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PUBLISHER: Paul Steely White

MANAGING EDITOR: Wiley Norvell

ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Graham Beck

PROOFREADER: Ken Coughlin

DESIGNER: Sarah Lang

CONTRIBUTORS: Dave Abraham, Graham Beck, Sholom Brody, Noah Budnick, Ken Coughlin, Julia De Martini Day, Kate Edmundson, Emmanuel Fuentesbella, Moses Gates, Peter Goldwasser, Edward Hernandez, Mike Infranco, Nathan John, Ali Qadeer, Lindsey Lusher Shute, Wiley Norvell, Katy Rieber, Travis Ruse, Caroline Samponaro, Elena Santogade, Joe Sherman, Molly Sullivan, Marin Tockman, Shin-pei Tsay, Kevin Vincent, Nick Whitacker, Paul Steely White, Rhonda Winter

COVER: Wiley Norvell

BACK: Darren Steuber

127 W 26 St, Ste 1002, NY NY 10001-6808

Tel: 212-629-8080 Fax: 629-8334, info@transalt.org, transalt.org

Reclaim: THE MAGAZINE OF TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

MISSION STATEMENT:
 Our mission is to reclaim New York City's streets from the automobile, and to advocate for bicycling, walking and public transit as the best transportation alternatives.

The Power of Pride

WHEN I WAS SIXTEEN GROWING up in Rockford, Illinois, all the boys in my peer group were getting cars. Billy Ward had an Audi 4000, Chuck Kostka had his Volkswagen Scirocco and David Shifo had a Chevy Blazer. Patrick Dubois had a Toyota Supra. You can imagine my dismay when my parents told me what I would be driving: a 1985 Yugo GV from the former Soviet bloc.

The Yugo, according to *Time Magazine*, conjured the “distinct feeling of something assembled at gunpoint.” I didn’t really care that it had no acceleration, or that the horn inexplicably honked every time I rounded a turn. What made me not want to drive it was that all my friends laughed at me. I soon learned that it was just as humiliating (and cheaper) to ride in the backseat of my friends’ cars, walk or take the bus. Then I discovered a mode of travel that got me where I was going, but also made me feel like I was somebody: my brand new French Cycles Gitane with Italian Campagnolo components.

Alternatives to the automobile have always been practical. But it’s a special attractive quality that really motivates people to walk, bike and take transit. This quality is often hard to define, but you know it when you see it, and you know it when you see people experiencing it.

You know it when you look at F train riders who just got new subway cars, and you know it by looking at the faces of the riders on the new Select Bus Service on Fordham Road in the Bronx. For years bus service has been getting worse, and now it has suddenly gotten better, with buses and service that are a cut above. To see these prideful riders yourself, visit streetfilms.org, and then imagine how happy they would be with full-blown Bus Rapid Transit!

You see it in the smiles and laughter of people who are populating all of the newly reclaimed plazas and public spaces all around town. My favorite new lunch spot is the reclaimed stretch of Broadway near Madison Square Park, where tourists and native New Yorkers alike are happy and ennobled to have the room afforded by a world-class street to enjoy the area’s world-class architecture.

You see this street pride in neighbors at a block party, in senior citizens who are walking down a sidewalk with enough space to walk hand-in-hand, and you see it among

the bicyclists who are riding in our city’s new wide, protected bike lanes.

These prideful experiences make you realize that somebody actually cares. Somebody thinks you are a first-class citizen. And, if you think it through, you realize that somebody has clearly taken enough pride in their work to make it all happen. There is nothing

“These experiences make you realize that somebody actually cares.”

that gives me more hope for the future than the fact that the ranks of these prideful livable streets workers are growing rapidly. From the Department of Transportation to the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, there are scores of new planners, managers and other agency staffers who believe in transportation alternatives, and many more existing staffers who, thanks to great leadership at those agencies, also now believe. T.A.’s membership, volunteer ranks and committee members (see our enlarged Committee Updates on pages 18 and 19) are all growing at a rapid clip, as is the number of organizations that are now allied with us. This surge of livable street esteem is also happening in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia and other cities around the country (see our new National Spotlight on page 21), thanks in part to the wonderful lead we are forging right here in New York City.

These are hard economic times. Driving and shopping don’t provide the fulfillment they once did. What will take their place? For the answer to that question, look no further than the prideful pages of this issue of *Reclaim*.

Sincerely,

Paul Steely White
 Executive Director
 Transportation Alternatives