Dear Readers,

The Editorial team is thrilled to present to you the Winter 2012 issue of the Urban Review. This student produced publication serves as a forum for ideas, a showcase of student projects, and an opportunity for students to publish their written works.

The articles in this issue reflect some of the most divisive and complex topics of our times. Each author presents a captivating analysis of events that will define this generation of urban affairs and planning. We trust they will capture your attention.

We are proud to commence this issue with an interview featuring UAP alum Moses Gates. Following the interview, Mr. Gates provides his personal musings on the Occupy Wall Street movement. This complements the observations made in the second article by contributing author Sam Stein, from the frontlines of the protest. Both demonstrate the depth of UAP’s ongoing involvement in contemporary urban conflicts.

The next section presents academic pieces by Alexandra Hanson and Zachary Campbell. Alex and Zac both address government responses to some of the most pressing urban crises, including public finance and public health, respectively. Their critical analyses represent the balanced and reasoned perspectives that are necessary for urban planners and policy makers who aid cities in turmoil.

Rounding out this issue, Alyssa Pichardo and Jeff Peel spiritedly promote active transportation in New York City. Alyssa thoughtfully deconstructs misinformation regarding cycling and walking in local media, and connects important truths with solutions for further improvement. Finally, Jeff closes our issue on a high note, trumpeting the arrival of the bike share program in New York City, and providing an insider’s view of what to expect from its implementation.

Thank you for your support and making this publication possible. Please enjoy.

Erin McAuliff, Editor-in-Chief

Moses, a graduate of the Masters of Urban Planning program in 2008, now works for the Association for Neighborhood Housing and Development and will be an Adjunct Professor of Demography at Pratt beginning Fall 2012. His hero is Indiana Jones – if Indy was a demographer, not history, professor. To follow his adventures visit: www.allcitynewyork.com

By Erin McAuliff

UR: Were there any especially memorable classes?
MG: The best classes were the ones I took with Joe Salvo. I took two classes with Joe. One was a demography class and the other one was also demography, but it was more New York centric, a little less methods. I’m really sad he is not there right now. Hopefully once the Census stuff cycles down he will be able to return to Hunter, because he was really great.

UR: Did you enjoy that Hunter’s program seemed to be more New York centric or did that ever frustrate you?
MG: I find it a very positive thing. You have five basic planning programs in the New York area and the folks I went to school and graduated with are at City Planning, DOT, everywhere… and are the folks who are doing the nuts and bolts planning stuff. I think in, you know, ten-twenty-thirty years we are going to be our own little planning mafia controlling the city. You learn really hands on stuff and you learn how New York works very well. I like the local focus but that’s not to say what you end up learning is not valuable for work everywhere. I passed my AICP exam from my education at Hunter and that really helps me to get a job anywhere, nationally.

UR: Besides your work with the Association for Neighborhood Development, you have a few side projects. Can you tell us how these started and a little about them?
MG: I’ve been climbing bridges since around 2003/2004, about when I started at Hunter. I haven’t and won’t end up climbing them all, but I’m okay with that. And I don’t have a favorite. It’s like asking who your favorite child is. I am also exploring every census tract. I was interested in seeing everything in New York and I wanted a way to quantify what everything was. It is imperfect, but it was a better way to break everything up – not too big or small. I didn’t want to walk every block in the city – but I do have a friend who is doing that. In the five boroughs, not just in Manhattan.

UR: Outside of work, you sometimes speak at events or on panels. We noticed you were involved with the Flux Festival, which is about psychogeography. What is psychogeography and what did you do at the festival?
MG: Psychogeography is essentially just stuff that has to do with cities and geography. It’s just like, you know, people who have interesting projects and like doing them. I did one panel/event called “What’s your city’s horoscope?”

Alumni Interview with Moses Gates

Cover Photo Source: Paulo Barcellos, Jr.
I decided a long time ago I was not going to legal life with what is potentially illegal.

and people are trying to separate their ever they are doing, but I think mostly separate their personalities and use an ex-

There are some people who like to sep-

I've always wondered about that.

UR: And you document most of your “extracurricular” work on-line, correct?

MG: The blog is just essentially a per-

sonal diary, not anything else. But if people read it, that's great also. What I write is kind of just what is in my head or my pet project for the moment.

UR: Have you ever worried about your internet presence possibly hurting your career?

MG: I've always wondered about that. There are some people who like to separate their personalities and use an explorer name or an internet name for whatever they are doing. But I think mostly you see that with stuff like street art and people are trying to separate their legal life with what is potentially illegal. I decided a long time ago I was not going to do that, and in the long run, if I end up not being Mayor because of it, so be it. I don't want to work for some-

UR: Have you ever worked for some-

one who you just didn't see eye-to-

MG: Towards the end of my time at Hunter I worked for a landmarks and preservation non-profit on the Upper West Side. At the end of the day, we just didn't believe in the same thing. My dream in the future is to start a non-

profit that is focused on opening up landmarks and historic sites and other interesting off-limits places to the pub-

tic. There are some really beautiful and interesting places that are landmarked, but hidden away from public use or view.

UR: Do you think it is important that people with side projects like yours make them open to the public as well by documenting them for posterity and sharing with others?

MG: Well, I have had a lot of opportuni-
ties because of it. I've made money loca-
tion scouting for movies, I am getting to write a book because of it, and I've gotten to be on TV. People have come to me or written me about collaborat-
ing or giving tours. I have never got-

ten a nine to five from it, but honestly I could see that happening down the road because of the things I've learned and skills I've developed because of this stuff. I would definitely encour-
ge folk to pursue whatever nutty side projects they have. The more stuff you know and the more stuff you do, the more opportunities you have. I'm a big believer in that.

Moses and I met to talk at a coffee shop on Wall Street near his office. Towards the end, our interview turned into an interesting conversation about the im-

ications of the Occupy movement for those working in the area. During his daily commute, just like so many oth-

ers doing their jobs, Moses was able to observe the effects that a politi-
cal movement and the City's response had on the uses of public and private space - not just in Zuccotti Park, but in the community at large. Alongside Sam Stein's piece, Sites Speak Louder Than Words, we are excited to run an edito-

rial by Moses.

The City has spent over $5 million in police overtime since the Occupy Wall Street protests have started. Here's what it's meant for the actual street.

Life on Occupied Wall Street

By Moses Gates

The City has spent over $5 million in police overtime since the Occupy Wall Street protests have started. Here's what it's meant for the actual street.

Monday through Friday, for the past two years, I've gotten on the #4 train from my home in Brooklyn and, about 20 minutes later, gotten off on Wall Street. I've walked one block east, turned right at the stock exchange, gone down Broad Street until I hit the bomb squad checkpoint, and then headed up a short flight of stairs into 50 Broad Street where I work for a nonprofit housing organization. On this two-

minute trip I pass three vehicle checkpoints, where move-
able bollards have been embedded in the street, two private security checkpoints for the stock exchange, which is sur-
rounded by a metal fence that just out to the midpoint of Broad Street, several police officers, some in riot gear, even more private security officers, and a bomb sniffing dog. The dog rotates between a chocolate lab, a black lab, and a gold-

en retriever. The black lab is the friendliest, and is happy to let tourists stop and rub its belly. The police stationed by the stock exchange and federal hall across the street are likewise happy to pose for pictures with the tourists. It's a militarized security zone, and has been since September 11th, 2001, but it's one that has settled into an amiable, everyday existence. When I first started my job I asked my boss if I could bring my bike up to the office. His response was "Just lock it up on the sidewalk. Haven't you seen the guys with machine guns downtown? Nobody's going to steal your bike." In fact, the guys with machine guns and the vehicle check-

points have mostly served to turn Wall and Broad Streets into a strange kind of public plaza, as they've removed all of the auto traffic. On Broad Street there's concrete benches set into the cobblestones and a piano in the summertime. Oc-

casionally they'll even throw a concert or other event outside the stock exchange in the evening.

The irony is that there's no real reason for the area to be a militarized security zone at all. The checkpoints, cops, and barriers have stayed these 10 years after September 11th mostly because nobody knows how to get rid of them. The Wall and Broad Street area nowadays is a somewhat sleepy (by Manhattan) area of luxury apartment buildings and second-

tier office space, with clothing stores and lunch chains using most of the storefronts. Across Broad Street from my office are an apartment building and a prep school. Almost the entire southern half of Wall Street itself has been converted to residential occupancy. The stock exchange, osten-

sibly the reason for all of this, is almost completely bereft of any practical function anymore. Two trading floors have been closed entirely, as the exchange now does the vast majority of its business electronically, and the remaining one stays open mostly to serve as a backdrop for financial reporters. The building's main function now is that of a giant billboard, giving a day or two of advertising to the companies and their products that are traded on the exchange – on my walk I've passed ads for everything from Budweiser to Lucky Charms (complete with Lucky the Leprechaun and the "It's Magically Delicious" slogan), hanging from the Corinthian columns of the façade. The huge American flag, which is how the trend started after the destruction of the World Trade Center, is now relegated to the occasional holiday and the week of Sept. 11th. The only building nearby that would reasonably merit this kind of protection is the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, but even there it sits as a sort of security zone, blending into the other office buildings around it. In fact, you can take a guided tour of the 7000 tons of gold they have in their basement. The stock exchange, home to Wall Street, is a symbol of power and prestige, and next to no business, doesn't let tourists within 20 feet.

In contrast, the area where the Occupy Wall Street protest- ers were a few blocks north of the actual Wall Street is much more of a hustle-and-bustle area. It's right on downtown's main drag, lower Broadway, and is surrounded by actual Class A office buildings housing actual members of the glob-

al financial industry. The reason the plaza was created was to get a zoning bonus for the office tower next door, whose tenants include Goldman-Sachs, Prudential and Swiss RE In-

surance, and Brookfield Financial Properties. Brown Brothers Harriman has their headquarters across the street. It's also right next to the biggest construction project in the city, the World Trade Center Site.

On September 17th, when the “Occupy Wall Street” protests started, things changed. But not in the area where the protest-
 tors actually were, which stayed a full and functioning mem-
ber of everyday New York City. The numerous Halal lunch carts remained, the Double-Decker tour buses continued down lower Broadway at an astonishing pace, the bankers in their suit-and-tie-permed hair argued by the drum circles and cardboard signs as they went to work. There were a ton of cops to be sure, and even one of those surveillance towers that looks like an alien spaceship had landed, but other than an occasional half-hearted “keep it moving folks,” no real attempt by the police to assert any kind of authority over the space. No, instead the city decided to concentrate even
more resources on the militarized security zone of the actual Wall Street, where none of the protestors actually were. The former amiability and neighborliness went out the window, replaced by an all-out anti-siege infrastructure protecting nothing from nobody.

So my walk changed. I didn’t get off at Wall Street anymore, because Wall Street was now a muggy hodgepodge of even more barriers, set up with little to no rhyme or reason to them. The amount of cops on the street tripled from its already considerable levels and now included a few on horseback outside the Stock Exchange, giving the corner of Wall and Broad a faint but constant aroma of manure. The morning food vendors on Wall had to move, leaving behind 8x11 ½ sheets of white paper taped to the light poles with “Your Coffee Man is Around the Corner” printed in a bubble-letter font reminiscent of the cover of an 8th grade book report in 1991. You’re no longer allowed to cross Wall Street, because, you know, God forbid a protestor somehow sneaks in and knits it a rainbow scarf or something.

The worst thing is, I wish I could say people even cared. But it doesn’t look like they do. In fact, the tourists seem to be kind of excited that now, in addition to the stock exchange, statue of the bull, riot police, and a bomb-sniffing dog, they also have cops on horseback to pose in front of. Life goes on, the proliferation of machine guns and metal barricades just a part of our new reality. I wonder what will be the next addition to this wall if protests start up again in the Spring. Electric fences? Metal detectors on the sidewalk? A tank on the corner of Wall and Broad? I’m sure the tourists would be excited to pose in front of that also.

Instead I started getting off one stop earlier, at Bowling Green, which had been a slightly longer walk, but was now considerably shorter as I headed around the security zone instead of straight through it. Bowling Green is the site of the big bronze bull, the one you see in the Merrill Lynch commercials. When I was a tour guide a few years ago, I used to meet tour groups at the bull, where my favorite game was to see how many people we could pile onto it (my record is 14). Tourists would snap their picture riding the bull, or sometimes pose from the back, with a smirk and a point at what makes the bull a bull, and not a steer.

Now the bull was completely gated off, with a cop car parked in front of it. For a few days the cops were feeling nice, and they’d let the tourists in one a time to take their picture with the bull. Then they got tired of managing the lines, and the bull became completely off-limits. Got to protect the bull. Because, you know, God forbid a protestor somehow sneaks in and knits it a rainbow scarf or something.

And that is really all they could do – even more than the stock exchange, the bull is nothing more than a symbol, an inanimate object responsible for no lives, no jobs, no economic activity. To add to the irony, the bull itself was an exercise in direct occupation of public space, dropped off by its sculptor in the middle of the night with no permission in front of the Stock Exchange after the crash of 1987. Try that trick now and you’ll probably get shot.

On November 2nd, as a taxpayer already millions of dollars of police overtime poorer, I got to walk to work from the Wall Street stop again. After a month and a half the local politicians, spurred mostly by the business that had experienced a huge drop in customers, had finally managed to get a deputy mayor to tour the area and convinced the city to remove some of the metal barriers. 6 hours later almost all of the barricades were back up. Now, their exact configuration seems to be in a state of almost hourly flux. The raid that evicted the Occupy Wall Street protesters has had no demonstrable effect on this, the militarized security zone has been institutionalized. The stock exchange and the bull have stayed solidly surrounded by their five-million-dollar sentinels. This is what Occupy Wall Street has produced - the city going all-out on a feint, guarding two hollow symbols of the financial establishment with an armed militia worthy of repelling the Golden Horde at the gates of Vienna.

The occupancy is 14). Tourists would snap their picture riding the bull, or sometimes pose from the back, with a smirk and a point at what makes the bull a bull, and not a steer.

...
with spatial expansion beyond Liberty Plaza. We marched along Broadway in Times Square, a stretch of street closed to traffic as a part of the Department of Transportation’s Public Plaza Program. Under Commissioner Jannette Sadik-Khan, the city has closed several blocks to auto traffic and created paved public spaces. These plazas are designed as sites of consumption, with small tables and chairs suggesting an outdoor café. They are created by the city, and maintained by a local “sponsor” (often the owners of adjacent property). DOT’s Public Plaza Program is the mirror image of City Planning’s Privately Owned Public Spaces: they are two ways the city shares responsibility for open space between government and capital. Our reclamation of such spaces implies a critique of neoliberal urban planning: whether our critique ends there or extends to a comprehen- sive rejection of both capital and the state remains to be seen. The full potential of the site was not explored – we held what amounted to a timed rally, with a fairly clear beginning and ending – but we should imagine the possibilities for future actions in these types of publicly owned, privately operated spaces. On the same day, the movement branched out further. On one hand, more privately owned public spaces and one fully public site, owned and maintained by the city itself. In the Bronx, we visited the General Assembly in Fordham Plaza (a privately owned public space), and turned the Brooklyn-bound 4 train into an open mic. In Greenwich Village, we gathered in Washington Square Park for a speech by post-colonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and a General Assembly to discuss the merits and limitations of staying in the park past closing. Like all of the city’s public parks, Washington Square is closed to traffic after dark. While staying in Washington Square Park past midnight would have meant certain arrest, but would pose a challenge to the state’s limi- tations on the commons. Most participants chose to exit the park just before it closed. The choice to move into a fully public park (as opposed to a public-private amalgam) would change the tenor of the movement significantly: if Liberty Plaza, Fordham Plaza and Times Square represent the entanglement of capital and gov- ernment. Moving to public spaces like Washington Square Park would represent a more direct engagement with the state than the movement has so far undertaken. It would imply that our target is as much the Bloomberg administration (or the state itself) as the investment bankers on Wall Street and the city agency under the mayor – issued millions of dollars in additional bonds to finance improvements that were aimed at making the incinerator more efficient and profitable.

We have to think now about how to do that, and what message would be conveyed by different sites. If our movement moves in- doors, where should we start? In- side public buildings, such as CUNY campuses or city administration of- fices? In wholly private buildings, including the headquarters of Wall Street’s biggest firms? Or in one of the many indoor Privately Owned Public Spaces scattered through- out Manhattan?

While we have so far rejected explicit demands, Occupy Wall Street communicates implicit messages in many ways: through our central organizing framework of participatory democracy and consensus; through our images and me- dia presence (including signs, social media output and The Declaration of the Occupation of New York City); and, most importantly, by the strategy of staying in Wall Street at night. Each site of struggle suggests a different narrative about our movement. “Occupation,” initially a tactic in the broader strategy of claiming a space to question the logic of capital, has now taken on a life of its own and become a de facto strategy. This movement is becoming as much about re- claiming public space as anything else. Occupy Wall Street’s implicit demand is a return to public control and ownership over land, no matter its formal ownership structure or tenure.

At Liberty Plaza, left intellectual Slavoj Žižek presented the movement with one potential vision going forward: “The only sense in which we are Communists is that we care for the commons. The commons is the commons. The commons priva- tized by intellectual property. The commons of biogenetics. For this, and only for this, we should fight.” Whether or not we use the language of communism, our fight is increasingly about openness to access the commons. Our geographic choices are opportunities to spread our vision of the public sphere. We will communicate our critique through the symbolisms of our actions.

Finding Another Way: Why Bankruptcy Is Not Right for Harrisburg

By Alexandra Hanson

Alex received her MUP from Hunter College in January 2012.

Finding Another Way: Why Bankruptcy Is Not Right for Harrisburg

By Alexandra Hanson

Alex received her MUP from Hunter College in January 2012.

For this, and only for this, we should fight.”  Whether or not our movement sees its future as one that projects an image of City Planning’s Privately Owned Public Spac- es, the many indoor Privately Owned Public Spaces scattered throughout all of New York City are symbolically significant: moving into First Park would be a reclamation of a public space rife with internal contradic- tions. The lot transitioned from a community garden to a corporate art project (on gentrification, of all things), and its future is uncertain. Expanding into First Park would be a strike against the outsourcing of public space, and the cor-

Harrisburg, the capital city of Pennsylvania, is currently embroiled in a major struggle over its debt obligations, both with its creditors and with the state. On October 11, 2011, the Harrisburg City Council voted in a free-standing vote of 4 to 3 to file Chapter 9 bankruptcy for the financially troubled city. This move is one of the most controversial in public finance today, and has launched Harrisburg into the national public finance spotlight. Civic officials are at odds with each other and with the state over access to the commons. Under Commissioner Ja-

Harrisburg's Story

Harrisburg, the capital city of Pennsylvania, is currently embroiled in a major struggle over its debt obligations, both with its creditors and with the state. On October 11, 2011, the Harrisburg City Council voted in a free-standing vote of 4 to 3 to file Chapter 9 bankruptcy. Chapter 9 is the chapter of the federal Bankruptcy Code that enables municipalities, such as counties, cities, or towns to file for bankruptcy. The city’s financial distress is a result of a failed incinerator proj- ect – the Harrisburg Resource Recovery Facility – which has sunk Pennsylvania’s capital city of $400 million in debt. While Harrisburg and State Officials Will Meet to Talk Over Takeover Law. The Bond Buyer October 22. Available at http://www. bondbuyer.com/issues/120_208/harrisburg-pa-bankruptcy-state- receivership-1032494.html

S.B. 1000142405297020368750457700178071227362.html


file for Chapter 9 bankruptcy.

Our geographic choices are opportunities to spread our vision of the public sphere. We will communicate our critique through the symbolisms of our actions.

Harrisburg's Story

Harrisburg, the capital city of Pennsylvania, is currently embroiled in a major struggle over its debt obligations, both with its creditors and with the state. On October 11, 2011, the Harrisburg City Council voted in a free-standing vote of 4 to 3 to file Chapter 9 bankruptcy.
However, despite these improvements, the EPA shut down the incinerator in 2003 because it did not comply with federal air quality standards. At the time, the incinerator carried the debt quickly ballooned. 

Over three quarters of Harrisburg’s debt is tied to its failed incinerator, originally built with $15 million in municipal bonds in the 1970s. However, the facility had problems from the start, experiencing regular ‘breakdowns and operating losses,’ and the debt quickly ballooned. 

In response to its inability to make payments and the looming remaining incinerator debt, the Harrisburg City Council chose to file for bankruptcy in mid-October by a margin of 4 to 0. The city is already in financial duress; the city has lost the primary source of revenue the incinerator had provided, and it has put Harrisburg in the national public-financial spotlight. Harrisburg’s Mayor Linda Thompson opposes the bankruptcy, as does Governor Jim Corbett of Pennsylvania. He has called the filing “illegal” because it has not been authorized by the state. 

The city has not paid the incinerator’s bottom line charge of $15 million in debt that financed it. Despite the fact that Harrisburg pays some of the highest trash disposal rates in the country, the Harrisburg Authority has been unable to make payments on the debt. The responsibility for the debt is now the City of Harrisburg, which backed the bonds. However, the City of Harrisburg has also been unable to make approximately $65 million in debt payments, more than the city’s entire annual budget. 

Over three quarters of Harrisburg’s debt is tied to its failed incinerator, originally built with $15 million in municipal bonds in the 1970s. However, the facility had problems from the start, experiencing regular ‘breakdowns and operating losses,’ and the debt quickly ballooned. 

In response to its inability to make payments and the looming remaining incinerator debt, the Harrisburg City Council chose to file for bankruptcy in mid-October by a margin of 4 to 0. The city is already in financial duress; the city has lost the primary source of revenue the incinerator had provided, and it has put Harrisburg in the national public-financial spotlight. Harrisburg’s Mayor Linda Thompson opposes the bankruptcy, as does Governor Jim Corbett of Pennsylvania. He has called the filing “illegal” because it has not been authorized by the state. 

The city has not paid the incinerator’s bottom line charge of $15 million in debt that financed it. Despite the fact that Harrisburg pays some of the highest trash disposal rates in the country, the Harrisburg Authority has been unable to make payments on the debt. The responsibility for the debt is now the City of Harrisburg, which backed the bonds. However, the City of Harrisburg has also been unable to make approximately $65 million in debt payments, more than the city’s entire annual budget. 

While bankruptcy provides some important protections to debtors, these protections often come at a significant cost. Some of the advantages of bankruptcy for municipalities identified by John Knox and Mark Levinson of Orrick, Herrington, & Sutcliffe, LLP are as follows: protection that grants an automatic stay of any legal actions against the municipality; its officials until it can be heard; a bankruptcy judge, “breathing space” to determine a plan to address its debts and cash flow problems; access to a bankruptcy judge who is likely an expert in financial arbitration, specifically relating to bankruptcy; and leverage to adjust debt and other obligations. 

However, the municipality will pay considerably for these advantages in both literal and figurative terms. While bankruptcy can provide these protections, the disadvantages are often severe and filing for bankruptcy can have long-term economic consequences that trend negatively for municipalities. One of the major disadvantages of bankruptcy is the reactive stance that credit markets will take, resulting in a loss of access to credit by the municipality. Unlike the liquidation of corporations where private entities, municipalities generally do not go out of business, even after declaring bankruptcy, and have filed for bankruptcy. 

While banking can provide some benefits, it is currently the right solution to Harrisburg’s financial woes for a number of reasons. First, the bankruptcy process is expensive and complex, and it can be costly to handle its financial troubles. The interim director of the Harrisburg Authority has developed a plan for taking over Harrisburg’s finances to ensure the continued operation of services, as well as debt, payroll and pension payments. The new law provides for a number of other changes and takes over the city’s finances to ensure the continued operation of services, as well as debt, payroll and pension payments. 

In addition to the loss of access to credit, bankruptcy also comes with significant expenses, including financial resourc- es and personnel time. In times of financial distress, munici- palities generally do not “go out of business,” even after declar- ing bankruptcy, and continue to need access to credit markets to operate. Credit-worthiness is determined by several factors, including not only the ability to make payments, but also the perception of the municipality’s willingness to repay their debt. Thus, both banks and Rating Agencies call into question the municipality’s willingness to make debt payments, especially if it has not exhausted all other avenues of solving its fiscal problems. In addition to bankruptcy’s advantages, there are actions besides bankruptcy that the city should be taking to handle its financial troubles. The interim director of the Harrisburg Authority, Shannon Williams indicated that several corpo- ral entities, as well as the Lancaster County Solid Waste Management Authority, have expressed interest in purchasing the incinerator, making this a viable option for paying off some of the cash-strapped city’s debt. 

Harrisburg’s bankruptcy proponents are now being forced to defend its right to take bankruptcy for the city, in light of the opposition from many of Harrisburg’s political and busi- ness leaders and the ruling by Judge France. Harrisburg’s City Council has rejected a plan Miller has expressed as a last resort. 

This internal conflict over whether Harrisburg should be filing for bankruptcy is a matter of resources and personnel time from proactively developing and adopting solutions to the city’s financial troubles. In addition to the discharge among city officials about whether to pursue bankruptcy, the state has taken steps to prevent Harrisburg’s bankruptcy. The Harrisburg’s receiver has been forced to file for bankruptcy, and has been unable to make payments on the debt. Once approved by the judge, the plan will be filed for bankruptcy and put into place by October 25. 

The new law provides for a number of other changes and takes over the city’s finances to ensure the continued operation of services, as well as debt, payroll and pension payments. The new law provides for a number of other changes and takes over the city’s finances to ensure the continued operation of services, as well as debt, payroll and pension payments. 

22 Ibid.
plan to address the city's financial troubles. The attorney representing the Harrisburg City Council, Mark Schwartz, called the legality of the law into question and criticized Act 47 as ineffective at serving financially troubled cities in Pennsylvania.

However, cities are entities of the state. The Tenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution reads: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people." The authorities and powers of municipalities such as cities, and towns are granted by their respective states. Twenty-six states outright prohibit municipalities from filing for Chapter 9 bankruptcy. Though Pennsylvania is not one of them, state officials have chosen to challenge Harrisburg’s right to file for bankruptcy, instead favoring an Act 47 plan. Since the Harrisburg City Council bankruptcy vote on October 11, 2011, the state has moved swiftly and aggressively to enact legislation that allows the takeover of the city by the state. The proposed Act 47 states that the city is allowed to file as well as the court ruling against the council’s right to file, signals an uphill fight for those in favor of continuing with the Chapter 9 proceedings. In addition, because of the Tenth Amendment, the bankruptcy court has a much smaller role in Chapter 9 bankruptcy proceedings than for other types such as Chapter 7 or 11 and must adhere to state law when addressing governmental activities and assets related to the bankruptcy. The inevitable conflict over the bankruptcy filing itself distracts from the pressing needs of Harrisburg’s financial troubles. Time and resources that are being used to fight over whether the city has the right to file would be better spent developing solutions to the city’s fiscal challenges.

There may come a time in the future when bankruptcy becomes necessary for Harrisburg, but today there are other alternatives that the city must explore first.

Finally, the need to access credit in the future is another major concern with the bankruptcy filing. Municipalities cannot be forced to liquidate under Chapter 9 bankruptcy, and generally do not dissolve after bankruptcy is declared. As with any municipality, Harrisburg will likely need access to credit markets in both the short and long term to continue its operations. Declaring bankruptcy will damage Harrisburg’s ability to access credit, not only because of its financial distress but also because of its perceived unwillingness to pay back its creditors. Parties both inside and outside of Harrisburg city government believe that there are additional measures that should be taken before the city seeks the last resort of bankruptcy. A few individuals in key positions within the city are the parties that have pushed the bankruptcy forward, damaging the perception of the city’s willingness to work with creditors to establish a plan that will ultimately result in the city fulfilling its debt obligation. This perception could severely damage the city’s already precarious position in the public debt markets, further damaging its chances of financial recovery by cutting off access to credit.

Comparison to Central Falls, Rhode Island

In August 2011, the city of Central Falls, Rhode Island filed for a rare Chapter 9 bankruptcy. Like Harrisburg, the city has found itself overburdened with financial obligations. A city of 19,000 with a budget of $56 million, Central Falls has $21 million in outstanding debt and $80 million in unfunded pension liabilities. However, unlike Harrisburg, which tried to file for bankruptcy before pursuing Act 47 or receivership, Central Falls is entering bankruptcy after a year under a receiver. Mayor Charles Moreau filed to put Central Falls into receivership in 2010, recognizing that the city needed significant financial restructuring to deal with its debt and pension obligations. Under Receiver Robert Flanders Jr., Central Falls has raised taxes, laid-off staff, closed its library and community center, and attempted to negotiate its obligations to retirees. Central Falls took significant steps to avoid those that have been employed by Harrisburg to deal with its fiscal crisis prior to filing for bankruptcy. In the case of Central Falls, Chapter 9 bankruptcy is truly the city’s last resort against insolvency. While Harrisburg may eventually require Chapter 9 bankruptcy to manage its financial troubles, it is not there yet. There are other options, such as those laid out in the proposed Act 47 plan that might allow the city to manage and recover from its fiscal crisis without the added cost and stigma of bankruptcy.

In addition, Central Falls’ relationship to Rhode Island in regards to the bankruptcy is dramatically different than that of Harrisburg. Rhode Island is in no position to help the struggling Central Falls, and even rescinded an offer for state aid in the summer of 2011 after Moody’s downgraded the Central Falls credit rating, indicating the possibility of default.

One in four of Rhode Island’s 39 cities are in some form of financial distress, and the state is not in a strong enough financial position to come to their aid. Rhode Island is also one of the twenty-six states that prohibit Chapter 9 bankruptcy, but the state has allowed the filing to proceed. Unlike Central Falls, the State of Pennsylvania has taken an aggressive stance against Harrisburg’s Chapter 9 filing, passing legislation that allows the governor to take over the financially distressed city. The conflict between the city and state will only add to the already arduous bankruptcy process, and is an unnecessary distraction at this stage when the city has not exhausted all other avenues to manage its financial distress.

Finally, though Central Falls has a variety of financial problems that have driven the city to the brink of insolvency, they are caused mainly by the unfunded pension. Harrisburg’s debt comes largely from its incinerator. Pension liabilities in Central Falls are an ongoing financial problem related to contracts with public sector employees, while the majority of Harrisburg’s debt is tied to one failed project. An unfunded pension is in its most basic terms – a liability. It is not an asset that can be sold or leveraged to pay for itself. The incinerator on the other hand, while deeply in debt, is an asset that the City of Harrisburg can use to pay down at least some if its debt. This is exactly one of the provisions in the proposed Act 47 plan, and is another factor that makes the case of Central Falls distinct from that of Harrisburg. This again illuminates the point that Harrisburg has not exhausted all of its options to manage its financial crisis, and therefore bankruptcy is not the appropriate solution at this point.

Conclusion

Harrisburg’s financial woes and the City Council’s controversial move to file for bankruptcy this past October have placed Pennsylvania’s capital city of 50,000 in the national spotlight. While bankruptcy can offer some protections, in the case of Harrisburg it is not the appropriate measure at this moment in time. The city has chosen to reject other alternatives that may be able to steer it through its financial troubles without the necessary costs, personnel strain, and stigma related to bankruptcy. In addition, filing for Chapter 9 before exhausting all other options sends a message that Harrisburg is unwilling to repay its debts, significantly damaging its future access to credit and hindering its financial recovery. Finally, the battle between the city and the state over Harrisburg’s right to file for Chapter 9 is diverting attention from the very pressing financial issues the city is facing. Central Falls stands as an example of a situation in which it is appropriate to file, having exhausted all other options and without impediment from the state. There may come a time in the future when bankruptcy becomes necessary for Harrisburg, but today there are other alternatives that the city must explore first. Despite the court ruling against the bankruptcy filing, conflict remains among city officials and between the city and state, distracting from developing pro-active solutions to the financial crisis Harrisburg faces.
Pandemic Health Management in Toronto: A Case Study on SARS, H1N1 and Urban Planning

By Zachary Campbell

Zac studied English and Political Science at the University of Toronto before coming to Hunter for his Masters in Urban Planning. His focus is on security planning. He interned with FEMA Region II in the Spring and hopes to one day work for the International Red Cross consulting on safety issues in cities around the world.

At its outset this project aimed to answer the question: “Did the response to the Toronto outbreak of H1N1 (Swine Flu) in April of 2009 demonstrate any significant policy or planning improvements in emergency management since the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreaks in 2003?” The question is a subset of a larger question: “Do governments, institutions and individuals learn from previous incidents?” The idea was to pinpoint changes made to pandemic emergency practice that were demonstrably better during SARS than they were during SARS. This would demonstrate not only that learning occurred, but that it was implemented, could be shared and could have impacts on future improvements. To answer my questions I reviewed a variety of literature and interviewed a number of individuals and authorities about their experience and opinions.

Background

The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) originated in the Guangdong province of China in 2002. Originally the disease was labeled as ‘atypical pneumonia’ because the epidemiology of the disease was not yet fully understood.1 The disease most likely began in animals and was then passed to humans. In February of 2003 a doctor who had treated several patients in Guandong travelled to Hong Kong, bringing SARS with him. He then infected at least 12 guests at the Metropole Hotel. One of those guests then travelled to Toronto, bringing SARS to Canada. Canada’s first SARS outbreak lasted from March 13 to April 23, 2003; a second outbreak was declared on May 23 and ended on June 30. During the two outbreaks, there were 438 SARS cases in Canada (most of which were located in Toronto, Ontario), including 44 deaths.2

SARS was unique because of its scope. While it didn’t infect many people, SARS was incredibly lethal. Furthermore, the scope of SARS was unique because of its timeframe. The disease eluded understanding for an extensive period of time, relatively speaking. This affected the perception and the management of the disease. “The new outbreak spread from the SARS ward on the eighth floor of North York General Hospital, where a 96 year old man undergoing surgery for a fractured pelvis on 19 April is believed to have contracted the disease.”3

The H1N1 (Swine Flu) infection also had zoonotic origins, originating in Mexico as a mutated strain of influenza in April, 2009.4 The first confirmed case of H1N1 struck Ontario on April 28, 2009. The World Health Organization declared Swine Flu a global pandemic on June 11, 2009. During 2009 128 people died of H1N1 in Ontario.

The scope of H1N1 was in many ways the inverse of SARS. H1N1 also infected populations who would not fit into any of the major individual risk factors for susceptible immune systems. It was easily transmitted in densely occupied residences, such as college dorms, and thousands of cases were reported across Ontario.

There are several key differences between SARS and H1N1. The most glaring difference is the fatality rate, over 10% for SARS and far less than 1% for H1N1. Nonetheless, in Ontario SARS killed 44 people while H1N1 killed 118 people. This is a testament to the difference in scope, where SARS totaled 438 cases while H1N1 totaled 2,528 cases. Other epidemiological considerations include the speed of onset and transmission of the diseases, the origin of the diseases (H1N1 was a new mutation of a known virus, while SARS was the discovery of the previously unidentified coronavirus).5 Furthermore, the geography of each disease was different. SARS was confined to Ontario, and predominantly in pockets of the Toronto-area. H1N1 spread across the entirety of Canada.

“If we dealt with fire,” says Toronto City Councilor Adam Vaughan, “the way we deal with public health you quickly understand that is absurd. Personal lack of responsibility can have huge social impacts.”6 Pandemics are inherently different from other emergencies. In order to more successfully plan for and manage pandemic emergencies the unique factors: isolation, treatment, and human resources, should be addressed.

“Fundamentally, a pandemic is not only a health crisis.” Ms. Mary Yates, Director of Human Resources York Central Hospital, said “but also a human resources crisis.” Pandemic diseases are unique from other emergencies in that they pose a larger and more direct risk to responders. Greater scope and intensity of pandemic infection affects not only the populous as a whole, but also those who are responsible to responding to it. Therefore, increased intensity of pandemic incident decreases response capacity. Due to the communicable nature of pandemic diseases, increased protection of responders (who not only have the same probability of contracting the disease as the general populous, but also the increased risk of being in proximity to infected populations) is key in managing resources and response capacity. This sentiment was conveyed by the Campbell report which stated that a very real problem during SARS was “the deep structural contradictions in hospital worker safety. These problems include a profound lack of awareness within the health system of worker safety best practices and principles.”7 Campbell cites the failure of the Ministry of Labour in Ontario to proactively inspect SARS hospitals until June 2003, when the outbreak was virtually over.

The need for isolation is also unique to communicable pandemics. This is commonly referred to as creating standoff. Standoff, in emergency management, is a barrier between the resources you want to protect and what may negatively affect them. Frequently standoff equates to physical separation and geographic distance. Physical manifestations of standoff through isolation during medical emergencies include quarantines, and negative pressure barriers in hospital rooms, and wards.

The unique element of emerging infectious diseases is their novelty, or the ‘emergence’ factor. The novelty factor affects the time which it takes to develop countermeasures. Diseases do not always respond the same way to the same response measures. This is evidenced by evolving strains of diseases such as penicillin resistant strains of bacteria, which require entirely new measures to combat them.

As James Young, the former Ontario Deputy Minister of Public Safety and manager of the SARS response, told me “the goals of managing a pandemic are saving as many lives as possible without


6 Furthermore, the standoffs “fundamentally a pandemic is not only a health crisis,” Ms. Mary Yates, Director of Human Resources York Central Hospital, said “but also a human resources crisis.” Pandemic diseases are unique from other emergencies in that they pose a larger and more direct risk to responders. Greater scope and intensity of pandemic infection affects not only the populous as a whole, but also those who are responsible to responding to it. Therefore, increased intensity of pandemic incident decreases response capacity. Due to the communicable nature of pandemic diseases, increased protection of responders (who not only have the same probability of contracting the disease as the general populous, but also the increased risk of being in proximity to infected populations) is key in managing resources and response capacity. This sentiment was conveyed by the Campbell report which stated that a very real problem during SARS was “the deep structural contradictions in hospital worker safety. These problems include a profound lack of awareness within the health system of worker safety best practices and principles.” Campbell cites the failure of the Ministry of Labour in Ontario to proactively inspect SARS hospitals until June 2003, when the outbreak was virtually over.

decreasing overall productivity.” Defin-
ing the appropriate metrics to measure this, however, is challenging. This is be-
cause as discussed before, pandemics and infectious diseases present as unique incidents, with dif-
fering planning considerations each instance.

In Toronto, pandemic response is for-
mally codified in the Ontario Influenza
Plan. The plan identifies two overall goals, and discusses some strategies and
tactics to accom-
plish those goals. These goals are 1) To
minimize serious ill-
ness and overall deaths through appropriate management of Ontar-
io’s health care system, and 2) To minimize soci-
etal disruption in Ontario as a result of an influenza pandemic.2

My analysis attempts to show the im-
portance of transportation, im-
proved readiness, and a culture of aware-
ness of risk, as well as improve-
ments in formal planning, manage-
ment of pandemics, and protection of health-
care workers. The evidence of the im-
portance of these changes in these fields comes from some of the suc-
cesses of the response to H1N1. As Dr.
Arlene King, Chief Medical Officer, To-
ronto Office of Public Health, pointed out, there are still no weaknesses in the various
densities, especially in the current anti-
spread approach of thought. Mr. James
Campbell, Director of Organizational
Development North York General Hos-
pital, had thought there were two risks:
 rebuilding deflation. “Cities encourage
density,” he said, “but density promotes spread of disease.”

“Cities focus on transit,” Mr. Campbell stated, “but disease spreads easily in confi-
ded, densely populated, public transit (trains and buses).” Ms. Mary
Yates echoed this sentiment stating that transit should be incorporated into future urban pandemic plans “as an ep-
Idemiology vector.” The importance of transport and the function of transport is going back to Mr. Campbell’s defini-
tion of the goals of pandemic response management being saving lives while managing pandemics. Nonetheless, the importance of the transit in the con-
tainment and isolation of a pandemic in a densely populated city cannot be understated as at least one person was found on the subway with SARS.

Transportation also directly affects the timeliness of the execution of op-
erations. As Ms. Susan Woolard stated “clogged traffic and slow transporta-
tion slows response times through out the duration of an incident.” Ms. Woolard specifically pointed out the heavy traffic along the Don Valley Parkway, which is the major North-South artery highway in Toronto. She stated that the 407 highway alleviated some of the East-West congestion by creat-
ing a redundant route. Ultimately traffic calming measures may improve some quality of life elements in densely pop-
ulated areas. Urban sprawl (low density) and considerations to other modes, like bi-
cycle and pedestrian, but they can slow both private trips as well as trips crucial to an incident response.

Transportation is also critical because as Mr. James Campbell said “SARS was a hospital based problem.” Even when a pandemic is successfully isolated, health care systems are often hit by a hospital based problem and confining it to hos-
pitals, moving resources (both people and commodities) to and from those hospitals is critical. As Mr. Mike Vocilka pointed out, the “amalgamation of the city made the hospitals more special-
ized.”

The amalgamation of Toronto occurred in 1998, which merged the downtown core with the four surrounding munic-
ipalities to create what the city currently refers to as “the greater Toronto area”, or more colloqui-
ally “the megacity”. This includes what was previously the city of Toronto it-
self, East York, Etobicoke, North York, Scarborough and York. The merger was done to facilitate the epidemiological specialization of the city, and to provide more prov-
vincial and municipal services. This amalgamation “is geograph-
ically codified in the Ontario Influenza
Plan.”

As Mr. Vocilka stated that the increased specialization that has occurred as a re-
sult of the amalgamation “is geographic-
ally awkward because a pandemic outbreak may be localized in one part of a city or it may spread across bound-
daries, yet the bulk of the isolation rooms and pandemic capabili-
ties are located in single points in the city.” He made two recommendations that could help to address some of the issues arising with the specialization and transporta-
tion difficulties: “community medicine with US teams could help determine appropriateness of pandemic response and routing” and “field triage teams could help improve situational awareness and to determine if an incident being overwhelmed would require au-
thorization to do so – i.e. doctor level training”.

Mr. Vocilka’s points illustrate some of the implications of physical planning and its management. Culture of diver-
sity in this case is a pandemic risk factor for cities. Diversity in con-
junction with globalization, which Dr. Young has stated “created higher risk because there were more mobile pop-
ulation groups”, equals greater overall risk.

The duality of transportation is that it is not only crucial to the productivity and livelihood of a city, but it can simultaneously help to spread disease and help to spread the needed resources to respond to that disease.

The logistical changes between SARS and H1N1 seemed to have made some difference, but not enough. The cycling of SARS control of public awareness and stockpiles helped to protect respond-
ents and meet some basic needs dur-
ing H1N1. They also helped to contain the spread within hospitals, through new isolation improvements. Nonethe-
less, the contract supply system from the federal government is still a major point of weakness. This is especially difficult, considering that the bulk of the plan-
ing and operations are executed by provincial and municipal workers.

Operational improvements between the two outbreaks included the for-
malization of screening tools and other re-
ponser protections. These allowed for faster, improved practices, such as utilizing ventilators or staff manage-
ment tools to maintain levels of surface during working quarantines. Despite the formalization of many practices, as well as the creation of a Public Influenza Pandemic, there are still no mechanisms to address opera-
tional weaknesses. For instance, weak leadership would decrease legitimacy of govern-
ment actions that occurred during SARS, except it is more likely that the miscommuni-
cation would be to the public instead of the hospitals.” And while the advent of social media, especially Twitter, offers opportunities as well, as demonstrated by exercises like the X-24 run out of Berkley to demon-
strate the speed of social media in the event of an emergency.

While the changes in the way we com-
municate have changed radically since SARS, and this presents a new plan-
ning consideration not addressed by H1N1, I don’t believe this to be one of the biggest future risks. Mr. Young stated it best, “complacency is the biggest risk.” Complacency at all levels of government means that the governmental risk is the biggest risk.

While there were many shortfalls to pandemic planning prior to SARS, one of the biggest seems to have been the lack of consideration that a catastrophic pandemic was given.

Conclusion
I believe that the case study details can be used to strengthen future inter-
period-between SARS and H1N1. Furthermore, I believe the study also illustrates some points for future im-
provements. Unfortunately the case study in question seems to evidence that readiness policies (and policies in general) are not effective in a linear way. By this I mean that governments and people only plan for risk, in this case pandemics, once the culture has changed because the incident has oc-
curred and those responsible for policy change have experienced the incident.

The Incident Management System and higher levels of government coordina-
tion allowed for a more controlled flow of information. This manifested itself in pre-planned messages, established and anticipated timelines and a clearer chain of communication. Nonetheless, the weaknesses that occurred, which the government does not have control. As James Young stated, there is a potential future risk of giving false untruthful information which “would recre-
ate the lack of clarity of communica-


Downton Toronto Subway station

Situationally aware is one of the factors where I believe there have been vast advances. The Ontario Agency for Health Promotion and Protection (OAHPP) is a tremendous success. The disunity of laboratories and scientific practice prior to H1N1 illustrated that there was room for improvement in how the scientific element of pandemic practice can be coordinated. Nonetheless, while the OAHPP has vastly improved coordination of laboratory practice, it is hard to establish how much of an impact this has had, since the two diseases in question were very different. Furthermore, there still does not seem to be a push to address the changes in behavioral patterns during a pandemic.

While many countries and private airlines have begun instituting security measured geared at protecting against some kinds of terrorism, the consideration of protecting against pandemic transmission at major transit hubs is still lacking. This is in part due to a technological/medical disadvantage: it took four days for H1N1 to present itself? None- theless, while the OAHPP has vastly improved coordination of laboratory practice, it is hard to establish how much of an impact this has had, since the two diseases in question were very different. Furthermore, there still does not seem to be a push to address the changes in behavioral patterns during a pandemic.

Acknowledgements:
During the course of my research I wound up interviewing individuals from many different fields. I would like to thank all of them, as well as my ad- visor Professor John Chin, Head of the Urban Planning Department, Hunter College. My interviewees included: James Campbell, Director of Organiza- tional Development North York Gen- eral Hospital; Samantha Eng, Commu- nications Associate for Public Health Nova Scotia; Mike Vociila, Paramedic Toronto EMF; Adam Vaughan, City Councillor, Toronto; Dr. Arlene King, Chief Medical Officer, Toronto Office of Public Health; Jay Rosenblatt, Lawyer; Simpson Wige; Mary Yates, Director of Human Resources York Central Hospit- al; Dr. James Young, the former On- tario Deputy Minister of Public Safety, Professor Roger Kiel, Undergraduate Program Director at Ryerson Univer- sity, Political Ecologist; Susan Woolard, Director Emergency Services Program, Professional Practice, Research and Edu- cation at North York General Hosp- ital; and Dr. Alan Holmes, President at Global Medical Services/Global Con- sulting. The people I interviewed pro- vided insight into the responses, and valuable opinions critical to formulating an accurate analysis of whether or not pandemic response has improved. Thank you.

Shifting Public Opinion in Favor of Active Transportation:
Perceptions of Roadway Safety in New York City
By Alyssa Pichardo

Alyssa has been a researcher on the New York City Community Air Survey for the past three years. She is currently working on research to assess the in- jury reduction potential of safe streets designs in New York City as a public health researcher and as a volunteer for Transportation Alternatives.

In recent years, the surge in cycling and pedestrian spaces in New York City has prompted a dialogue about the relationships between space, cycling and pedestrians. Initiatives to increase active transportation through cycling and walking are on the rise, combating the public health risks associated with sedentary lifestyles. Complete street design provides greater access and mobility for pedestrians and cyclists and therefore more opportunities for ac- tive transportation. Increasingly, public health literature provides evidence to support active transportation in New York City and to combat opposition to complete streets planning.

However, public opinions expressed in local media and legislative reforms promote the belief that our roadways are becoming less safe with the intro- duction of complete streets designs. This article attempts to debunk public myths surrounding active transporta- tion in New York City, to illuminate the realities of roadway safety with epi- demiological and scientific data, and suggests solutions to improve safety and provide active transportation across New York City.

The Myth: Cycling and walking in New York City are deadly

Blogs and news media have used ac- counts of pedestrian and cyclist fatalities to negatively skew public percep- tion about safety. For example, a lo- cal blog, Streetsblog NYC, publishes “Weekly Carnage” reports every Friday afternoon. The Weekly Carnage sec- tion provides direct links to the most recent media coverage of pedestrian and cyclist deaths on New York City streets. These reports, in addition to the news coverage they connect to, continue to give the impression that cycling and walking in New York City are deadly.

The Reality

New York City as a whole has one of the lowest rates of traffic fatalities in the country. Traffic fatality rates for all roadway users are lower in New York City than nearly every other major US city with the exception of Portland, Or- egon. 1

Solutions to further reduce traffic fatalities

While safer on a national level, New York City has more than twice the traf- fic fatality rate of Stockholm, Sweden (3.49 deaths/100,000 people compared to 1.23 deaths/100,000 people). 2 Swe- den is charting its way toward zero traffic deaths through the Vision Zero Initiative, with policies and roadway designs aimed at preventing all traffic deaths. New York City should draw upon the work of Stockholm to continue improving safety.

Furthermore, Vision Zero initiatives, which include pedestrian safety im- provements, should specifically tar- get areas frequented by risk adverse groups such as women and the elderly. Increasing safety for seniors is especial- ly crucial since seniors suffer from sig- nificantly high levels of pedestrian fa- talities in New York City, where they ac- count for 38% of all pedestrian deaths yet constitute only 12% of the total population. 3 Creating safer routes to destinations frequented by risk adverse groups is the first step in attracting new active transportation users since these groups less frequently engage in walk- ing and cycling when there is a percep- tion of danger. Targeted areas could in- clude grocery stores, farmers markets, schools, playgrounds and community and senior centers.

The Myth: Cycling and Walking in Dense Urban Areas is Unhealthy Due to Air Pollution

Recent reports in the media have pro- moted some false assumptions about air pollution exposure during active transport. For example, The Atlantic, citing recent toxicology research stated, “One Downside to Bicycle Commuting: Biker’s Lung,” creating the impres- sion that cycling and walking in dense urban areas is unhealthy because of air pollution.

The Reality

The truth is that short-term air pol- lution exposure is greater for cyclists. However, the overwhelming benefits of cardiovascular exercise outweigh these negative impacts, according to Dr. Michael Brauer, an atmospheric re- searcher in Vancouver, BC. Dr. Brauer’s research team has assessed on road- way, near roadway and fully separated from vehicular traffic cyclist air pollu- tion exposure. 4 Dr. Brauer’s research found that roadway designs, which separate cyclists from moving and idling vehicu- lar traffic, significantly reduced pollut- ant exposure. Particularly, when bicycle boxes, in which cyclists are provided a space to wait in front of idling cars, and planted medians were employed in roadway designs. 5

In regards to pedestrian health, Dr. Al- fredo Morabia, an epidemiologist at Queens College, has completed pub- lic health research on the air pollution exposure and physical activity of mo- torists, public transit riders and pe- destrians in New York City. Dr. Morabia and his team found similar air pollution exposure rates for all users. Their work also concludes that lower air particulate exposure for motorists only when they drove with

1 About Streetsblog.org’s Weekly Carnage, http://www.streetsblog.org/about-the-weekly-carnage/
5 New York City has more than twice the traffic fatality rate of Stockholm, Sweden (3.49 deaths/100,000 people compared to 1.23 deaths/100,000 people)
Closed windows and with internal air circulation engaged. More importantly, the study found that the physical activity of those commuting by walking was nearly twice that of motorists, resulting in a potential daily physical caloric expenditure that could stop the obesity epidemic. The potential to improve public health through active transportation is significant and making modifications to roadway redesigns will further minimize health risks.

**Solutions to further reduce air pollution exposure during active transportation**

To further reduce the air pollution exposure of pedestrians and cyclists, NYC DOT should continue to introduce cycling lanes physically separated from vehicular traffic and incorporate green streets in all of New York State, according to hospital patient logs. It is important to note that data from both hospital patient logs and police reports may underestimate real world incident rates. 6

Other public health research counters the idea that cyclists endanger pedestrians, instead suggesting that the presence of cyclists can improve pedestrian safety. Research has shown the presence of cyclists overwhelmingly increases the safety of pedestrians. Research in 24 California cities from 1997 to 2007 demonstrated that cities with higher levels of cycling reduced pedestrian fatalities by more than half, from 15.5% to 6.3%. 7

**Bicycle Box standing area for cyclists in front of $40 million case at intersection of Cheyenne St. & Stanton St., Manhattan. Provides space for cyclists to reduce exposure to tailpipe emissions while stopped at intersections.**

**The Reality**

While the preliminary research that Hunter College professors Tuckel and Milczarski have presented on the incidence of specific laws for each travel mode is crucial to create public accountability for unsafe behavior. If more pedestrians, motorists, and cyclists speak out against unlawful and unsafe behaviors when they occur, the social pressures can produce positive results. While such changes may be hard to quantify, this solution recalls Jane Jacobs’ seminal argument for urban planning that creates the “eyes upon the street,” creating peer pressure to reduce unlawful behavior. 11 Jane Jacobs work transformed the field of urban planning and a similar endeavor must be undertaken to shift the foundations of transportation planning.

**The Myth: Cyclists Excessively Endanger Pedestrians**

In New York City, there is an increasing perception that cyclists excessively endanger pedestrians in roadway conflicts. The New York Post has reported on the danger of cyclists, including such articles as “Ride and Wrong in Bike Lanes,” implying the higher rates of bicycling result in greater pedestrian injuries. The New York Times also has frequently highlighted similar arguments in its Spokes Newsblog. In “The Cyclists-Pedestrian Wars,” the New York Times profiles specific and rare accidents between cyclists and pedestrians, citing the recent research of Hunter College faculty, Peter Tuckel and William Milczarski.

**The Myth: Eliminating Congestion is the Ultimate Goal of Transportation Planning**

Recent legislation in New York City, which promotes free-flowing traffic over roadway safety, has reinforced the belief that eliminating congestion is the ultimate goal of transportation planning. City Council Member James Vacca has successfully introduced and passed through the Transportation Committee, Intro 671. 12 Intro 671 requires NYC DOT to provide vehicle level of service counts before and after street redesigns such as the introduction of bicycle lanes or pedestrian spaces.

**Solutions for creating safer streets through complete streets designs**

NYC DOT should continue working to reduce vehicular travel and speeds on city streets to prevent deaths. There are several roadway designs that can be incorporated to bring about such reductions including increased street width, reducing the number of travel lanes, increasing visibility at intersections for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists with sidewalk extensions at intersections, and expanding the 25 mph zone program across the city. Furthermore, New York Police Department (NYPD) must prioritize traffic enforcement of safer vehicle speeds by ardently enforcing the
speed limit of 30 mph. And finally, it is crucial to remove the stipulations in Intro 671 for vehicular level of service metrics gathered by NYCDOT on major roadway projects, or those affecting four city blocks or more. Vehicular level of service metrics should only be employed when similar public transit, pedestrian and cyclist level of service metrics are also simultaneously assessed on redesigned streets.

Conclusions

The data and statistics highlighted here provide clear counterpoints to some of the most egregious lambasting of active transportation initiatives in New York City. Several strategies were presented that directly address public misconceptions of roadway safety, including the adoption of Vision Zero initiatives. In addition, targeted safe streets improvements should only be employed when similar public transit, pedestrian and cyclist level of service metrics are also simultaneously assessed on redesigned streets.

Traffic safety data can be a key element in transforming public opinion as communities and planners move forward with transportation improvements for cyclists and pedestrians. Web portals such as CrashStat.org and ITO World’s USA Road Casualties Map are a starting point to provide location-based crash information to communities, but detailed and frequent reporting is lacking. If these web portals provided quarterly or biannual updates from city, state and federal databases, roadway safety information could be easily disseminated. However, regulatory barriers such as the use of Freedom of Information Act requests and subsequent department follow-ups remain and can slow the release of data. Therefore, in New York City, it is crucial that NYCDOT, NYCDOT and local hospitals provide complete traffic injury and fatality data to the public without prior public inquiry. By proactively providing traffic safety information frequently and directly to the public, cities will improve transparency and increase grassroots support for safe street developments.

Mixing Zone for cyclists and left turning motorists at intersection of 1st Ave. traveling north along the protected bike lane and left turning motorists.

New York City Bike-Share

By Jeff Peel

Jeff is a first year Master of Urban Planning candidate. Prior to attending Hunter, Peel was state and local advocacy coordinator for the League of American Bicyclists providing technical assistance in policies, programs, and design to state and local departments of transportation and bicycle advocacy organizations throughout the country. Peel served on the Washington, D.C. Bicycle Advisory Council and is a current board member of Bike Walk Mississippi. His studies and work focus on promoting active transportation.

Introduction

In 2007, Paris launched its Velib’ bike sharing system, with bikes deployed throughout the city seemingly overnight. It has grown from an initial 7,000 bicycles to now over 20,000 bikes, and has become an integral part of Paris’ transportation system. The sheer volume of bikes and quick popularity of Velib’ drew much attention to bike-sharing, and many cities soon followed by implementing their own bike-share programs. With the success of systems in many other major cities of the world- London, Montreal, Beijing, Oslo, Melbourne, Mexico City, Toronto, Barcelona and Washington D.C., the question has not been if New York City will offer bike-sharing, but when. Mayor Michael Bloomberg first investigated bike-sharing in 2007. Subsequently, in September of 2011, the city announced Alta Bike Share as the future system provider. NYC Bike Share is scheduled to launch by summer 2012 with 10,000 bikes at over 600 locations. The focus now shifts to what New Yorkers should expect with this influx of bikes, what challenges should be expected with implementation, and what is needed to ensure that bike-sharing in New York is successful.

Background

Bike-sharing is a membership based bicycle transit system, created through a network of bicycles available at stations or “docks” throughout the city. Alta Bike Share’s Boston and Washington D.C. systems, price membership by day, week, or year, with costs ranging from $5 a day to $75 for an annual membership. Membership through an individual credit card serves to track the bikes to protect against theft or damage. Should a bike be stolen or badly damaged, the member will be charged $1,000 for replacement. On top of membership costs, progressive fees are then tallied the longer a user has the bike undocked. These fees help ensure circulation of the bikes throughout the system.

The fluidity of the bike-share system is one of the greatest strengths of the program. Bikes may be taken from any one of the 600 stations and returned to any other station within the system. Station proximity will ensure easy user access to other stations should one become full or empty. It is not necessary to return the bike to the point of trip origin such as with car-sharing nor must the user travel along a fixed route, as with transit. Sometimes, at stations where docks fill-up or empty frequently, users cannot naturally rebalance the appropriate quantity of bikes to docks ratio. When this happens, service crews must manually add or remove bikes from the station, typically via a service truck or van.

Jeff is a first year Master of Urban Planning candidate. Prior to attending Hunter, Peel was state and local advocacy coordinator for the League of American Bicyclists providing technical assistance in policies, programs, and design to state and local departments of transportation and bicycle advocacy organizations throughout the country. Peel served on the Washington, D.C. Bicycle Advisory Council and is a current board member of Bike Walk Mississippi. His studies and work focus on promoting active transportation.

Introduction

In 2007, Paris launched its Velib’ bike sharing system, with bikes deployed throughout the city seemingly overnight. It has grown from an initial 7,000 bicycles to now over 20,000 bikes, and has become an integral part of Paris’ transportation system. The sheer volume of bikes and quick popularity of Velib’ drew much attention to bike-sharing, and many cities soon followed by implementing their own bike-share programs. With the success of systems in many other major cities of the world- London, Montreal, Beijing, Oslo, Melbourne, Mexico City, Toronto, Barcelona and Washington D.C., the question has not been if New York City will offer bike-sharing, but when. Mayor Michael Bloomberg first investigated bike-sharing in 2007. Subsequently, in September of 2011, the city announced Alta Bike Share as the future system provider. NYC Bike Share is scheduled to launch by summer 2012 with 10,000 bikes at over 600 locations. The focus now shifts to what New Yorkers should expect with this influx of bikes, what challenges should be expected with implementation, and what is needed to ensure that bike-sharing in New York is successful.

Background

Bike-sharing is a membership based bicycle transit system, created through a network of bicycles available at stations or “docks” throughout the city. Alta Bike Share’s Boston and Washington D.C. systems, price membership by day, week, or year, with costs ranging from $5 a day to $75 for an annual membership. Membership through an individual credit card serves to track the bikes to protect against theft or damage. Should a bike be stolen or badly damaged, the member will be charged $1,000 for replacement. On top of membership costs, progressive fees are then tallied the longer a user has the bike undocked. These fees help ensure circulation of the bikes throughout the system.

The fluidity of the bike-share system is one of the greatest strengths of the program. Bikes may be taken from any one of the 600 stations and returned to any other station within the system. Station proximity will ensure easy user access to other stations should one become full or empty. It is not necessary to return the bike to the point of trip origin such as with car-sharing nor must the user travel along a fixed route, as with transit. Sometimes, at stations where docks fill-up or empty frequently, users cannot naturally rebalance the appropriate quantity of bikes to docks ratio. When this happens, service crews must manually add or remove bikes from the station, typically via a service truck or van.
As cycling proponents have waited for several years for bike-sharing to come to the city, NYC Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) has been creating a bicycle lane and pathway network. The NYCDOT has installed approximately 800 miles of bike paths, lanes, and signed routes throughout all five boroughs, of which approximately 300 miles have been built within the last four years.1

In addition to the creation of infrastructure, promotional events such as Summer Streets, NYC Bike Month, and the 5 Borough Bike tour, have increased the popularity of biking within New York City. Educational outreach, through NYC DOT sponsored public service announcements, Transportation Alternatives: Biking Rules! campaign, and Bike New York’s safe cycling educational course offerings have helped to raise awareness on bike safety throughout the city. According to pro-bike group Transportation Alternatives, New York daily cyclists now number over 200,000,4 and the NYC-DOT’s screen line counts have doubled in the last four years.5

When indexed for this growing number of cyclists, the crash rate has dropped precipitously.6

**Potential of NYC Bike Share**

With the newly created system of bike facilities and the recent increase in ridership, the foundation for NYC Bike Share to be successful is set. Thus far, the announcement of NYC Bike Share has been met with an enthusiastic response. The Quinipiack University Polling Institute found 72% of New Yorkers plan to use the system and 59% want stations in their neighborhood.1 The greatest potential of bike-sharing will not be more resources for current cyclists, but instead will provide an entry point into urban riding for many new or casual cyclists. Often, the concern over potential theft and lack of adequate indoor storage has served as a barrier, causing many interested riders to turn away from cycling. Bike-sharing effectively eliminates those justifications for not cycling, if even only occasionally.

As with Select Service Bus lines and the recent East River Ferry, bike-sharing should be seen as an additional layer to the city’s transportation system that fills gaps in the traditional bus and subway systems and allows residents and visitors more choices in how to get around. Bike-sharing can also serve as a last-mile solution to transit trips. Bike-share trips in Brooklyn can help decrease travel time to stations or allow for single-seat trips when transit users pedal to their final line rather than time consuming transfers. Perhaps the greatest contribution is improved transportation for cross-town Manhattan trips that are served by few subway lines and walking-paced bus service.

Analysis of crash rates amongst cities with bike-sharing systems has shown that system users are less likely to be involved in a serious crash than those using their own bike.8 Based on these observations, new, transportation-oriented cyclists appear to be more risk averse than those who are experienced cycling enthusiasts and ride accordingly. This phenomenon can be attributed to a number of factors. Evidence points to a safety in numbers effect;9 the more people cycling, the safer all cyclists are. This is not only attributed, to a greater awareness from motorists on the presence of cyclists, but also, to the pressure on transportation officials to create safe cycling facilities, and increased awareness regarding appropriate cycling behavior.

**Challenges to NYC Bike Share**

Despite an improved safety record in New York City, as well as those cities with active bike-sharing systems, NYCDOT and local cycling advocates must prepare to expand education and other safety measures. Additionally, the New York Police Department (NYPD) must increase the caliber of traffic enforcement, to ensure new bike-share users remain safe. Though no other bike share programs have reported any fatalities, high numbers of crashes or injuries would create a safety and public relations problem for the system and potentially hinder its success and community acceptance.

While NYCDOT has touted the benefits of the system, they have downplayed the impact of the actual stations themselves. The stations can range between approximately 30 to 100 feet in length depending on the number of bicycle docks available. Stations will be placed in city parks, public plazas, along sidewalks, and in-street in place of curbside vehicular parking. Bike-share stations add another layer of complexity to already contentious spaces. In order to keep bike-sharing approval ratings high, it is important that station placement not interfere with pedestrian movement or access to limited green space. Similarly, removal of on-street auto parking for facilities has already proven to attract the ire of some vocal residents and business owners. NYCDOT must adequately make the case that the turnover of bikes at on-street stations is a more efficient and profitable use of this scarce public resource than for vehicular parking.

**Long Term**

The greatest long term challenge facing NYC Bike Share is the expansion of both size and reach. The initial 600 stations will be located in Manhattan, below 60th Street, and in sections of western Brooklyn. A crowd-sourced map of potential station placements shows large demand outside of the initial area and across all five boroughs.

While other systems have had the opportunity to grow in size, the New York City program may run into some difficulties due to the lack of public funding. Unlike other U.S. systems, Alta Bike Share will rely solely on sponsorship and user-generated revenue to cover costs. Though the lack of public money to New York’s system may have helped win over some skeptics, local, state, and/or federal funds10 should be explored for continuous system growth. Washington, D.C. and neighboring Arlington County have successfully used Federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds for their system. Also, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has updated their grant program11 to allow for funding for cycling related improvements, including bike-sharing.

With shrinking federal funds for bicycling and transit, New York should continue to look to local private sources to help pay for system expansion. D.C. succeeded in attracting developers and agencies to sponsor stations as a transportation demand management strategy or in substitution for a portion of required auto parking.12

**Conclusion**

NYC Bike Share will combine the success of NYCDOT and local cycling advocates in growing the number of cyclists in the city and increasing safety. Bike-sharing will provide another transportation option which will prove to be beneficial in accessing parts of the city not well-served by transit. Consequently, the program will lessen travel time by offering an alternative to subway transfers. Advocates and city officials should be preparing a variety of educational material for bike-share users as well as working with law enforcement to improve bike-safety. NYCDOT must adequately prepare city residents for the physical impact on parks, sidewalks, and streets that bike-share stations will have, particularly where auto parking will be affected. Finally, with bike-sharing in New York likely to rival success of programs in other cities, city officials should look to additional public and private sources of funding to facilitate network expansion.

---

5 "DOT's screen line counts have doubled in the last four years."
9 "From London to D.C., Bike-Sharing Is Safer Than Riding Your Own Bike." Injury Prevention, 26 October 2009.
CONTACT URBAN REVIEW:
urbanreview.hunter@gmail.com
695 Park Avenue West Building 1611
New York, NY 10065
PH: 212-772-5518
F: 212-772-5593

To learn more about the graduate program in Urban Affairs & Planning at Hunter College visit our website at:
http://www.maxweber.hunter.cuny.edu/urban