th Avenue improvement plan.	4 th Avenue				
The connection of art to safety on streets. Street intersection murals.	4 th Avenue area		How do we involve the public? Arts Conservancy? Schools? Brooklyn Museum, Park Slope Civic Council		Develop a Park Slope Art Week, Park Slope Fringe.
Install blades of grass sculptures made like boat sails that blow in the breeze, foreshadowing future greening.	4 th Avenue medians	Green, beautify, bring joy to 4 th Avenue; also love the idea of creating areas to gather.			
Greening (trees, planted medians, planters)	Organize walkabouts to determine the best places to add planted medians	Greening has been shown to slow traffic and create more livable streets, improving commercial activity, cleaning the air, managing storm water, etc.	NYCDOT, business partners to help pay for maintenance, Business Improvement Districts, civic associations		Work with NYCDOT on a comprehensive plan (there is a potential model at Union Street at 3 rd Avenue
Kiosks to sell MetroCards above-ground for bus riders	Grand Army Plaza, 7 th Avenue at Union Street, 7 th Avenue at 9 th Street	If you can't walk steps and only ride buses, you still have to get down the stairs of a subway station to get a MetroCard	MTA		
Add tile/mosaic	Prospect Avenue (4 th Avenue) subway station				
Police enforcement of traffic laws (running red lights and stop signs, turning into pedestrians)					
Better engagement with the MTA to do station installations through its existing arts program	7 th Avenue station (B/Q lines); 7 th Avenue station (F/G lines)	These stations are dismal and depressing	MTA		
Lighting issues	Underneath the 4 th Avenue subway overpass between 9 th and 10 th Streets	Safety	MTA/NYCDOT		

WHAT?	WHERE?	WHY?	WHO?	WHEN?	HOW?
Curb cuts with colored tactile warning strips	Fiske Place, Polhemus Place	People of all walks of life need to be able to travel on <u>both</u> sides of the street		As soon as possible	Participatory budgeting, 39 th Council District
Uncluttered aisles in grocery stores	Community-wide				
Murals	Over the Prospect Expressway at 6 th Avenue and 17 th Street				
	Any wall on 4 th Avenue to 9 th Street and uphill on 9 th Street	It's a bland "dead zone"		As soon as possible	Approach local building owners with blank walls to see the willingness to match with artists to create murals. Offer support and funds.
	South side of 9 th Street, west of 5 th Avenue	Beautify the space and make it cooler	Park Slope Civic Council, perhaps in coordination with another organization	As soon as possible	Park Slope Civic Council could approach the property owner with details (mock-up, graphics) and a proposal. Funding via crowdsourcing (Kickstarter, etc.)
Restore B69 bus to 8 th Avenue and Prospect Park West; restore B71 bus; Park Slope stops on express buses to Manhattan; buses to run from the "bottom" of Park Slope up to Prospect Park West and back					The last mentioned item, buses running up the hill and back down, might be accommodated by the bus shuttle reported among the Top Proposals.
Tree guards for tree – art creation					
Create a civic conversation about art in Park Slope					
Disability-friendly store stickers	Local merchants				

WHAT?	WHERE?	WHY?	WHO?	WHEN?	HOW?
Universal design	Community-wide	Universal design, taking into account the needs of all users, is good for everyone			
Countdown timers	All streets	Safety	NYCDOT		
Park Slope sculpture walking tour, turning the neighborhood into a destination for art	Spread throughout the whole neighborhood	Promote art and community involvement; attract people to Park Slope, have this become part of Park Slope's identity – as a neighborhood that promotes the arts.	Participating residents, artists, and the Park Slope Civic Council (who would create the infrastructure for this)	Year-round	Encourage residents to have art placed or installed in their front yard or on stoops, fences, etc. This could be accessed year-round by a URL or a call-in walking tour. Survey existing sculpture and art, curate, and promote more art and the tour.
Annual (spring?) sculpture event and walking tour, like Storm King	Prospect Park				Artist chosen by competition/submission. Possibly involve Brooklyn Museum.
Create Park Slope/Gowanus Art Week – anything goes in the neighborhood with public/private art (visual and performance)					
Develop a plan to “break through” the NYC Arts Commission to create public area options where works could be placed permanently, i.e. longer than 11 months	4 th Avenue, 7 th Avenue, Prospect Park West traffic circles	I believe (particularly for sculpture) that the installations would be of far better quality if they were on display longer.	Muralists, sculptors, installation artists	As soon as possible	Work with the Brooklyn Borough President's office to develop a plan in coordination with the Mayor's office to the Arts Commission, a persistent, professional, organized presentation to “crack this nut.”

WHAT?	WHERE?	WHY?	WHO?	WHEN?	HOW?
Curb bulbouts / extensions as sculpture installation sites, in the style of Tom Otterness or of similarly low heights	Corners on avenues, especially near schools	Improves street safety, slows cars making turns, reduces time pedestrians are in the roadway		Permanent	
Assyrian art installation	Old Stone House? Local public school?	It is topical with the rise of the self-proclaimed Islamic State. This could engage not only the community, but the whole city and maybe the nation. It would put a giant spotlight on Park Slope and the arts in Park Slope.			Coordinate with Brooklyn Museum.
Get art installations into empty storefronts					
Public washrooms					
Rethink "improvements" to Grand Army Plaza, Flatbush Avenue, Prospect Park West, and 4 th Avenue so that these improvements are more age-friendly and do not add more congestion to neighborhood residential streets.	St. Johns Place, and 6 th Avenue from Carroll Street to Flatbush Avenue	Congestion, high traffic, truck traffic			

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Community Board 8 Transportation Committee meeting

[Traffic and transit](#)

Start Date:

April 28, 2015 - 7:00pm

Sponsored By:

Brooklyn Community Board 8

Location:

CNR-Center Light Health Care Center
727 Classon Avenue (corner of Park Place)
United States

Description:

At the April CB8 Transportation Committee meeting, representatives from the Brooklyn Department of Transportation will present plans for implementing a [Neighborhood Slow Zone](#) in Prospect Heights. In 2012, PHNDC gathered more than 1,300 petition signatures and received 35 letters of support for the proposed NSZ from elected officials, civic groups, schools, daycare centers, residential facilities and houses of worship. Prospect Heights was [chosen](#) for a NSZ in 2013.

Open to:

General public

Events

- [Community Board 8 general meeting](#)
April 9, 2015 - 7:00pm
- [School-to-School Dialog on High Stakes Testing](#)
April 15, 2015 - 7:00pm
- [Pacific Park Brooklyn Community Update Meeting](#)
April 22, 2015 - 6:00pm
- [Prospect Heights Craft Fair](#)
April 25, 2015 - 11:00am
- [Community Board 8 Transportation Committee meeting](#)
April 28, 2015 - 7:00pm

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No Flyers signs



What Have We Learned From 30 Years of 'Aging in Place'?

A new study on "naturally occurring retirement communities" shows that cities must adapt to and support the needs of elders for them to thrive.

KRISTON CAPPS |  @kristoncapps | Mar 31, 2015 |  2 Comments



A new study shows how elders can thrive in "naturally occurring retirement communities." (AP Photo/John Raoux)

Next year marks the 30th anniversary of New York City's first staffed Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) Supportive Service Program. This is an important milestone, as over the next 30 years these programs will inform how we care for and support aging populations.

A NORC is a community, neighborhood, or housing development that was

originally designed for families but over time came to support older adults (aged 60 years or older). A NORC Supportive Service Program, on the other hand, is a partnership between a neighborhood and a housing development to help residents there age in place. Social workers, nurses, and other support staff help residents and caregivers as their needs change.

The two terms, NORCs and NORC SSPs, are often used interchangeably, but they aren't the same thing, according to a [Gerontological Society of America report](#). As Baby Boomers age, identifying the communities where they live that could be considered NORCs—and implementing NORC SSPs to assist them—will be an increasing priority in New York and beyond.

Aging in place isn't just a matter of building housing for retirees. It's about fostering supportive community structures that evolve with age.

But global climate change in particular may make identifying NORCs and establishing NORC SSPs in climactically sensitive areas a critical priority.

The report, which was released Monday, spells out the value of the NORC SSP model to communities:

The NORC-SSP model represented a paradigm shift in aging services in 1986. It brought together health care and social supports, recognizing that both were necessary as people age. Ahead of its time, the NORC-SSP model was an early example of a "place-based" program. It brought together service delivery and community-building efforts. Rather than just focusing on reacting to individuals in crisis—"one hip fracture at a time"—it recognized that the community itself plays an important role in how residents aged.

The model has seen its greatest gains in New York, in part because the city's high density allows for the kind of NORC that's easiest to support, at least on paper.

There are [two kinds of NORCs](#), broadly speaking. Most of the NORCs in New York are "closed" or "vertical" communities marked by apartment buildings or clusters of buildings. The very first NORC SSP was established at [Penn South Co-operative](#), a 2,800-unit housing development in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood, after residents there realized that most were seniors and most had no desire to leave.

"Open" or "horizontal" NORCs tend to occur in single-family or two-family housing developments. These are more often created through the out-migration of young people from the development.

"Connectedness to other people ... and the broader community is a determinant of well-being in old age."

Needless to say, retirement communities can naturally occur in all sorts of communities: urban and suburban, apartment and condo, single-family or dense development. Pledging funds to turn NORCs into successful NORC SSPs depends upon correctly identifying the naturally occurring retirement communities that will thrive with public-private support.

"Today in New York, \$13 million in public financing and approximately 50% more in matching community support fund over 50 housing- and neighborhood-based NORC-SSPs in moderate- and low-income communities," the report reads.

NORC SSPs foster more than good health and safe aging: By providing roles for residents that change as their needs do, they contribute to an over-arching sense of place. Aging in place isn't just a matter of building housing types for

families and retirees. It's about fostering supportive community structures that evolve with age.

And community is key in times of crisis. As the report observes, older residents died at much higher rates than younger residents in the 2002 heat wave in Chicago and the 2003 heat wave across much of Europe (but specifically Paris). Climate crises are only growing more common.

"In each of these [climate crises], the older adults were either not known to anyone in the community or were disconnected from anyone around them," the report reads. "Connectedness to other people (not just service providers) and the broader community is a determinant of well-being in old age."

About the Author



Kriston Capps is a staff writer at CityLab. He writes about housing, architecture, design, and other factors that shape cities. Previously, he was a senior editor at *Architect* magazine.

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Why L.A.'s \$1.4 Billion Sidewalk Repair Case Is Such a Big Deal

Los Angeles isn't the only jurisdiction that's been forced to confront its sidewalk problems by disability-rights advocates, and it won't be the last.

SARAH GOODYEAR |  @buttermilk1 | Apr 7, 2015 |  33 Comments



A cracked and damaged sidewalk in the Beverly Glen neighborhood of Los Angeles. (SeeClickFix)

In the city where “everybody drives,” sidewalks and other accommodations for people who aren’t in cars have often seemed an afterthought. But with a landmark [settlement](#) to fix its badly broken sidewalks announced last week, Los Angeles is moving toward a future in which its infrastructure for non-drivers will get some long-needed attention.

The settlement comes in response to a class-action lawsuit filed under the Americans with Disabilities Act, which alleged the city did not maintain its sidewalks “in a condition that is useable by class members who rely on wheelchairs, scooters, and other assistive devices to get around.” The agreement (still pending a judge’s approval) means L.A. could commit a stunning \$1.4 billion over the next 30 years to repairing and upgrading sidewalks, installing curb cuts, and ensuring access to crosswalks.

According to Linda Dardarian, one of the lawyers for the plaintiffs, the settlement comes after five years of sometimes bruising litigation. She says that the city’s attitude toward the suit changed abruptly when the [pedestrian-friendly administration](#) of Mayor Eric Garcetti, elected in 2013, came into office.

"People have gotten hurt tipping over in their wheelchairs."

“Before that, it had been a scorched-earth battle,” says Dardarian. “[Members of the previous administration] weren’t seeing this as an opportunity to resolve a chronic, systemic, intractable problem that had been weighing on the city for decades. It took the new administration—with more of an attitude of positivity and what can be done instead of what can’t be done—to resolve an issue that affects the whole city.”

The change in tone and practice, says Dardarian, reflects the city’s evolving attitude toward its streets as something more than just conduits for personal motor vehicles. “As we shift our focus as a society from cars and onto pedestrians and transit and bikes,” she says, “that’s when the people at the top realize our sidewalks need attention.”

Los Angeles has a particularly fraught legal relationship with its sidewalks, Dardarian explains. At one time, property owners were responsible for maintaining sidewalks adjacent to their homes and businesses, as is the case in many other cities. But back in the 1970s, L.A. took control of sidewalk maintenance in order to qualify for a federal grant program aimed at assisting

cities with street repairs. That federal money quickly ran out, however, leading the city to fall behind on even routine repairs. A decision to plant thousands of ficus trees, which have shallow root systems that can destroy concrete as they grow, made the situation even worse. One survey estimated that [some 40 percent of L.A. sidewalks need repair](#).



Joe Serna, LAT

@JosephSerna

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L.A. tentatively agrees to \$1 billion+ in sidewalk repairs over next 30 years. lat.ms/1yBt28e @LATimesemily

5:32 PM - 1 Apr 2015

3 RETWEETS 2 FAVORITES

Broken sidewalks are an inconvenience for many residents, but for those with mobility disabilities, they can be a life-altering barrier. "A lot of our people are already isolated socially," says Lilibeth Navarro of [Communities Actively Living Independent and Free \(CALIF\)](#), one of the plaintiffs in the suit. "On the one hand there's the ADA, promising opportunities to jobs and all the facilities that society has, and you want so much to be a part of that. But of course the first step into the world is the street outside your door. So we have been struggling in traversing the miles and miles of sidewalks. People have gotten hurt tipping over in their wheelchairs."



Doug & Terri-Rae

@DougAndTRae

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Welcome to L.A. where the river is paved but the sidewalks aren't. From Sunday's LA Daily News:

fb.me/6nailSutY

2:13 PM - 5 Apr 2015



[As March Madness ends, the sidewalk insanity begins](#)

I kept waiting for somebody, anybody, the Mayor, the City Attorney, the plaintiffs in “Willits v. City of Los Angeles”, to shout, “April fools!” I’m still waiting. Could it be? Are L.A.’s notorio

DN L.A. Daily News @ladailynews

3 RETWEETS 1 FAVORITE

The settlement will not only commit about \$30 million per year to repairs in areas prioritized under the ADA—government buildings, transit hubs, medical facilities, and the like—but it will also allow L.A. residents to request specific repairs to trouble spots. Dardarian says that means residential neighborhoods, which are at the bottom of the ADA priority list, will get targeted help as well.

Los Angeles isn’t the only jurisdiction that has been compelled to face its sidewalk problems because of lawsuits filed by disability-rights advocates, and the ADA has forced street enhancements for non-car users that might never have happened otherwise. In 2010, California transportation agency Caltrans

[agreed to a \\$1.1 billion settlement](#) to repair or upgrade 2,500 miles of sidewalks, curb cuts, wheelchair ramps, and other accommodations at that agency's facilities around the state. In Jackson, Mississippi, advocates who were struggling to use public transportation filed an ADA suit that resulted in a 2009 consent decree requiring the city to provide access to bus stops and other accommodations. [Improvements there are ongoing](#). Suits are pending in [New York City](#) and [Long Beach, California](#), as well.

Advocates say that ADA-compliant infrastructure isn't only good for those with mobility issues. "It's beneficial to not only people with disabilities but to the whole human family," says CALIF's Navarro. "Seniors, mothers with strollers, even the young people on their skateboards."

"Another implication of any big systemic disability case is that it benefits the whole community," says Dardarian. "It brings everyone into the public sphere."

About the Author



Sarah Goodyear has written about cities for a variety of publications, including *Grist* and *Streetsblog*. She lives in Brooklyn.

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The Company That's Helping Mass Transit Stand Up to Uber and Leap

TransLoc is building an on-demand system for transit agencies.

ERIC JAFFE |  @e_jaffe | Apr 10, 2015 |  16 Comments



[Screenshot via Geekadelphia](#)

Despite what the April Fool's picture above suggests, Uber did not recently launch a private, on-demand train [service called UberT](#). But whether it meant to or not, the gag underscored a real and growing tension between public transportation agencies and flexible car or bus services that [position themselves](#) as [transit competitors](#). Here's how [Leap Transit](#), the new Bay Area flex-bus being touted as a Muni alternative, explains itself to [potential investors](#):

We are reinventing the urban daily commute by building a better

bus — and the world's most advanced transit management system in the process.

Transit agencies have [cautiously acknowledged](#) the trend, but it's clear they're paying attention, says Doug Kaufman, CEO of [TransLoc](#), a transit technology company that works with agencies to provide real-time information. Kaufman says on-demand transportation services like Uber, Leap Transit, and [Bridj](#) have made mass transit agencies realize that their captive ridership could actually be threatened over time.

"They're scared," he says. "We've talked to them. We've heard at conferences. People are really talking. They're saying, 'What do we do about this?'"

TransLoc's answer to that question is to give transit agencies the resources to fight back. The company is [developing a technology platform](#) that will help transit agencies combine the traditional fixed-route services they do so well with more flexible, on-demand services that transportation start-ups aim to capture. Kaufman hopes that platform, which he likens to a computer operating system, will "empower" mass transit to challenge its new competitors head on.

"Regardless of how I feel about services like Uber, Leap, and Bridj, I think they're showing that riders are craving more elegant solutions," he says. "Services built around *them*, rather than the fixed-route model, which is: you come to us."

The On-Demand Commute

TransLoc took the first step toward an on-demand transit platform last fall with the release of [Traveler](#), a tool that shows riders where mass transit vehicles are and shows agencies where riders are (with their permission). Kaufman says TransLoc Traveler fills in critical information gaps about where riders start and stop their journeys and generally how they're using the system. That data serves as a basis for identifying corridors or areas with unfulfilled rider demand.



The emerging TransLoc operating system can draw on Traveler data in two key ways. First, it can inform agencies that some of their fixed route service might be inefficient—say, by changing the number of buses or routes that run at different times of the day based on ridership. More critically, says Kaufman, the new system will be able to recommend where transit agencies can supplement existing fixed service with a more flexible, on-demand option.

Kaufman offers this (sadly reasonable) hypothetical example: you'd love not to have to drive to work, but your commute takes 20 minutes by car versus an hour by bus. The new TransLoc platform might offer you a more flexible option. Open an app, punch in your origin, destination, and arrival time, and the dynamic system could search for others in your area going the same way to help lower the cost. The system would then schedule a pick-up (maybe at a nearby corner) and send a right-size vehicle (maybe a van or a 10-passenger bus) to serve the flex-route.

In the ideal situation, your new commute time would be closer to driving than riding the bus, but your new commute cost would be [closer to a transit fare](#) than a cab fare.

The "Next Hundred Years" of Transit

Publicly operated flexible buses or shuttles (and some private ones) have failed in the past for a variety of reasons, but Kaufman points to three trends suggesting this time around might be different. First are the demographic shifts toward city living that favor mobility-access to car-ownership. Then there's the technology that makes such an operating platform possible. And then there's the growing threat to transit's position.

"They're scared. They're saying, 'What do we do about this?'"

"When you consider all those things together, I think this is honestly the first time a service like this has really been feasible," he says.

Right now TransLoc is working with a select handful of agencies (Kaufman would not reveal which) to sort out potential obstacles and shortcomings in the on-demand operating system. The idea is to work with agencies that already have a fleet suitable for flex service (say, paratransit or cutaway vans), and to test the platform on weekends when surplus vehicles are available. Kaufman expects TransLoc to launch a prototype in the next few months, and hopes to have a full product ready by late 2015 or early 2016.

Again, he stresses, the new service would complement, not replace, existing fixed-route options—guiding transit agencies into the future.

"Our goal—unlike Uber and Bridj and Leap Transit and all those—is not to supplant them or nibble around edges and take their overflow but to really fix this fundamental issue of the fixed-route-only model," he says. "We believe if we can create a really intelligent, elegant system that allows them to do this combination model in a way that serves the entire community, and if we build it as a true platform, then public transit will have its model for the next hundred years."

About the Author



Eric Jaffe is a senior associate editor at CityLab. He writes about transportation as well as behavior, crime, and history, and has a general interest in the science of city life. He's the author of *A Curious Madness* (2014) and *The King's Best Highway* (2010), and lives in New York.

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