

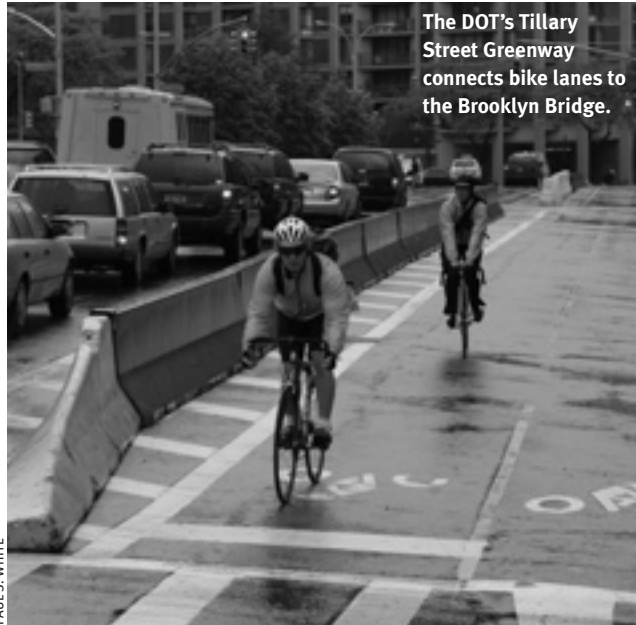
# Greenways to the Streets

**T**HE CITY'S 120 MILES OF car-free greenway paths are oases in the urban cycling jungle. Used by over two million commuter-cyclists, bike messengers, recreational cyclists and occasional users each year, they are safe spaces where cyclists do not have to be constantly on the lookout for everyday hazards like aggressive drivers, potholes, car doors and double-parked vehicles.

But, the big scary city streets between home and greenway stop many New Yorkers from cycling. Streets like Emmons Avenue in Brooklyn, Bronx Park Boulevard in the Bronx, Houston Street in Manhattan, 23rd Avenue in Queens or Hylan Boulevard on Staten Island. Why does the protected cycling space that greenways provide end at the street? What would happen if car-free bike paths extended to residential and commercial streets, connecting home, work, school, parks and shopping? What will it take to bring the greenways to the streets in New York City?

Mayor Bloomberg and his advisors know that New Yorkers much prefer safe and protected bike routes to negotiating their way through city traffic. As a regular Hudson River Greenway bike commuter, Deputy Mayor Doctoroff knows this from firsthand experience. In his first State of the City address in January 2002, Mayor Bloomberg announced his plan to build the Manhattan Waterfront Greenway, the car-free biking and walking path around the island's shore. Much of the path was opened in 2003, and development of this waterfront greenway continues to progress. Now, the City Departments of Parks and City Planning and its Economic Development Corporation have taken up ambitious plans to roll out dozens of miles of new greenways in parks throughout the five boroughs [see map].

But park and waterfront greenway paths are not enough. Talk to family, friends and neighbors in the city who like to bike, or talk to bike commuting parents about riding with their children. They will tell you that the car-free greenways are wonderful; but how can they get to them when they do not feel safe biking in traffic, even on their own block? This greenway access problem is particularly vexing for the majority of New Yorkers who are not lucky enough to live near a waterfront or major park. To these would-be bikers, a



The DOT's Tillary Street Greenway connects bike lanes to the Brooklyn Bridge.

PAUL S. WHITE

## From Cars to Bikes

Can driving trips be switched to bicycling? Eighty-percent of all bicycle trips are three-miles or less in length—a 15-20 minute ride. Half of all car trips in New York City are the same distance. Factor in parking and traffic, and biking is usually quicker.

bike lane separated from adjacent motor vehicle traffic by a six-inch wide stripe does not provide adequate protection.

To enable all New Yorkers to enjoy the city's burgeoning park and waterfront greenways, and to encourage more New Yorkers to use a bicycle for daily transportation, New York needs a new generation of protected bike lanes and "on-street" greenways.

## Safe and Simple by Design

On-street greenways can be one-way or bidirectional and are located on the road, either next to the curb or on the median. Unlike traditional bike lanes, on-street greenways are not indicated by mere signage or paint, but by bollards, fencing, planters or other barriers that provide cyclists real protection from motor vehicle traffic.

Protected bike lanes, like on-street greenways, but always curbside and one-way, also provide traffic-free space for cycling. Unlike most New York City bike lanes, which drivers use as travel and parking lanes, protected bike lanes feature a physical barrier

between the bike lane and moving traffic to keep drivers out. Bollards or other barriers can be used to protect bikers from drivers, or, as in Montreal, Canada and Melbourne, Australia, the parking lane can be placed between the bike lane and the motor vehicle travel lane, separating bikers and drivers.

On-street greenways and protected bike lanes, separated from moving traffic by physical barriers, make drivers more aware of the presence of cyclists and stop from encroaching on cyclists' space.

Over the past six years, the City has only sporadically installed short pieces of on-street greenways and protected bike lanes to connect pieces of the bike network or improve cyclist safety near busy intersections.

In 2000, the Departments of City Planning and Transportation designed and installed protected bike lanes on the blocks leading south through the confusing "bowtie" intersections at Herald and Madison Squares in Manhattan. After the protected bike lane was installed on Broadway, between 35th and 34th Street, bicyclist-driver crashes were cut in half. The protected street space keeps drivers from encroaching on cyclists' space and helps cyclists establish themselves as they ride through these complex and heavily trafficked intersections.

In 2003, the City installed a half-mile on-street greenway between 155th Street and the Harlem River Greenway and a protected bike lane on the FDR Drive Service Road between 25th and 29th Streets as part of the Mayor's Manhattan Waterfront Greenway. In November 2005, The DOT's Brooklyn office removed twenty parking spaces and built the Tillary Street greenway to connect the Clinton Street bike lane to the Brooklyn Bridge bike path, and, in June 2005, the DOT announced plans to build the Sands Street greenway between the Navy Street bike lane and the Manhattan Bridge bike path in Brooklyn.

To roll out these facilities citywide, the Mayor must either create a cross-agency office in City Hall or charge the Departments of Transportation, City Planning and Parks to work together to develop standard on-street greenway and protected bike lane designs for New York City. When the City has a standard design template, it will be easier to build these facilities without being bogged down with

# Greenways on the horizon

City and State government agencies and local community organizations are planning projects that include on-street greenways and protected bike lanes as the preferred designs for the proposed routes.



reinventing the wheel every time an opportunity or request arises. The three City agencies each have in-house bicycle and greenway planners and programs that are charged with developing the city's bicycle network. To date, they have designed and implemented the lion's share of on-street bike lanes and off-street greenway paths in the five boroughs.

In developing designs for on-street greenways and protected bike lanes, City Hall should look to successful designs from big cities like Melbourne and Montreal—both with populations of over 3.5 million.

## Increasing Cycling by Creating Greenway Graduates

Car-free bike paths encourage more people to ride bikes in New York City. In Manhat-

tan, the only borough for which comprehensive bike count data is available, the opening of the Hudson River Greenway in 2001 led to a steady increase in cycling along its length. Since opening, bicycle traffic on the Hudson River Greenway has increased 27%, from 2,113 bicyclists between 7 am and 7 pm in 2001 to a high count of 2,686 cyclists in 2004.

The greenway has also encouraged more people to ride on the streets of Manhattan. Since 2001, biking on Manhattan's avenues alone has increased 30%. As more people regularly ride on greenways, "greenway graduates" become more comfortable cycling and take to the streets. Cycling on car-free paths gives people confidence and helps them make biking an everyday transporta-

tion choice, like walking, taking the subway or driving.

The popularity of the Hudson River Greenway also shows that New Yorkers prefer biking on protected cycling paths to riding through trafficked-streets, directly next to cars, cabs and trucks. In 2001, the year the greenway opened, cycling in Manhattan was three percent lower than 2000, yet bicyclist volumes on the avenues were a full 24% lower than the previous year. Where were those 2,000 people riding each day? On the Hudson River Greenway.

## Bringing Cyclists in From the Margins

New Yorkers need to be able to leave their front doors and cycle safely to their desti-

## In Focus

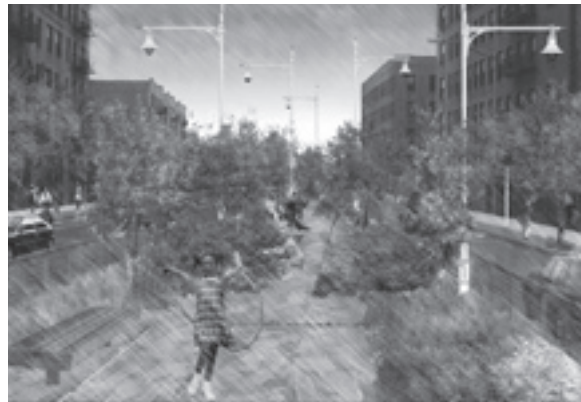
nations. On-street greenways and protected bike lanes should run along direct routes that connect and upgrade the existing bike network in New York City, our greenway and bridge paths, bike lanes and designated on-street bike routes. Like drivers, cyclists want to ride on main streets because they are direct routes that connect residential areas to popular destinations like transit hubs, parks, schools, cultural institutions and shopping. To safely ride on these high traffic roads, cyclists need protected street space.

New York City's neighborhood streets, let alone our wider collector and arterial roads, are not designed or policed to slow drivers and force them to always yield the right of way to bikers and walkers. The vast majority of our streets do not have safe and protected space for cyclists of all ages and abilities, but main streets are what planners had in mind when laying out New York City's bike network.

Agency staff at the City Departments of Transportation and City Planning, who planned and wrote the City of New York's Bicycle Master Plan in 1997, designated main streets as proposed bike routes in the plan. The veteran bicycle planners chose big streets as planned bike routes, not because they are currently congenial places to ride but because they are the logical routes cyclists want to take, the most convenient and quickest routes from A to B. The City's planned routes are marked as dotted red lines on its annual bike map.

Look at the dotted red lines, the "planned/proposed routes," on the City of New York's official 2006 NYC Cycling Map: Prospect Park West in Brooklyn, the Grand Concourse in the Bronx, upper 2nd Avenue in Manhattan, Roosevelt Avenue in Queens and Bay Street on Staten Island are all planned bike routes. Seasoned city cyclists may be experienced enough to ride in their dense traffic, but most people interested in cycling will take one look and turn around. Big streets like these need protected bike lanes and on-street greenways to be truly safe for cyclists.

On the 2006 edition of the official NYC Cycling Map, the City changed the label of the dotted red route marking from "recommended route" to "planned/proposed route." This change makes a lot of sense because



**The planned South Bronx Greenway will connect waterfront parks and paths with protected street space for biking and walking.**

many of the dotted red routes are big streets and urban arterials that few would recommend to someone interested in going for a bike ride. That these heavily-trafficked streets are planned cycling routes speaks to the need for the City to install physically protected cycling space that will make the big streets safer for cyclists and practical parts of New York City's bike network. Bike routes that are not safe for novice cyclists are not functional bike routes.

On-street greenways and protected bike lanes will make main streets safe for cyclists of all ages and abilities, as well as practical, cycling routes. T.A.'s online bicyclist and pedestrian crash mapping resource, CrashStat.org, shows that throughout New York City, in neighborhoods with both low and high levels of cycling, many more bike crashes occur on arterial and collector roads than on smaller ones. Streets with high traffic volumes and high speeds need strong safety measures, like physically protected cycling space, to prevent motorist-cyclist crashes and encourage more New Yorkers to bike.

The Hudson River Greenway shows that direct routes are well used by cyclists. The greenway connects one of the densest resi-

dential neighborhoods in the country to the two busiest business districts in the U.S.—Midtown and Lower Manhattan. Consequently, it is the busiest bike path in the country, with over 1,000 users an hour during peak periods.

## The Future of On-Street Greenways in NYC

It is time for the City to go a step beyond its current piecemeal placement of protected street space for cyclists and make the implementation of on-street greenways and protected bike lanes part of its standard routine. There is a growing public demand for physically protected, on-street cycling improvements in neighborhoods around the city, as Community Boards and business and community organizations alike are discussing these improvements and starting to ask if the City can install them.

Agencies should seize on every opportunity to create physically protected street space for cyclists. The City has a small number of on-street greenways and protected bike lanes under its belt (see above), and agencies are planning a few more as part of greenway projects in every borough. The on-street greenway and protected bike lane designs in development are options, alongside standard bike lanes and signed on-street bike routes, and as each project progresses, the City will choose to install either physically protected cycling space on the street or weaker designs, like mere signed routes. With public input, protected cycling space will become a reality.

In its fall 2005 meeting regarding the then-proposed 8th Avenue bike lane, Community Board 4 discussed requesting that the DOT to install a protected bike lane on the avenue. Ultimately, the board decided to request a buffered bike lane because the DOT representatives at the meeting said that if the board requested a protected bike lane, the DOT would need months to plan and study a proposed design. Since they had originally requested the 8th Avenue bike lane in 2003, the Community Board did not want to delay the project any further.

To tap into the latent demand for biking, safe cycling space, protected from motor vehicle traffic must extend beyond our parks and waterfronts and reach into neighborhoods. New Yorkers should be able to find safe space for bicycling at their doorsteps. On-street greenway and protected bike lanes will make bike riding a regular transportation mode for all. □

### TakeAction.

What streets do you think need protected bike lanes and on-street greenways?

Write Mayor Bloomberg and ask the city to build on-street greenways and protected bike lanes in your neighborhood and on streets you frequently ride.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007  
Fax: (212) 788-2460  
E-Mail: [nyc.gov/html/mail/html/mayor.html](mailto:nyc.gov/html/mail/html/mayor.html)