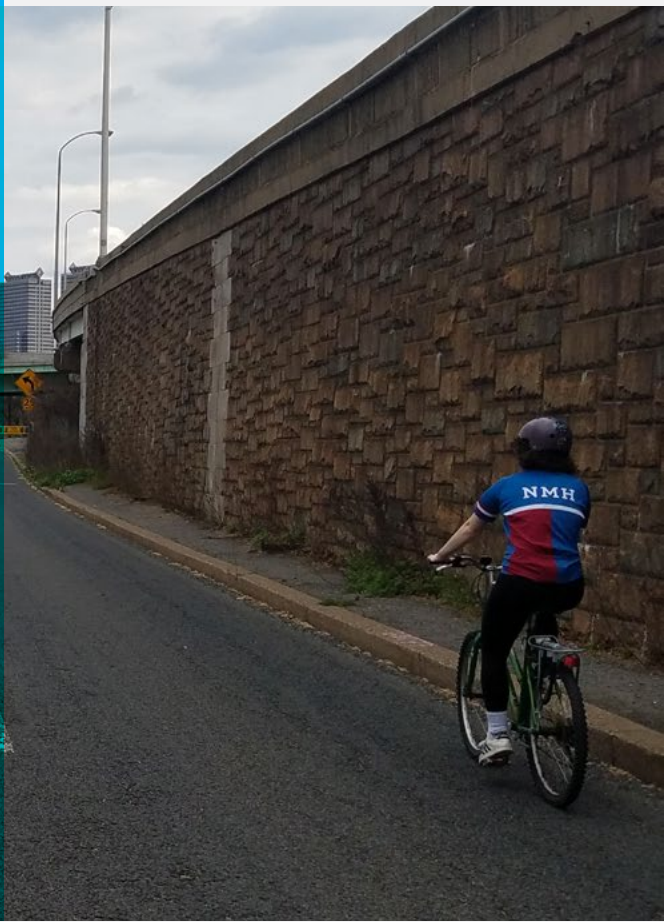




RECOVERY STREETS



An opportunity for the City of Philadelphia to be an international leader in COVID-19 recovery.





Medical and health experts agree that being active outside is crucial to maintaining physical and mental health.

However, without options, overcrowding in parks, on sidewalks, and on trails can become a serious issue during the coronavirus epidemic because of the need for greater physical distance. A series of temporary updates to our public spaces, detailed in this report, would help Philadelphia deal with the health, economic, and inequitable fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney has said himself, going outside for a run, stroll, or bike ride is fine during the pandemic. And as [Councilmember Mark Squilla recently told NBC 10, regarding reopening restaurants and other businesses](#), “If you have more of these open spaces available to [Philadelphians] and more businesses to go to and places to go, people can then go to places that aren’t crowded and physically distance.”

Reallocating street space can help. Rethinking street space during the COVID-19 pandemic can not only keep people healthier by allowing them to get outside safely, but it will slow down motorists, who have been responsible for an unprecedented amount of crashes in 2020. It would also incentivize those commuters returning to work who live within six miles of Market Street to use a bicycle or to walk instead of driving alone, avoiding an onslaught of cars descending upon Center City.

With vehicle travel at an unprecedented low level, now is the time to rethink the use of street space. We can imagine and take control of the type of city and quality of life we want post-COVID. There are a few silver-linings to come out of this crisis. Clean air. Reduced noise pollution. Return of nature. Appreciation of being outside. These are not things we want to lose. With a reprioritization of our streetspace, we can keep all these things. We can make our shared public space -- our streets -- more democratic, safer, and vibrant.

According to preliminary data from the Philadelphia Police Accident Investigation [Unit's Fatal Crashes](#) report on Open Data Philly, 17 pedestrians were killed by motor vehicles in Philadelphia during the first quarter of 2020.

That represents an **88 percent increase in pedestrian fatalities** when compared to the same period last year. Pedestrians represent 56 percent of total traffic fatalities in 2020. Overall, there was a 50 percent increase in all traffic fatalities through April 2020.

Numerous cities across the world have successfully rethought their street space without drawing crowds and creating better space for social distancing -- but Philadelphia may be in an even tougher spot. There is a grave possibility that the hundreds of thousands of workers who used to take transit will shift to driving their own cars or using TNCs instead. If people flock to private motor vehicles after reopening, there simply won't be enough space for those vehicles. Congestion, air pollution, illegal parking and increased carbon dioxide emissions are directly counter to Mayor Kenney's goals and values for transportation, sustainability and equity.

If we thought congestion, especially in Center City and University City, was bad before, we are in for a rude awakening if we allow the City to "return" to normal with tens of thousands more people trying to drive in the same space.

Encouraging those within a reasonable distance to travel into business districts using means other than private transportation may be the only way to keep congestion and traffic violence at a minimum. Philadelphia needs to begin planning for the post-COVID-19 world, in which our economy is back open but social distancing regulations are still in place.

Recovery Streets, which includes the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia, 5th Square, Feet First Philly, and Clean Air Council, recommend the following actions to help people decrease their risk of transmission of the coronavirus to others while engaging in outdoor activities and traveling to essential destinations:

- 1** Examine potential interventions to safely share street space, such as: reduce motorized vehicle speeds; prohibit through traffic in neighborhoods; reduce lane widths and/or the number of traffic lanes to provide more street space for people to walk, run, skate, and bike; adjust traffic signals to favor pedestrians and calmed vehicle speeds; paint and physically-separate temporary protected bike lanes to ease congestion in Philadelphia's business districts, and create bus-only lanes.
- 2** Identify locations to pilot Calm Streets interventions using pre-existing infrastructure without police resources.
- 3** Identify existing stock of barriers, cones, signs, and other equipment to determine how many and what types of Share the Streets interventions are possible.
- 4** Develop a plan to equitably identify locations, distribute equipment, and provide staff support to implement more Calm Streets interventions across the city. The city can begin with the map released by the Recovery Streets Coalition and already signed onto by four Councilmembers: Councilmember Jamie Gauthier, Councilmember Helen Gym, Councilmember Derek Green, and Councilmember Kenyatta Johnson. Simplify and telescope the application process for residents to request Play Streets
- 5** Create an application process and procedures to allow neighborhoods to request Calm Streets interventions, similar to Temporary Street Closures Procedures for Block Parties.
- 6** Spread the word about the application process through both city staff and community partners.
- 7** Create a pilot program for opening restaurants by providing outdoor seating and moving food carts off sidewalks and into parking spaces. This will require reallocating parking spaces and streetspace in some neighborhoods.
- 8** To avoid crowding, continue to educate residents about the importance of maintaining physical distancing requirements and wearing masks, which has currently been happening.
- 9** Plan ahead for the post-COVID world. Simple solutions like emergency dedicated bus lanes and temporary protected bike lanes (especially for those within six miles of Center City).
- 10** Measure success. Evaluate the pilot projects frequently to ensure that they are being safely utilized and changes are made quickly and expeditiously.

“ It is time
to calm
Philadelphia’s
streets now.

Shared Streets interventions can equitably increase safe places to walk and bike in neighborhoods around the city, thereby increasing healthy active transportation while reducing excessive demand on existing recreational spaces.

Background:

The COVID-19 pandemic is changing many aspects about how we live. With gyms, fitness studios, and numerous places for recreation and entertainment closed, more people are active outdoors, using parks, greenways and sidewalks in record numbers, according to data the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia gathered from the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission.

Increasingly, Philadelphia’s essential workers have been moving toward bicycling to get to and from work at this time, especially since SEPTA has turned to an emergency schedule. Additionally, pedestrian fatalities have surged since the Stay-at-Home order was put into place, as streets emptied and motorists are driving faster.

It is time to calm Philadelphia’s streets now.

The Philadelphia government’s stay at home orders define outdoor activity as: activity in an outdoor open space, such as walking, biking, hiking, or running, as long as individuals comply with social distancing requirements of six feet.

For some households, it could be safer to be outside together than inside the housing unit. However, this increased usage is leading to crowding in a time that requires greater physical separation.

Although participation in physical activity is an individual choice, the built environment plays an important role in how easy and safe spaces are for walking, biking, and physical activity. Lack of safe places to be active make this choice more difficult, particularly in historically disadvantaged areas where residents are disproportionately burdened by health barriers.

Many cities across America and the world are adapting quickly and finding solutions that are impactful and cost-effective.

The most common tactic has been to share streets. Due to record level decreases in vehicle travel, streets are an ideal location for safe and healthy walking, biking, rolling, skating, jogging, and other activities while also staying physically distant to other people.

Our organization has created a “menu” for our Recovery Streets plan, which will provide general ideas on what our proposals are, and how they will work. See descriptions of how many of these ideas could be realized:

Recovery Streets Menu

With vehicle travel at an unprecedented low level, now is the time to rethink the use of street space. We can imagine and take control of the type of city and quality of life we want post-COVID. There are a few silver-linings to come out of this crisis. Reduced noise pollution. Return of nature. Appreciation of being outside. These are not things we want to lose. With a reprioritization of our streetspace, we can keep all these things. We can make our shared public space -- our streets -- more democratic, equitable, safe, and vibrant.

	SOCIAL DISTANCING	CLEAN AIR	REACTIVATION	CONGESTION AND SAFETY
OPEN STREETS (PARKS AND NEIGHBORHOODS)	✓	✓	✓	✓
CALM STREETS	✓	✓	✓	✓
BIKE FACILITIES	✓	✓	✓	✓
BUS LANES/STOPS	✓	✓	✓	✓
OUTDOOR VENDING	✓	✓	✓	
PLAY STREETS	✓	✓		✓



Open Streets Plan (Parks and Neighborhoods)

In March, Philadelphia made international news by becoming one of the first cities in the world to close a road to help residents safely socially distance while still getting exercise. [Closing Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive to motor vehicles](#) and opening it to people has become a model for what other cities can do in the face of the pandemic.

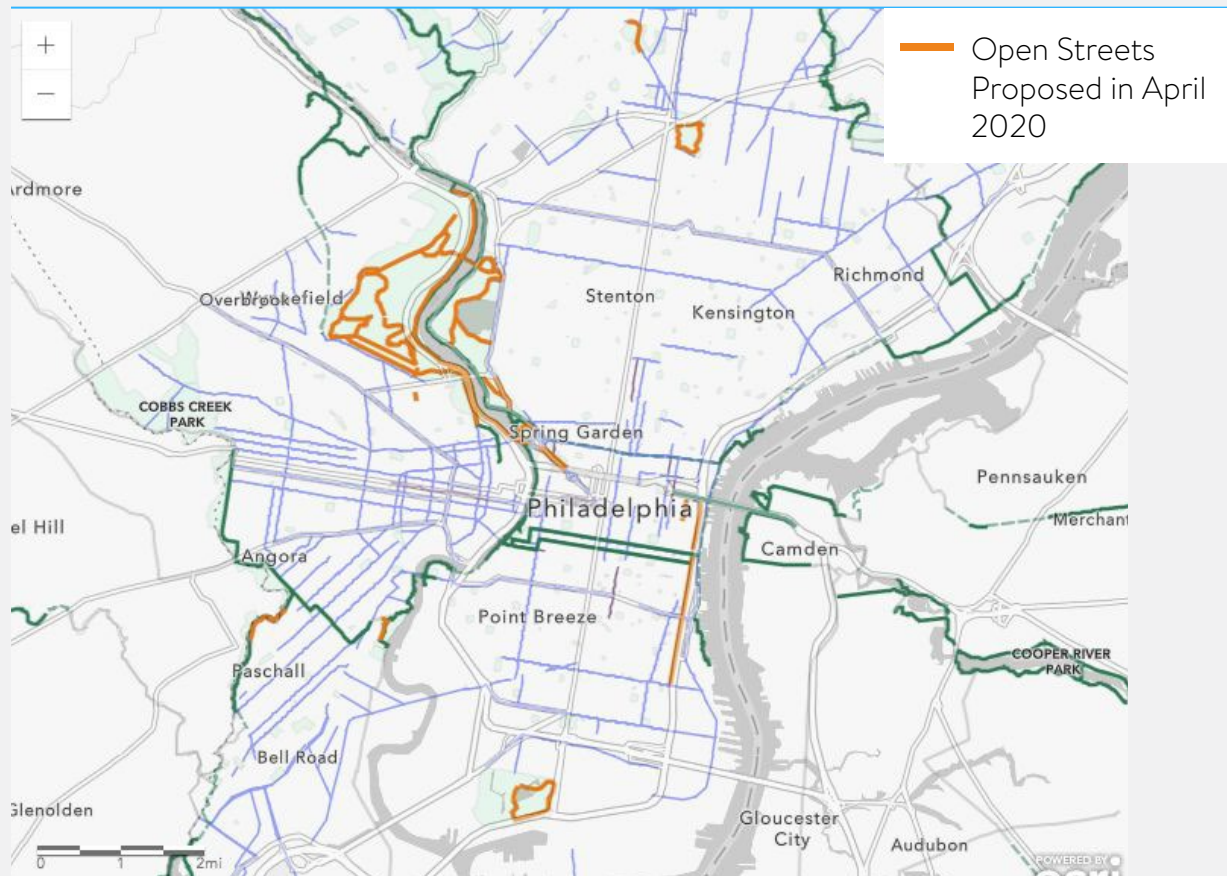
It has also been greatly successful here -- perhaps too successful. The road is used daily by thousands of Philadelphians who need to get exercise and commute to their essential jobs in the city. It is the only park road in the

entire Delaware Valley where people can expect to travel without fast moving vehicles in their lane, while practicing safe social distancing.

In response to this success, in early April, a coalition of advocacy organizations across Philadelphia, and numerous City Councilmembers, released a letter to the Kenney Administration, calling upon the City to open up more streets for safe social distancing. This is something we believe the city can do right now, with minimal efforts or resources. The Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia, 5th Square, Clean Air Council, Feet First Philly and Nate Hommel worked together to put together a list and map of streets we believe can be opened up to people right now, using minimal city resources.

Citizens in neighborhoods all over Philadelphia have continued to go outside — as is allowed, and even encouraged — during the COVID-19 pandemic and attempt the CDC-recommended six feet of social distancing.

But, unfortunately, it's often easier said than done. Philadelphia's sidewalks are small and often do not allow for six feet of space when passing, which has led to people walking in the streets, to safely pass one another, whether they're out with their families, getting exercise, or walking to the grocery store.



“Currently, residents all over Philadelphia travel outside for essential activities like shopping for groceries, accessing healthcare, and getting daily exercise.”

The Kenney Administration, in March, had already taken the positive measure of closing Martin Luther King Jr. Drive to motor vehicles to help unclog the trails along the Schuylkill River. This has been met with an overwhelmingly positive response. But not every Philadelphian has access to MLK Drive and, in the weeks since MLK was opened, it has become increasingly cramped as it is the only open space in the city that can be safely used for socially-distanced recreation.

We believe it’s especially important these streets give people using parks better access, and more space to breathe and practice safe social distancing. At this point, the weather is only going to get warmer, schools are officially out until September, at the earliest, and our public spaces are going to get increasingly stressed. Pools and recreation centers are closed for the summer due to budget cuts, and the people of Philadelphia are going to need summer relief. Our organizations also sent an official letter to the Kenney Administration, calling upon the City to come up with a plan for more open streets in Philadelphia.

Unfortunately, Philadelphia’s sidewalks simply are not wide enough for safe social distancing, and more people will be using them as the city gets closer to slowly opening business activity again. Philadelphians fortunate enough to own a private automobile are able to drive to locations where they can safely be outside, but this should be a right not a privilege, and that means bringing these spaces to every neighborhood in Philadelphia.

To ease the pressure on narrow sidewalks, and give access to every Philadelphian for safe places to walk, we propose certain streets be closed to vehicle traffic in neighborhoods all over the city, particularly along commercial corridors. Several neighborhood groups have requested the outer lanes of the Parkway be closed to vehicle traffic. Streets in center city like Walnut and commercial corridors like 9th Street and Passyunk Avenue should be closed to vehicle traffic so that people can safely re-engage in the economy.

2

Calm Streets

As we've seen in cities around the world, like Oakland (pictured below), New York City, Hoboken, and others, it is possible to partially shut down neighborhood streets to vehicle traffic in order to allow for safe social distancing in cities.

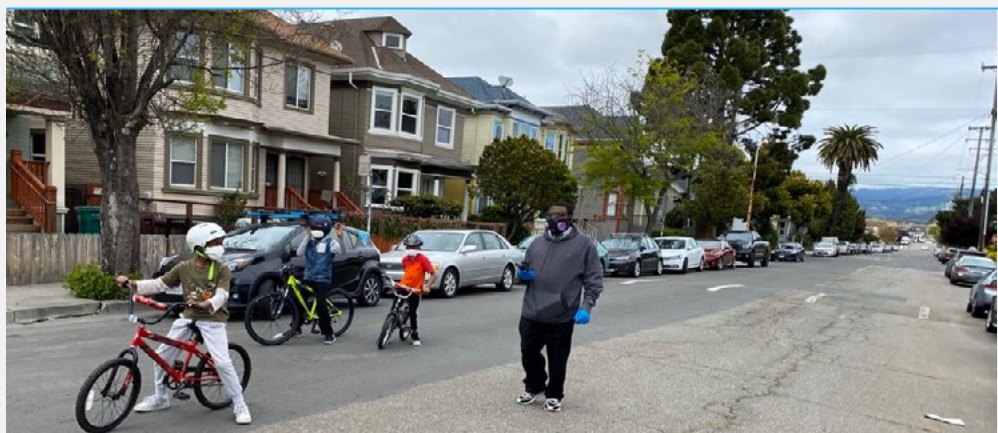
This is at least in part required of cities like Philadelphia, now, because of the speeds at which drivers are going on more empty streets through cities. While this has largely been anecdotal, new data suggest drivers are acting more reckless in the face of empty city streets.

In the five weeks after many states announced lockdown orders on March 16, the data company Zendrive [said drivers' use of cell phones behind the wheel is up 38 percent over pre-lockdown numbers](#). The number of drivers who exceeded speed limits was up 27 percent, as was hard braking (25 percent) and collisions per million miles (20 percent.)

"As a result, every minute spent on the road is riskier; every mile driven is riskier," a rep for the company said.

As acknowledged by Mayor Kenney in his May 7th press conference, [traffic violence is up during COVID19 with fewer cars on the road and more opportunity to speed and drive recklessly](#). Slowing neighborhood streets will help Philadelphia avoid an additional public health crisis of traffic fatalities. Simply asking drivers to slow down is not an option.

Once these streets have been calmed using existing infrastructure, like barricades and signage, neighbors often flock to those streets and they are used to get essential items, and stay healthy, while maintaining a safe six feet of distance.



In Oakland, [74 miles of open streets were planned](#) for folks to be able to get outside without and get fresh air while social distancing. To do this, they hired a street management company to provide barricades and signage, and check on that infrastructure periodically.

“The City of Oakland Slow Streets Program is intended to support safe physical activity by creating more space for physical distancing for all Oaklanders by declaring that all Slow Streets with and without soft closure barriers are Closed to Through Traffic so that people can more comfortably use these low-traffic streets for physically distant walking, wheelchair rolling, jogging, and biking all across the City,” the City of Oakland declares on its website.

Oakland’s Slow Streets program was also a direct response to the increase in reckless driving seen throughout the city. Calm streets can help mitigate unsafe driving and keep more people out of hospitals at a time when we need to keep healthcare workers safe.

Oakland’s program is meant to “discourage drivers from using ALL Oakland Slow Streets unless necessary to reach a final destination, and urges all drivers to drive slowly and safely, expect to see people walking and biking along ALL streets, as our hospitals are facing



unprecedented challenges and don’t need any additional patients. This effort does not impact emergency vehicle access in any way,” the City notes on its website.

Additionally, after an initial failure to create a slow streets program due to the false presumption that police resources would be needed at every corner, [New York has created a new Slow Streets program without a police presence](#), which has, thus far, been successful.

In New York (above), the Mayor and the Council announced that

40 miles of streets citywide would be opened during May to allow greater social distancing, with a plan to expand to a total of 100 miles to be identified in the weeks and months ahead. The hours of operation for these streets vary, and are being decided upon internally.

We believe Philadelphia can do the same, without police presence, to give Philadelphians better spaces to safely get out of their houses this spring and summer, especially as private recreation, like summer camps and gyms, likely remain closed; and public recreation, like public pools, are also planned to stay closed all summer.

3

Expanded Bike Facilities to Ease Congestion During Reopening

In the coming months, when Philadelphia's economy begins reopening, it is imperative we plan to deal with what we've seen in reopened cities around the world: People retreating to their cars.

In cities across China that have reopened, citizens are increasingly using private motor vehicles for short trips that used to be taken via public transportation. It stands to reason that it may take Philadelphians longer to feel comfortable using public transportation in the near term. For many, public transportation may not be utilized the way it once was until a COVID-19 vaccine is available.

Philadelphia needs to make sure the traffic that returns after the pandemic is not worse than the already unsustainable situation we were suffering through in 2019 and early 2020.



Additionally, there simply isn't enough room in Center City to accommodate the many people returning to Center City for work if those who were previously using public transit are now driving private vehicles.

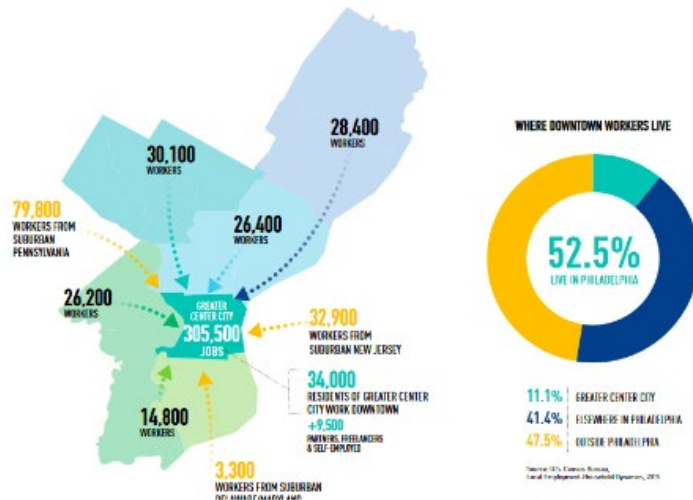
According to a [2019 Center City District report](#), there were 305,000 jobs in Center City. And the majority of people

traveling into Center City to work those jobs are coming from other neighborhoods in Philadelphia.

CCD 2019 Report:

305,000 jobs in Greater Center City

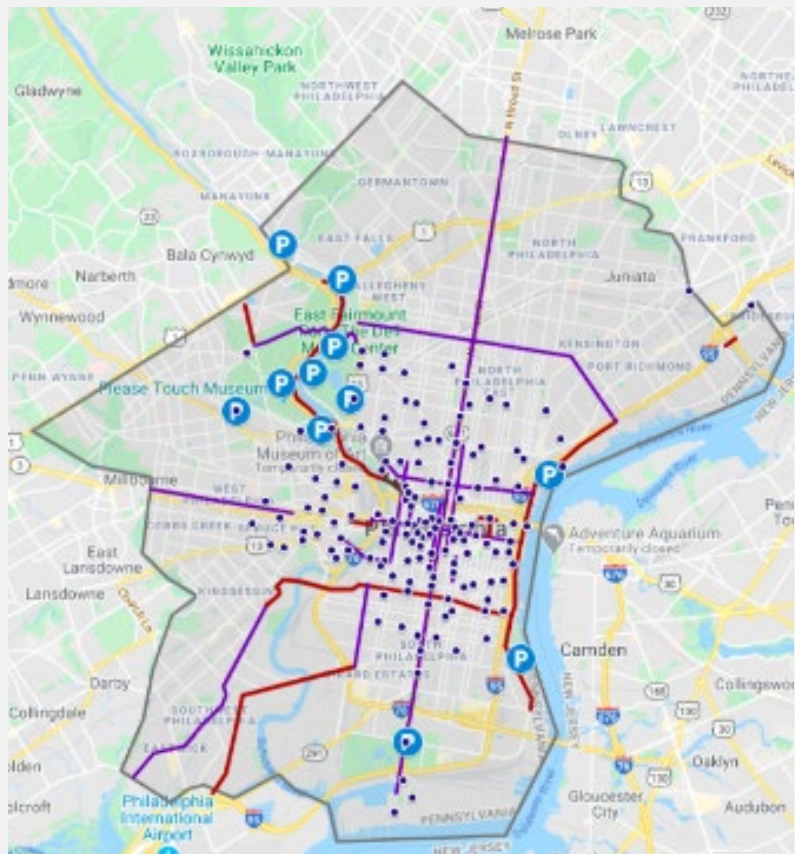
89% of those workers, or **204,000** live outside of Greater Center City



Forty-four percent of those workers who live outside Center City take transit currently. Even if just a third of them continue traveling into Center City after the city economy reopens, that means roughly 33,000 commuters could be coming into Center City needing an alternative to transit, in addition to the 150,000+ current car commuters.

If all, or most of these transit commuters shift to private vehicles, the 46,000 available public parking spaces available in garages will be overwhelmed and congestion will exacerbate. Recovery Streets proposes that the City accelerate planned bike lane projects and erect temporary separation infrastructure to create 50 miles of protected bike lanes to incentivize many commuters who would use a bicycle or other micro-mobility devices to get to work if they felt the streets were comfortable and safe.

The map of proposed 50 miles of Recovery Bike Lanes is as follows:



We believe these temporary bike lanes, in addition to the existing infrastructure Philadelphia already enjoys, will give anyone who wants to ride a bicycle for transportation, within six miles of Center City, a means to get there.

4

Bus-Only Lanes

Mass transit is essential to move Philadelphians with the vast majority of transit riders taking buses to go to work, school, shopping, medical appointments, and other trips. Congestion slows buses and makes trips via transit (like automobile trips) have unreliable travel times. Unlike automobiles, buses alleviate congestion and improve air quality because they carry so many more people efficiently.

Bus only lanes [enable buses](#) (SEPTA, NJT, and inter-city) to move more quickly and reliably, as well as providing more trips as buses can cycle through their routes in less time.

During the COVID-19 period of sheltering at home, transit ridership has plummeted. It means people are staying at home and transit is only being used for essential trips. However, this is unsustainable as the economy reopens. Philadelphians will need to return to transit to reach jobs and services. Fear of being in confined spaces without the ability to



“ Bus only lanes enable buses (SEPTA, NJT, and inter-city) to move more quickly and reliably, as well as providing more trips as buses can cycle through their routes in less time.

be socially distant will last as long as there is not a vaccine and widespread immunity. By providing more trips with the same resources, mass transit can ease those fears. Bus-only lanes make that possible.

Recently several cities and transit authorities (including Barcelona and [Washington D.C.](#)) have called for installation of new bus lanes. Everyday, this list increases. Bus-only lanes are a [simple way to make major impacts to public-health and the economy](#). Philadelphia is already behind because we do not have any such facilities currently, now is the time to start.

Transit is critical to the vitality and economy of Philadelphia. Center City could not be so dense without transit - our skyscrapers and dense walkable shop-lined streets would be pockmarked by parking lots and overly-wide congested streets. Our neighborhoods would look the same. Mass transit is also far more affordable than private car ownership.

If transit is not supported during this time of crisis, major and long-lasting cut-backs will happen. This will impact air quality, development patterns, congestion, and household budgets. There is no bail-out large enough if the public does not feel safe or comfortable riding transit again.



5

Social Distancing at Bus Stops

Social distancing [at bus stops](#) will need to persist until there is wide-spread immunity. Currently, due to low ridership, social distancing at stops is self-regulated.

As society reopens, Philadelphia's already limited sidewalk space will struggle to accommodate social distancing. This impacts high ridership bus stops throughout the city.

Bus shelters are not maintained by SEPTA, but by the City of Philadelphia and their advertising partner, Intersection. High Ridership stops (which often have shelters) should have signage reminding waiting customers to stand six feet apart and have pavement markers like many businesses do.

[This has already been implemented in places such as London](#), Vancouver, and San Francisco. SEPTA should do the same at their facilities, such as transportation centers, bus loops, and stations.

To provide social distancing space at bus stops, sidewalk space may need to be expanded into parking lanes and transit zones will need to be enforced.



6

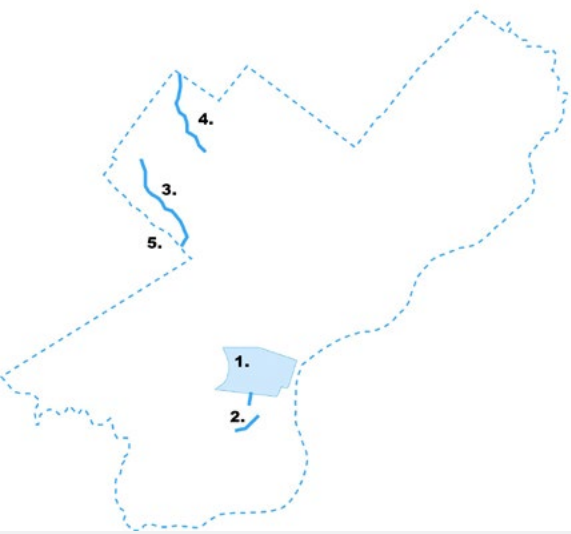
Expanded Outdoor Vending and Seating

When stores and food service businesses eventually reopen, they'll have much more limited seating and standing room inside, and could be operating at 25-30% of their usual indoor capacity. For many small businesses, and particularly food service businesses, that will lead to closures if they can't serve the same number of customers they once did. Cities around the country, like Tampa (pictured above) have already begun accommodating customers with social distanced outdoor cafes.

One easy way for the City to reduce the number of small business closures and worker layoffs both downtown and on our neighborhood commercial corridors is to allow businesses to use either the sidewalk, parking lane, or even a lane of traffic, in front of their stores for additional seating or retail space.

Cafe seating is allowed by-right for businesses in Center City and a small handful of commercial districts, but for businesses located on





Map: Where cafe seating is permitted without a City Council ordinance

one of the more than 200 neighborhood commercial corridors outside of Center City, [the process is a bureaucratic nightmare](#), and even requires a City Council ordinance.

Elected officials should assume that every business will want to use outdoor space if it makes sense for their operation, and the City will need a new policy to facilitate this happening quickly on a mass scale. Even under normal conditions the current process can take up to a year if a City Council ordinance is required. Possible solutions could involve either extending the Center City cafe seating overlay to encompass the entire city, or even better, issuing some simple rules and guidelines that everyone can follow without a permit, while leaving the permit process in place only for restaurants seeking to serve alcohol outdoors.

Changes to the “pedestrian enhancement” process are also needed for businesses to use the parking lane instead of, or in addition to, excess sidewalk space. In many cases sidewalk space is too narrow to accommodate safe distancing requirements, in which case businesses should be given the option to use the parking lanes in front of their storefronts for seating or vending.

The current processes to receive permission for “pedestrian enhancements,” or parklets in a small number of parking spaces, are also cumbersome and require [signature-gathering from near neighbors](#), which isn’t safe to do at this time. City Council and the Streets Department should [revise the pedestrian enhancement process](#) to quickly and easily allow businesses to repurpose either single parking spaces in front of their stores by-right, or for full parking lanes on blocks to be repurposed for seating or vending in places where multiple shops are clustered together.

Where Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) or Community Development Corporations (CDCs) exist, those organizations could be deputized to devise outdoor commerce plans for their districts, and submit packages of requests for multiple lane or street closures in a single application, rather than a case-by-case approval process.

7

Expand Play Streets and Block Party Programs to Allow for Social Distancing

One of the easiest ways for the City to close more streets to through-traffic this summer is to let neighbors do it themselves.

The City already has a popular vehicle for this with the Block Party permit, which thousands of people use each year to close their streets for a few hours on special occasions. The City makes this permit very cheap (\$25) and easy to access, so it gets a lot of use. What neighbors need now is ongoing permission to close streets to through-traffic.

One possibility that could fit the bill is the more obscure [Play Streets program](#)—part summer meals program, part summer day camp—which sees a lot less use. Play Streets allows neighbors on certain types of blocks (one-way, non-numbered streets) to close their streets between 10AM and 4PM on weekdays using tape or large household objects, and it includes free meals for local kids. One reason this program is less well known is because it's harder to access. For instance, residents can't just apply online—they have to call Parks and Rec just to get a paper application mailed to their houses.

The Kenney administration has signaled their interest in expanding the Play Streets program this summer to provide more outdoor space to families as pools and Rec centers will be closed due to city budget cuts and COVID-19 precautions. While a Play Streets expansion would be good news, any changes to the program should also involve a [modernization of the rules to encourage much more widespread use](#). During the COVID-19 crisis at least, it should include an expansion of the allowed street closure hours to weeknight evenings and weekends, an end to the current 75% block approval requirement, and some other operational changes to adapt the program to the present moment.

Like Philadelphia's program, Seattle's combined Block party/Play Street program also allows neighbors to designate their block as a "play street," and close it to vehicle through-traffic. But unlike Philadelphia, [Seattle only requires organizers to notify neighbors with a door hanger](#), rather than demonstrate 75% support to get the permit. In addition to imposing an unfair bias against action, signature-gathering

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requirements are especially inadvisable right now during social distancing.

Another department policy officials should reconsider is Parks and Rec’s policy of requiring at least two blocks of space between Play Streets, or between Play Streets and other parks and Rec centers. The program should also be changed to allow neighbors to plan continuous networks of Play Streets through their neighborhoods for ongoing use.

The City could also solicit planned networks of Play Streets from Registered Community Organizations (RCOs) or BIDs to simplify the process even further, and open up a lot more public space this summer close to where people live.

It may be the case that the Play Streets permit isn’t the right vehicle for widespread citizen-initiated street closures this summer, but if that is the case, the administration should consider introducing an entirely new type of permit that allows ongoing daily street closures to through-traffic, but is geared more toward active transportation through neighborhoods than in-street activities.





Metropolitan Center: Center City/University City Cordon

Limiting private automobile access to large areas of the Metropolitan Center with the highest density of jobs, retail, and people allows for all of the benefits discussed above.

A cordon, while the most aggressive approach, likely requires the least manpower, enforcement, and messaging.

Instead of tailored plans for each corridor or block by block, limited access requires a blanket message that prioritizes pedestrians, cyclists and transit in a “share the road” scenario that reduces congestion, enables social distancing, adds vibrancy to city streets, and benefits the environment.

With quick action before Philadelphia moves to the yellow or green phase, the cordon can be put into place while congestion is at its lowest. Then priority streets for bike, pedestrian and transit facilities can be decided with more time and data.

This will also enable the City and its partners to procure additional materials to delineate bus-only lanes, bicycle lanes, and expanded pedestrian and retail space, especially outdoor dining.

Philadelphia already has experience with the cordon, it was implemented for the Papal visit in 2015. It was implemented for security reasons, but resulted in an unintended and wonderful benefit that resulted in what we now call “Popen Streets.” Unlike the visit from Pope Francis, the security needs are far less and the cordon does not need to be as expansive.

This is a new idea, not proposed by any other City at this time, unlike all of the other interventions described above. This is an opportunity for the City of Philadelphia to be an international leader in COVID-19 recovery.

