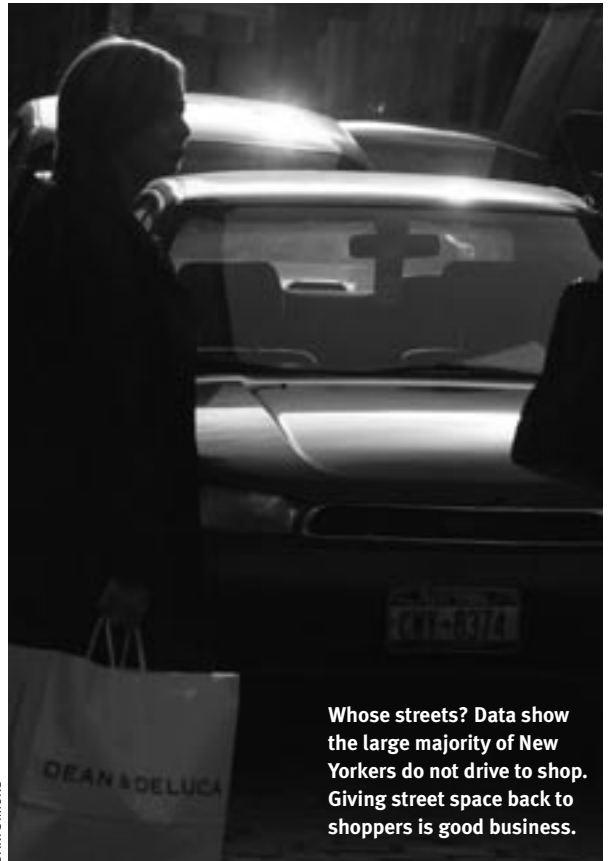




Pedestrians and walking shoppers make for great people watching, perhaps the best in the City. But more importantly they are vital to economic success.

DANI SIMONS



Whose streets? Data show the large majority of New Yorkers do not drive to shop. Giving street space back to shoppers is good business.

DANI SIMONS

Walkers Drive NYC Retail Economy

WALKING IN NEW YORK CITY IS A HOT TOPIC IN THE news these days; most often discussed as a cheap, healthy, environmentally friendly way to get around. For hundreds of years, New Yorkers have been walking to local outdoor markets to load up on fresh fruits, vegetables and other supplies. Today whether you are in Brooklyn walking to the local laundromat or in Queens trekking to the subway in winter, walking is still an essential part of nearly every trip New Yorkers take.

But is walking a necessary or valuable transportation mode for our city's economy? The answer is yes according to many city planners and business leaders. The buzz in this crowd is all about "walking shoppers," how to draw them to retail and restaurant districts throughout the city, keep them safe and keep them coming back.

Areas such as Spring Street in SoHo and even the Bowery in the East Village have attracted more foot traffic over the years through residential conversions and new development leading to more valuable real estate and booming retail. Yet street space still predominantly accommodates car traffic

while pedestrians are forced to compete with one another to stay safe and out of the street. Pedestrians continue to grow increasingly resentful of vendors, sidewalk cafes and anyone or anything else that once comfortably fit on the sidewalk but now overtakes precious walking space. Fortunately, many Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) have begun to realize the important role pedestrians play in the local economy. Monique Stringer, Operations Manager of **The Myrtle Avenue Brooklyn Partnership**, acknowledges the importance of foot traffic in the Fort Greene/Clinton Hill area in Brooklyn, "Shoppers who travel on foot are the lifeblood of local retail and res-

taurant success. When people are strolling down a commercial corridor, it gives them a better view of services that they may have missed had they been in a vehicle. Also nine times out of ten, if they are strolling they are not in a rush...Health benefits go without saying!" Today BIDs are meeting with urban planners and the Department of Transportation to begin exploring ways to accommodate walking shoppers, drafting plans that increase sidewalk space and limit or slow car traffic and re-designing their streets and sidewalks in ways that will attract even more foot traffic.

Is New York City undergoing a Streets Renaissance? Can we expect to see street space allocated more fairly for all users? As New York continues to rise in popularity and streets become more crowded, the answer is yes. David Roskin, Director of Public Affairs at the **Grand Central Partnership** (GCP) describes how things have been changing in the area, "During the course of the last 20 years, the Grand Central neighborhood has seen a jaw-dropping increase in pedestrian volumes, particularly on nights and week-

ends. This growth is driven primarily by the dramatic resurgence of our retail and restaurant scenes, which have flourished in a neighborhood once known only as a 9-to-5 business hub. Today, our sidewalks are bustling from early morning to late at night, seven days a week, and the crowds are a testament to the Grand Central Partnership's success at keeping this neighborhood clean, safe and enjoyable for everyone."

Roskin points out that over the past two decades private and public groups have successfully invested in revitalizing key commercial areas in the city through improved sanitation, attractive storefronts and enhanced security. The Grand Central Partnership reported last year that their own pedestrian data from 2004 showed a "predominant increase in pedestrian volume as compared with 2003," and if expectations are consistent with other areas of the city their numbers will be even higher for 2005.

Roskin goes on to describe measures the Partnership has implemented to improve customer service and encourage return visits: from May to September, GCP closes the southbound lanes of Park Avenue from East 42nd Street to East 41st Street to cars. At these times, Pershing Square (the restaurant located on East 42nd Street under the Park Avenue Viaduct) operates an outdoor café for lunch and dinner, and GCP also provides tables and chairs in a free public seating area located on the sidewalk on the west side of the block. Part of this space, referred to as Pershing Square Plaza, is also sometime used for promotional events during the warmer months. These improvements have successfully attracted more and more people to this district's commercial streets with the supermajority arriving through Grand Central Station and continuing to their destination on foot.

From tourists flocking to Times Square and SoHo to shop and people-watch on foot, to workers walking down the block to eat lunch at a local restaurant or commut-

ers stopping into a drug or grocery store on their way to the subway, train, bus or ferry, it seems like everyone gets around New York City by foot these days. It is apparent that any thriving commercial area in New York City depends on walking shoppers. In 2005 tourism and transit ridership reached unprec-



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ented numbers, flooding many city streets and sidewalks with crowds of the magnitude once only seen in Times Square.

“As the third busiest transportation hub in the city, Union Square has benefited from its accessibility to and from all parts of the metropolitan region. MTA figures show that in 2005 over 30 million subway riders entered through Union Square station, nearly twice

the number from a decade ago. Once here, New Yorkers and visitors alike are apt to stay and take advantage of the neighborhood's wide array of assets such as the Greenmarket, our restaurants, theaters and retailers. Pedestrians and walking shoppers make for great people watching, perhaps the best in the City but more importantly they are vital to the economic success of Union Square's businesses,” explains Karen H. Shaw, Executive Director, **Union Square Partnership**. The **Union Square Partnership** and the **Union Square Community Coalition** are working to improve pedestrian access and safety around Union Square Park while exploring ways to calm traffic throughout the area.

In 2005 Transportation Alternatives' first ever NYC Stroller Report Card found that for many parents and caretakers street and sidewalk safety still leaves a lot to be desired. An incredible 86% of respondents (from Brooklyn, Queens and Manhattan) reported that they have avoided streets throughout the City because they are too difficult to navigate when walking with a stroller or child under 10 years old and 50% have avoided streets while walking without a stroller or child under 10 years old. The data indicates that if streets and sidewalks were safer and in better condition, people would walk even more.

Today the city finds itself in a happy posi-

tion, with local businesses determined to accommodate larger crowds of walking shoppers in more areas than ever. Like the Grand Central Partnership, many BIDs have adopted pedestrian-only hours, restricting auto-access to specific hours of the day or allowing access only for local deliveries. The **Downtown Alliance** sponsors pedestrian-only hours (from 11 am to 2 pm weekdays) on Fulton and Nassau Streets in Lower Manhattan, popular among lunch hour visitors, shoppers, residents and local business managers. An informal survey sponsored by Transportation Alternatives last summer revealed overwhelming public support for these car-free hours, with many clamoring for longer car-free hours and even expanding it to more streets in Manhattan. The majority of New York City's residents and employees, however, are less fortunate. Many choose to avoid overcrowded sidewalks in their neighborhoods rather than elbow their way through the masses. These residents and employees in areas such as Astor Place, the Meat Packing District, Union Square

Livable Streets: A New Vision for New York

The NYC Streets Renaissance Campaign is proud to present Livable Streets: A New Vision for New York. From February 1st through March 29th the Campaign sponsors a captivating new exhibition and six exciting events at the Municipal Art Society that explores the automobile and its effects on quality of life in NYC. This exhibit examines New York City's streets from a fresh perspective to facilitate, inform and inspire the public to ask, 'What if all space between buildings was your place to socialize, play, stroll and explore?'

For a complete listing of events visit mas.org/Events/exhibits.cfm. Please RSVP for all events you plan to attend: rsvp@mas.org or call 212-935-2075.

The NYC Streets Renaissance Campaign is a partnership between Transportation Alternatives, Project for Public Spaces and The Open Planning Project.

In Focus

and Times Square in Manhattan and much of Downtown Brooklyn deserve and would greatly benefit from wider sidewalks, more crossing time and less car traffic; all of which would improve mobility, make walk-in retail shopping more accessible, improve security in the area, eliminate the need to walk in the streets and make a more aesthetically enjoyable space. By implementing simple common sense improvements, recognizing and eliminating the dangerous and unpleasant traffic conditions that discourage shopping and cripple the local economy—business and commercial districts will help shape streets that are enjoyable and inviting to the entire community.

Tim Tompkins, President of the **Times Square Alliance**, is aware of the need to improve and encourage pedestrian access and has been working with the DOT to make several improvements throughout the Times Square District. He acknowledges the importance of a strong pedestrian presence within the area, “Pedestrian congestion is a great sign of vitality, but we need to make sure there is additional sidewalk space so that it is neither unpleasant nor dangerous.” He recognizes that since pedestrians are good for business, safe pedestrian access is good customer service. “[Times Square is] getting more and more people to the area and this is a great sign of our health. It’s also great for retail. But unless we expand the sidewalk—something we’re

working on—we face the unfortunate possibility of ‘pedlock’ which will ultimately hurt our businesses. This becomes a safety issue as well. As a result we’ve begun tracking the number of people who have to walk in the street because the sidewalks are too crowded; this number has steadily grown, and jumped dramatically just in the past year.”

The Times Square business district, one of, if not the most, visited area in New York City, has paid particular attention to the growing number of visitors to their district, with at least half a million people commuting to the Times Square area on any given day and growing. They are one of the few business districts to monitor the number of pedestrians on their sidewalks and streets during the holiday season and recognize the need to move quickly to reallocate space to pedestrians. Since 1980 there has been a 200% increase in people walking through the area with pedestrian counts soaring at key locations. Data from recent years indi-



A little elbow room in Times Square would provide safety and freedom for the hundreds of thousands of workers, shoppers and tourists there.

PAUL S. WHITE



TRESA HORNEY

Astor Place is ready for a makeover. With hundreds of thousands of pedestrians traveling through the neighborhood daily bring hundreds of opportunities to make this a great shared space.

cate that the trips to the area show no sign of slowing down. During the holiday season 2005, in front of the Virgin Megastore in the heart of Times Square the number of pedestrians skyrocketed, up 98% from 2004 (59,060 per day in 2004 versus 120,737 in 2005).

The **34th Street Partnership** is regarded as an industry leader in streetscape improvements that invite walking shoppers to the area and recently received the Award for Excellence from the Urban Land Institute for their 34th Street Streetscape Program. They have been working for years to transform Greeley Square and Herald Square from lonely, desolate cement islands into true destinations where local employees meet friends for lunch and tired shoppers can find respite from a Macy’s shopping spree. “The pedes-

trian project, with its extended sidewalks and separated bike lane has not only created a safer intersection for pedestrians, bikers, and auto traffic, but it has beautified the two squares, which are centered on the intersection of Broadway with Sixth Avenue (Avenue of the Americas) and West 34th Street, that form one of New York City’s most recognized and heavily trafficked crossroads,” explains Dan Biederman, President of the 34th Street Partnership.

Biederman considers the DOT’s test reconfiguration of Herald and Greeley Squares a true success story. The expanded pedestrian spaces have significantly benefited the 34th Street District, its shoppers, tourists, commercial and retail tenants. He adds, “The sidewalk extensions along Broadway and Sixth Avenue adjacent to Herald and Greeley square Parks provide essential north-south pedestrian access when the parks are closed at night; whereas previous conditions forced pedestrians to walk in the roadway travel lanes in order to skirt the parks during the night-time hours.” These changes have brought much needed greenery and improved the overall safety and access to the area.

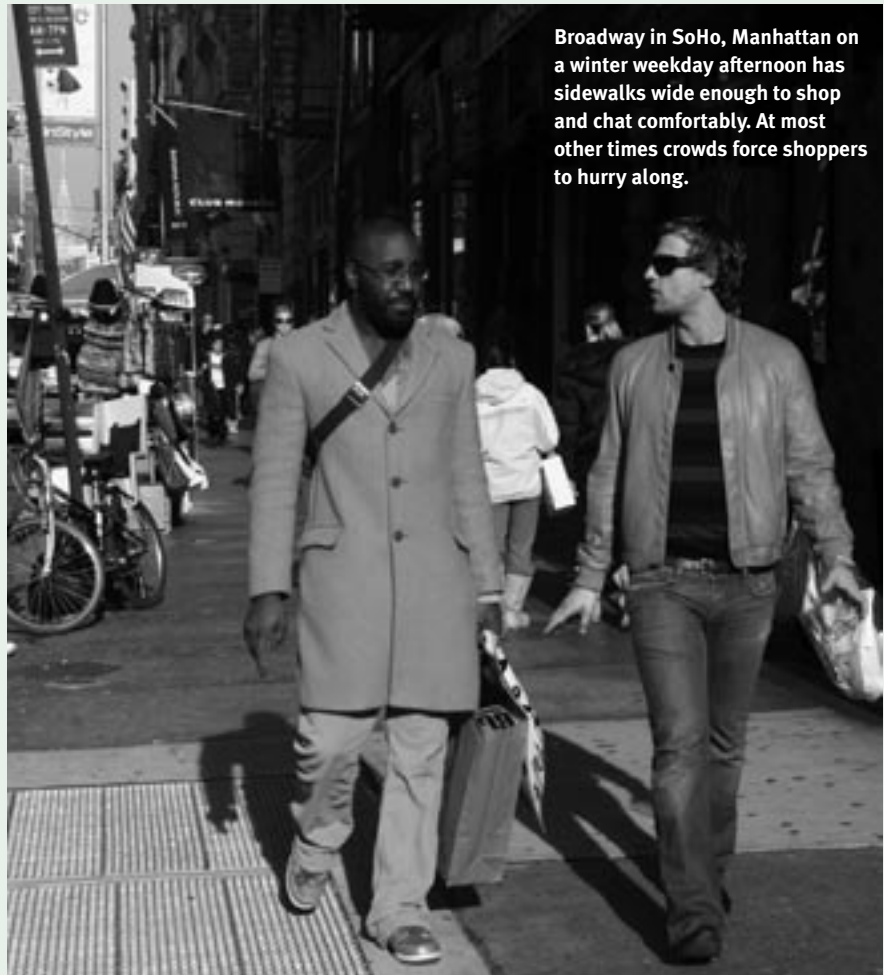
Dan Biederman notes that the northward extension of Greeley Square Park and the new north crosswalks on Broadway and Sixth Avenue at West 33rd Street are heavily utilized, and have successfully reduced congestion on the parallel south crosswalks and their adjacent corner areas. These measures have increased pedestrian safety by reducing the numbers of people attempting to cross Broadway and Sixth Avenue at unsafe mid-block locations.

The demand is there for more pedestrian-friendly streets. Businesses and residents alike have consistently asked the City to put pedestrian needs first. Yet New York City lags behind our competitors in Europe and Asia, who have realized that improving walking conditions while discouraging auto use leads to better business and a better quality of life. Providing more room for people to walk, creating destination streets, improving movement within business districts and unclogging streets so that buses are not jammed in traffic and delivery vans can access stores, is an art and science that New York City's international competitors are quickly mastering. New York City does not have to reinvent the wheel, we just need to catch up and regain our competitive edge.

Transportation Alternatives as part of the NYC Streets Renaissance Campaign is working with business leaders, community groups and city officials to redesign streets, our most valuable public asset, to serve all users for optimally. New development must make large and small scale economic investments for more diverse street uses (pedestrian only hours, pedestrian priority malls, markets, etc.) to help create opportunity and the infrastructure we need to best serve the public.

At the invitation of Transportation Alternatives, Jan Gehl, renowned planner and architect best known for designing streets for public space, recently paid a visit to New York City. He introduced local city and business leaders to new street design possibilities that would help promote healthy, happy living. Through these common sense solutions New Yorkers could walk safely and enjoy valuable street space for all it is worth. New York City's businesses would become competitive with more progressive cities and continue to attract more commerce and shoppers from around the city, region, country and world.

T.A. and our supporters know that less traffic, less pollution and less noise makes streets more desirable to walk. What is exciting is that it seems like the city's business leaders have also caught on to these ideas. Together we can promote a vision of a pedestrian-friendly environment in which New Yorkers save money and time on transportation and health costs. Sidewalks and streets with fairly allocated space for walking and bicycling is good customer service, is good for the local economy and improves air quality all while encouraging people to linger longer and visit more often. The Streets Renaissance has begun and we are proud to be at the leading edge of it. □



Broadway in SoHo, Manhattan on a winter weekday afternoon has sidewalks wide enough to shop and chat comfortably. At most other times crowds force shoppers to hurry along.

Be Part of the Streets Renaissance

Transportation Alternatives is working with several neighborhood organizations and Business Improvement Districts on a variety of strategies to ensure new street design and traffic signal timing standards put people first. These standards should include but not be limited to:

- **Wider sidewalks, longer pedestrian crossing time, safer bicycle routes and traffic calming measures** that are the rule, not the exception.
- **A comprehensive citywide walking and bicycling plan** that is predicated on new performance targets to reduce driving and increase the rates of walking, bicycling and pedestrian usage of public space.
- **Modern parking policies** that benefit residents and businesses.

New Yorkers are walkers first and foremost. New York City neighborhoods deserve clean air to breathe, and the opportunity to shop and dine outdoors in safe, comfortable and clean, enjoyable surroundings. The City must make street improvements that focus on pedestrian needs first, slow down drivers, eradicate incessant honking, the endless drone of traffic, the fear of crossing dangerous intersections, and air heavy with smog. The City must make safe, enjoyable street space a priority in 2006.

Visit nycsr.org/involved.php to get involved and bring the NYC Streets Renaissance to your neighborhood. Call or write the Mayor, your City Council member and your community board and tell them you would like safer sidewalks more space to walk and less traffic on your streets.