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Resources and Recommendations Planning for Social Infrastructure during and after COVID-19



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Resources and Recommendations

Planning for Social Infrastructure during and after COVID-19

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Our Collaborators

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we live in and interact with public space. It has challenged cities to provide safe environments for residents to complete essential shopping trips, to spend time outdoors, and to interact with the built environment. Our research investigated the ways in which cities have responded to the health crisis by using, planning, and designing their public open space and local streets - **social infrastructure**.

Resources

We reviewed a variety of professional and media sources to explore the topics of:

- *Equitable access* to public space and resources through community-based initiatives;
- *Promoting healthy practices* while communities adapt to a new, socially-distant lifestyle;
- *State and Industry guidelines* for planning through and after COVID-19.

Our research found discussions related to:

- The increasing importance of diverse and genuine community engagement and input in COVID-19 planning responses.
- The opportunity of Open and Shared Streets to promote healthy lifestyles by giving residents space to enjoy freely and safely.
- The resilience of communities as seen in farmers markets, exercise clubs, and neighborhood relationships is crucial to the physical and mental health of its members.
- Essential businesses and workers must continue to be protected as cities slowly reopen.
- Cities' COVID-19 responses must be inclusive of an intersectional understanding of their communities.
- ... and more.

Our **Resources** section offers readings, resources, and literature based on U.S. industry leaders.

Recommendations

A number of organizations present in the Massachusetts community have created a [set of recommendations](#), "Adapting Streets for Pandemic Response and Recovery in Massachusetts". Among the contributors are MassPIRG, WalkBoston, Allston Brighton Health Collaborative, Green Streets Initiative, the LiveableStreets Alliance and many more. Their recommendations for streets within the COVID-19 pandemic include supporting safe access to transit service, making biking safer and easier, supporting small business recovery, adjusting curbside management, creating safe places for people to walk and play outside near their homes, and provide street safety in a way that does not require police enforcement. The complete set of guidelines can be found in in the **Recommendations** section of this document.

These resources and recommendations are in no way absolute, but should be considered supplemental tools in working towards a more equitable and just planning response, during and after COVID-19; we can always do more to serve our communities.

Resources

Industry Guidelines:

“Key planning recommendations for mass gatherings in the context of COVID-19”, World Health Organization

[This](#) is a May 2020 document from the World Health Organization titled “Key planning recommendations for mass gatherings in the context of COVID-19”. It has been written as a resource for “host governments, health authorities and national or international organizers of mass gatherings containing risks of COVID-19 transmission”. The publication recognizes the importance of mass gatherings, and addresses how to mitigate the public health risks of mass gatherings through normative and epidemiological context, risk factor evaluation, capacity to apply prevention, and determination of overall risk.

“WHO mass gathering COVID-19 risk assessment tool - religious events”, World Health Organization

The above is titled “WHO mass gathering COVID-19 risk assessment tool - religious events”. The [document](#) allows for independent decision making for religious communities with the steps for the toolkit as follows: instructions, decision tree, risk evaluation, risk mitigation, decision matrix, and risk communication. The toolkit assigns a risk “score” to the event after being provided with the details, which is then used to make the final decision.

“COVID-19 Resources”, American Planning Association

This [webpage](#) from the American Planning Association is updated weekly with resources in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Organized resources include the topics of planning methods, public participation, economic impacts, equity, federal and state support, housing, infrastructure, land use, transportation, multi-topic resources, as well as the APA COVID-19 guiding principles and response. Each subsection links articles, podcasts, videos, and presentations that are easy to find, but some require an APA membership.

Information Clearing Houses for COVID-19, American Planning Association

The American Planning Association’s [Information Clearinghouses for COVID-19](#) serves as a central location for planners to find information from government entities and allied professional organizations regarding the pandemic. The agencies represented in the linked resources include US Interagency on Homelessness, Smart Cities Council, National Recreation and Park Association, International Association for Public Participation and more. A COVID-19 GIS hub, Local Action Tracker, and the latest CDC information can be found here.

New Online Public Engagement Resources, American Planning Association

Available to members, the American Planning Association has curated a [collection](#) of over 60 resources for using online public engagement tools. The APA recognizes the importance of public meetings and the resources collected provide background information and policy guidance, and explains how agencies are effectively using online public engagement.

Rapid Response: Emerging Practices for Cities, National Association of City Transportation Officials

[“Rapid Response: Emerging Practices for Cities”](#) has been put out by the National Association of City Transportation Officials highlighting best practices for transportation systems. The focus areas include maintaining transportation systems to safely move essential workers and goods, keeping front-line workers safe, assessing pick-up and delivery needs, relieving crowded areas for physical distancing, creating clear messaging of city policies, and supporting unsheltered and vulnerable populations.

Resources

“Ten Ways Every City Should Respond to COVID-19 on its Streets, compiled by NACTO”, StreetsBlogUSA

“Ten Ways Every City Should Respond to COVID-19 on its Streets, compiled by NACTO” is an [article](#) from StreetsBlog. Among the ten actions are 1) waiving public transportation fares, 2) building popup bike lanes, 3) classifying bikes as essential travel, 4) offer free bike share access, 5) convert walk signals to reduce touching, 6) establish dedicated drop off and delivery zones, 7) close streets that go through parks, 8) hosting culturally sensitive open street events for every community member, 9) adjusting signal timing to slow vehicles, and 10) using city property to open testing locations accessible to those without cars.

Complete Streets and COVID-19

Smart Growth America has compiled a GIS [map](#) of Complete Streets and COVID-19 throughout the world, although most of the data is within the US. The actions on the map are broken down into community responses including open streets, micromobility, curbside management, emergency bicycle or pedestrian policy, transit operation, community engagement, advocacy campaign and “other”.

Resource Library - Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program, Massachusetts Department of Transportation

In providing examples for municipalities to use as inspiration for project ideas, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has compiled a [resource library](#) for the Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program. Within the resource library, applicants can find links to MAPC recommendations, COVID-19 transportation response center, interim design strategies, temporary traffic control, outdoor dining factsheets, and tools such as StreetMix and Tactical Urbanists Guide to Materials and Design.

Streets for Pandemic Response and Recovery, National Association of City Transportation Officials

The National Association of City Transportation Officials have created a 47 page [document](#) titled “Streets for Pandemic Response and Recovery”. It discusses a number of topics including critical services, managing speeds, sidewalk extensions, bike and roll lanes, streets for protest, pick up and delivery lanes and more. It also features a number of case studies and examples from around the world, as well as direct action steps to take.

COVID-19 ACSP Member-Sourced Resources, Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning

The Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning have compiled a list of member sourced resources found [here](#). Along with resources from the WHO, CDC, and ACSP including educational videos and online trainings; the webpage also features articles and webinars for planning in the midst of COVID-19 from ACSP member schools. The topics include articles of colleges reopening plans in fall, YouTube documentaries, and webinars.

“Parklets: Best Practices for Design and Implementation”, American Planning Association

This 2016 PAS [memo](#) has become relevant once again as it highlights “Parklets: Best Practices for Design and Implementation”. Free for APA members and \$10 otherwise, the article describes the functions of parklets through case studies to offer guidance on implementing parklet programs in communities.

“Voices from the Pandemic”, Planning

This June 2020 [special issue](#) of *Planning* is titled “Voices from the Pandemic” and illustrates planners’ personal changes and professional challenges through COVID-19. The articles discuss how planners and communities are finding new ways to live and work, and the sure to be everlasting effects of the coronavirus on planning. Available only to APA members.

Resources

State Guidelines:

“Baker Admin. Launches \$5m ‘Shared Streets and Spaces Emergency Grant Program’”, StreetsBlogMass

This [article](#) from StreetsBlog Mass highlights the Baker administrations launch of a \$5 million grant program for municipalities to be awarded anywhere from \$5,000 to \$30,000 to “quickly launch or expand improvements to sidewalks, curbs, streets, on-street parking spaces and off-street parking lots, in support of public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce in their communities.” Inspired by municipal leaders turning to the Governor expressing that they needed help, the grants will be implemented with support from MassDOT. Applications opened on June 22 and are still open at time of writing.

Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program, Massachusetts Department of Transportation

The Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program is a quick launch and quick build municipal funding program. The [webpage](#) includes the application, program details, a resource library and press releases. Within the resource library, applicants can find links to MAPC recommendations, COVID-19 transportation response center, interim design strategies, temporary traffic control, outdoor dining factsheets, and tools such as StreetMix and Tactical Urbanists Guide to Materials and Design. Recent awards have included Lowell, Provincetown, Northampton, Somerville and more to support projects such as protected bike lanes, floating bus stops, outdoor hand washing stations, and expanding paths to public resources.

“Streets for Recovery”, The Solomon Foundation

The Solomon Foundation supports the planning and design of greenway and park projects throughout Greater Boston. Within the [webpage](#), the foundation is offering their services as a thought partner to test ideas for projects within communities, for grant applications to MassDOT’s Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program and MassDevelopment’s Complimentary Program for Community Organizations. The site provides links to resources such as a Liveable Streets webinar, Statewide Contracts Guide, Vendor Guide for materials, MAPC information, as well as a guide to Massachusetts Grant Programs.

Resources

Shared Goals, Recovery and Resilience:

“As Coronavirus Quiets Streets, Some Cities Speed Road and Transit Fixes”, Bloomberg CityLab

Bloomberg CityLab [article](#), “As Coronavirus Quiets Streets, Some Cities Speed Road and Transit Fixes” details how cities have taken up the opportunity of fewer cars and people on the roads to complete infrastructure projects. Included are the expansion of the LA Metro, street closures to expand bus lines in Nevada, and improvements to San Francisco rail lines. The article also briefly touches on the ethics of essential workers and the future of public transportation in a time of social distancing.

“Streets for People - for Health and Safety During COVID-19 and Beyond”, Coalition for Smarter Growth

The Coalition for Smarter Growth released a [press release](#) in April 2020, titled “Streets for People - for Health and Safety During COVID-19 and Beyond”, urging local governments to provide more space for pedestrians, bikers, and other forms of micromobility. The release touches on the decline of car usage, the lack of sidewalks wide enough for social distancing, and the opportunity for cities to seize these changes to make their communities safer and more livable.

“The Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper Transformation of Public Spaces”, Project for Public Spaces

“The Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper Transformation of Public Spaces” by the Project for Public Spaces [details](#) the labor heavy and expensive improvements made to a town are not the only stimulants of positive change. The article highlights “LQC” efforts in cities around the world through case studies and examples. Initiatives include featuring seasonal events, the integration of art, implementing community driven ideas, repurposing already existing public space, securing diverse funding resources, implementing projects in economically disadvantaged communities, management structure including friends and volunteers, and generating vision. To close, the article details how to “build capacity” and achieve LQC projects.

“Tencent’s ‘smart city’ seen as a model for post-coronavirus China”, Reuters

“Tencent’s ‘smart-city’ seen as a model for post-coronavirus China” [discusses](#) how the Chinese tech company Tencent is utilizing technology to put people and the environment first in its smart city known as ‘Net City’. The article details that the smart city will feature less streets for cars, green roofs on all buildings - and controversially the use of artificial intelligence to collect data. The article concludes that in a post-covid world, both urbanism and technology will be at the heart of the change.

“Reallocating Main Street Space to Support Community Wellbeing”, Bring Back Main Street

A national research and action campaign, “Bring Back Main Street” is advocating for the recovery of Canada’s main streets for its people, businesses, and organizations. [Memo #7](#) “Reallocating Main Street Space to Support Community Wellbeing” touches on the importance of main streets as a place for accessing essential goods and connecting with neighbors through the pandemic, as well as the social responsibility for grieving and protesting the treatment of Black lives in communities and by police forces. The article calls for streets to be reallocated by; carving out safe spaces for people, bringing business back to the street, asking the question of ‘main streets for whom?’, and using an open streets toolkit. The article is a living document and is regularly adding more resources.

Resources

“Four Ways to Build Inclusive, Healthy Places for All”, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation [article](#) titled “Four Ways to Build Inclusive, Healthy Places for All” reflects on public squares around the world and their successes and limitations. In doing so, they have identified four key considerations in placemaking: know the neighborhood, build trust and social networks, design public spaces for equity and dignity, and foster social resilience.

“Preparing for COVID-19 Recovery in Seattle”, American Planning Association

With the first reported case of coronavirus in Seattle, the American Planning Association has [interviewed](#) Seattle Director of Planning and Community Development, Sam Assefa, about the role of the planning department in the city’s recovery. Assefa strives to answer the question of “how can we do more with less?” by discussing the approach to long-term recovery, including concerns with budget, Mayor’s priorities, and planning’s role. Assefa discusses how the planning department has supported frontline responders with data and GIS support for small business stabilization, food distribution, housing assistance, health tracking of unsheltered populations and more.

“An Equitable Parks Plan Driven by Data”, American Planning Association

“An Equitable Parks Plan Driven by Data” [tells the story](#) of the New York City Community Parks Initiative, an effort to allocate city funds to underfunded neighborhood parks. By using data and mapping, the NYC Parks Department has been able to redesign 47 community parks since 2014, increasing park equity, job opportunities, and community engagement.

Equity:

“Connecticut Study Highlights Coronavirus Racial Disparities”, New England Public Media

In New England Public Media [article](#), “Connecticut Study Highlights Coronavirus Racial Disparities” Senior Research Assistant Kelly Davila, with the non-profit Data Haven, says how she could “hardly keep up with the data” that was showing the impacts of COVID-19 on Black and Latino communities. Davila hopes that the study, reporting health determinants including housing, education, food access, and income, will help policy makers further understand systemic racism.

“Social Equity Knowledge Base”, American Planning Association

The American Planning Association has compiled a large [knowledge base](#) on Social Equity with links to background resources, clearinghouses, books, reports, briefing papers, articles, blog posts, fact sheets, case studies, online trainings, videos, audio and podcasts, interactive maps, toolkits, guides, models, comprehensive plans, functional plans, standalone policies, regulations, webpages, and related collections.

“Planning for Equity Policy Guide”, American Planning Association

The American Planning Association created a [Planning for Equity Policy Guide](#) in 2019 to emphasize and strengthen the responsibility and role of planners in equity advancement. It brings attention to the importance of equity in all policies, and cross-cutting equity issues such as gentrification, environmental justice, and community engagement by giving policy options. It also provides examples of equity policies in practice regarding climate change, education, energy consumption, health equity, heritage preservation, housing, mobility and transportation, and public space.

Resources

“How do we respond to anti-black racism in urbanist practices and conversations?”, Canadian Urban Institute

The Canadian Urban Institute has hosted a [webinar](#), “How do we respond to anti-black racism in urbanist practices and conversations?”, now available on YouTube. The five key takeaways, as identified by the Institute, include: the fact that public spaces are not neutral but sites of everyday racism and oppression, the reality that black communities are experiencing the crises of COVID-19 and institutional racism at once in very different ways, the necessity to make room for Black grief and empowering marginalized voices, the critical role of academia and urban planning professions in amplifying Black experience in scholarship and curriculum, and that there are many tangible ways to take necessary action (citing Jay Pitter’s “A Call to Courage: An Open Letter to Canadian Urbanists” as required reading for all urbanists”).

“Equitable Development During & After COVID-19: Five Takeaways”, Project for Public Spaces

The Project for Public Spaces [article](#), “Equitable Development During and After COVID-19 Five Takeaways” describes takeaways from 2020, regarding both systemic racism and the COVID-19 pandemic. The takeaways include that, 1. safety and comfort in public space is foundational and deeply personal, 2. real community engagement means real power and choice and meeting people where they are, 3. while open street policies could help businesses, permitting and implementation remain major barriers - especially in communities of color, 4. supporting street vendors not only reduces health risks right now, but supports entrepreneurship in the long term, and 5. as public budgets shrink and businesses struggle, space may be our most valuable asset.

“‘Safe Streets’ Are Not Safe for Black Lives”, Bloomberg CityLab

Bloomberg CityLab’s [article](#), “Safe Streets are not Safe for Black Lives”, warns that COVID-19 pedestrian street designs could have adverse effects if they fail to correctly take diverse public input into consideration. It brings to attention the main concern of protecting the public from vehicular accidents, rather than “racism, transphobia, xenophobia, and the territorial entitlement to space”. Perhaps the most powerful quote within the piece is, “Without a plan to include and protect Black, Brown, Indigenous, trans, and disabled people, or a plan to address anti-Black vigilantism and police brutality, these open streets are set up to fail.” The article identifies concrete ways to lean into supporting Black life, including: divestment from police agencies in public works and transportation agencies, the implementation of environmental justice plans in infrastructure plans, empowering choice by addressing scarcity in all modes of transportation, the design of low-stress street networks that center the safety of Black people, holding industries accountable after they have released statements of support, modified employee agreements so no one is forced to serve the needs of law enforcement, and mandatory equitable distribution plans for bikeshares.

Resources

Shared Streets:

“To make St. Louis safer hundreds of streets were closed. What if this was a mistake?”, St. Louis Post-Dispatch

This [article](#), “To make St. Louis safer hundreds of streets were closed. What if this was a mistake?” comes out of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. St. Louis began this “defensible space” strategy nearly 50 years ago, but a recent study indicates that the “schoemehl pots” have not contributed to public safety and may actually be connected to higher crime rates. That study, although it is still in the works, can be found [here](#). It has been a conflicted topic for residents, some who appreciate privacy and slowed traffic while living on a blocked road, while others cite issues of suburban design in an urban setting and slowed emergency response time.

“The Pandemic has Pushed Aside City Planning Rules. But to Whose Benefit?”, New York Times

New York Times [article](#) “The Pandemic has Pushed Aside City Planning Rules. But to Whose Benefit?” discusses the COVID response in Oakland, California. The article reveals the weaknesses initially of the street changes the city had made; including the fact that its most vulnerable residents are not outdoor dining in restaurants anyway, and that many children and community members do not feel safe from violence in public spaces. The article continues to expose the weaknesses of community engagement/meetings. Oakland has conducted a survey on how its open streets are impacting residents, which is linked [here](#). The article states that the survey has been disproportionately completed by upper-class, white residents.

“Your COVID-19 ‘Sidewalk Wars’ Thinkpiece is Missing the Point”, StreetsBlogUSA

StreetsBlog has released an [article](#) titled “Your COVID-19 ‘Sidewalk Wars’ Thinkpiece is Missing the Point” that discusses the “pavement wars” between ‘good social distancers’ (going out alone for groceries only when needed) and ‘bad social distancers’ (couples holding hands, joggers in urban areas) - and why the situation is really to blame on the lack of adequate pedestrian infrastructure. The article is particularly interesting because it discusses that even in a time when cars are no longer present, the infrastructure designed for them remains an issue. The article also references the future of walking in cities, with examples from Italian residents needing permits to walk to the store and Beverly, MA’s streets becoming one-way, no loitering zones.

“Speeding Up Slowed Streets Projects”, American Planning Association Massachusetts Chapter

This resource is a [PowerPoint slideshow](#) titled “Speeding Up Slowed Streets Projects”, hosted by Whitney Burdge, a Transportation Planner for Canadian engineering company Stantec. It provides examples of slow streets around the US and the world, provides a list of pros and ‘considerations’ of slow streets, as well as a number of extremely detailed case studies from Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Italy to show how to fast track projects in a sustainable way.

Resources

Public Space:

“A Necessary Paradigm Shift in How We Use Urban Space”, American Planning Association

The American Planning Association [article](#) “A Necessary Paradigm Shift in How we Use Urban Space” delves into the question of the changes COVID-19 has inflicted on our communities, and whether these changes will be temporary, or permanent. It emphasizes the importance of green, public space in cities for outdoor recreation, stress reduction, and even accelerated recovery from illness. The article also touches on outdoor dining, shared and open streets (some that have become permanent), and the need for green space in neighborhoods rather than just city centers. It also raises the question of the movement to an online working world, and if planners will soon have to account for the closing of office spaces.

“The Recovery Will Happen in Public Space”, Project for Public Spaces

A May [article](#), “The Recovery will Happen in Public Space” from the Project for Public Spaces encourages planners to think about how everyday spaces can fill people’s daily needs. It provides examples of the possibilities public spaces have, from outdoor exercise classes, theatre, child story times, community gardens, walking clubs, haircuts, libraries, temporary health clinics and more (with an emphasis on these being free for residents!), with help from local organizations, musicians, artists, and community organizers. The article calls for governments to work closely with public health, economic development, and social services initiatives; while pointing out that “density” is not to blame for the spread of the coronavirus, but rather the “geography of inequality”.

“COVID-19’s effect on transportation, sustainability”, The Delaware Gazette

This [article](#) from the Delaware Gazette (Delaware, OH) seeks to bring attention to residents' appreciation of “public amenities, such as parks and trails” during the pandemic. It does so by citing the environmentally beneficial spillover effects of COVID-19, including less traffic, increased park visits, ozone pollution at a 20-year low, and reduced air travel. The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning department pledges to continue working on these sustainable solutions in continuing to cope with COVID as well as in the post-pandemic world.

Transportation:

“Access Denied”, American Planning Association

“[Access Denied](#)” is an article about micromobility and people with disabilities; pointing out that electric scooters and bikes are created for young, able bodied people with the resources to pay for them (through a smartphone app, credit card), as well as the fact that docking stations create a physical barrier for those using wheelchairs. The article continues to describe inclusive micromobility, four simple rules for a micromobility ordinance, accessibility action plan, a path to universal mobility, and accessible ride sharing.

“Why We Must Talk About Race When We Talk About Bikes”, Bicycling

In “[Why We Must Talk About Race When We Talk About Bikes](#)” author Tamika Butler highlights their experience as a gender nonconforming, queer, Black woman in their position as Executive Director at the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition. Their work highlights the importance of tackling systemic racism within biking. The article delves into the topics of bike lanes as a warning sign of gentrification, a biking ethos of exclusion, and what type of identity is considered the ‘norm’ for bikers.

Recommendations

Adapting Streets for Pandemic Response and Recovery in Massachusetts

June 16, 2020

As Massachusetts continues moving through its four-phase reopening plan, municipalities across the state will need to make changes to their streets and other public spaces in order to ensure public health and economic vitality. It will be important to support restaurants and small businesses and give people enough space to comply with physical distancing guidelines as they travel to work and other errands, get exercise, and access healthcare. Although Massachusetts has recently moved into a new phase, it's likely that infection rates will fluctuate and we could experience a second wave in the coming months, requiring adjustments to street space and an adaptive approach.

Many municipalities are experiencing budget constraints due to the impacts of the pandemic, highlighting the importance of creating a careful and clear process for the prioritization of projects. This pertains to the necessary balancing between quick-build, rapid response strategies for recovery and already planned capital improvement projects. Additionally, prioritization should ensure that support is provided first to the people who need it most, taking into account systemic inequities, unequal levels of risk and exposure, and disparate financial and social resources available to people.

Below, we've outlined several short-term recommendations for improving the way our streets can work in this new context, to keep people safe and aid our economic recovery. Throughout, it's important to keep in mind the following overarching approaches:

- **Health and Safety:** Municipal and state staff and the public need to nimbly respond to changes that may be needed to keep people safe -- whether from COVID-19 or traffic crashes.
- **Equity:** Prioritize those who are most burdened by COVID-19, including older adults, essential workers, Black and brown people, and Environmental Justice communities.
- **Partnership:** Resource community groups, Main Streets organizations, and the private sector to support municipal responses.
- **Community engagement:** Consult with community members and groups to determine the right solutions for each neighborhood, and ensure outreach is done in multiple languages and via both online and offline methods.
- **Build on what we know:** Resource plans and processes that already exist to make progress quickly. Many municipalities already know which streets are the most dangerous, where older adults and children may need special consideration, which corridors are important for commuting, and which business districts need support.
- **Rapid response:** Use quickbuild and tactical methods that are inexpensive and fast (including cones, barrels, planters, saw horses, and flex posts).

Recommendations

Recommendations:

Support safe access to transit service. It's important to make transit use as safe as possible as essential workers continue to travel, more non-essential trips are made, and more people return to work. While municipalities can't directly impact frequency, crowding, station flow, or other aspects of transit service, there are several ways that cities/towns can support transit agencies, including:

- Identify the busiest bus stops and rail surface stops and remove adjacent parking spots to lengthen waiting areas and allow for physical distancing for people walking by the stops or stations
- Create quickbuild bus lanes on key bus corridors with cones or other pop-up delineators in order to ensure buses are not stuck in traffic and, therefore, speed up frequency and reduce crowding
- Target key feeder streets to busy bus and rail surface stops to implement traffic calming and other safety measures for riders who are walking and biking to access transit, including sidewalk extensions at busy intersections to reduce crowding among people waiting to cross
- Identify bus stops that serve a high number of older adults, and add or modify seating to allow for compliance with physical distancing guidelines

Make biking easier, safer, and accessible for new riders. Bike sales have significantly increased in Massachusetts, likely signaling that there will be many new riders in the coming months as people take advantage of streets with less traffic and look for ways to commute that allow for physical distancing.

- Rapidly speed up existing programs to build protected bike lanes on key corridors, using orange barrels, jersey barriers, and other quickbuild materials to create physical separation
- Focus on corridors that are key for commuting and provide access to healthcare, food, parks, and other essential needs
- Ensure that corridors are connected to each other in a network
- Expedite the approval process for installing bike parking, particularly bike corrals that accommodate a high volume of bikes, use on-street parking spaces, and do not impinge on sidewalk space

Support small business recovery. Reallocating space from streets, sidewalks, or parking lots in business districts will help restaurants and retail stores expand their footprint and allow enough space for their customers to comply with physical distancing guidelines.

- In dense business districts, consider closing entire blocks to cars to ensure safe use of streetspace by pedestrians, shoppers, and diners. Otherwise, clearly delineate the space for pedestrians from vehicle traffic with planters, stanchions, or other vertical separation.
- Ensure ADA access is maintained, and that there is enough space on sidewalks for people passing by to comply with physical distancing guidelines. Establish a consistent walking zone that does not weave in and around tables or other furnishings, providing a clear lane for those visually or mobility impaired
- Streamline the process for restaurants and shops to apply for temporary outdoor dining and retail space
- Adjust licensing to remove non-essential restrictions around the sale and service of alcohol in outdoor spaces
- Ensure that delivery drivers and other people picking up take-out still have easy access to restaurants
- Coordinate across municipal lines to be as consistent as possible in policies and street space usage

Recommendations

Adjust curbside management, delivery, and freight strategies. Narrow sidewalks make physical distancing difficult or impossible, particularly near locations that are busy or require queuing, such as grocery stores and restaurants offering take-out. Additionally, there has been a boom in grocery and other home deliveries, necessitating changes to loading zones and pick up/ drop off areas without impeding accessibility by freight delivery.

- Provide more space for people to comply with physical distancing guidelines while walking or queuing by reallocating curbside parking or vehicle travel lanes
- Convert curbside parking to clearly signed pick up/ drop off zones, particularly in front of restaurants serving take-out or businesses that need more frequent deliveries, including grocery stores, pharmacies, and convenience stores
- Provide frequent pick up/ drop off zones in dense residential neighborhoods in order to facilitate home deliveries

Create safe places for people to walk or play outside near their homes. Getting exercise and spending time outdoors are important for physical and mental health. Many more people are walking and biking for recreation as well as transportation. This is causing crowding in some parks and adjacent parking lots, which can be relieved by the creation of more pedestrian-focused spaces.

- Promote the creation of “shared streets” in residential areas, in order to slow down and reduce car traffic. Depending on the staff resources available, municipalities can explore allowing neighborhood associations or community organizations to directly manage this process, including putting up signage
- Focus on neighborhoods that have fewer parks, green spaces, or private yards
- Provide places for children to play safely and without crowding. “Play streets” can be integrated into shared streets, creating a specific area that is separated from vehicle travel lanes where children can play, draw with sidewalk chalk, ride scooters or bikes, and socialize with each other at a distance
- Identify areas with high concentrations of older adults and communicate a clear and frequent cleaning schedule for benches nearby

Provide street safety in a way that does not require police enforcement. Define safe streets and safe public places as providing adequate physical space to comply with public health guidelines, protection from motor vehicle crashes, and protection from other types of violence.

- Rather than relying on police cars and police officers for enforcement to close or delineate street space for people walking and biking, use physical barriers like cones
- Ensure that behavior in light of physical distancing guidelines and the use of new street configurations is not criminalized, including compliance with wearing face coverings in public places
- Involve communities of color and low income communities, where safety and the threat of violence have long been a concern, in planning and implementation for adapting streets for COVID response and recovery
- Work with Google, Waze, and other navigation platforms to remove shared streets from the network to guide vehicle through-traffic around shared streets instead of on them

Recommendations

Looking further into the future, other adjustments and approaches must be taken into account. Municipalities should start thinking about how winter weather will impact these new configurations, exploring ways to ensure snow is completely cleared from bike lanes and sidewalks so that width is not lost to snow piles. If COVID-19 trends allow, many restaurants and other retail establishments will want to allow dining and shopping outside to continue even as the temperature drops, requiring a more streamlined approval process for installation of tents and outdoor heaters. “Winter Cities” -- an urban design concept for cold climates that includes well-lined seating, wind protection, and outdoor fire pits -- may provide needed inspiration later this year.

There is technical and funding assistance available for municipalities from MassDOT and the Lawrence and Lillian Solomon Foundation in partnership with the Barr Foundation:

- MassDOT “Shared Streets & Spaces”: <https://www.mass.gov/shared-streets-and-spaces-grant-program>
- Solomon Foundation “Streets for Recovery”: <https://www.solomonfoundation.org/streetsforrecovery/>

We support our municipal leaders in addressing safety issues and ensuring that our cities and towns are lively places for the people of Massachusetts during this challenging time.

Sincerely,

Allston Brighton Health Collaborative
Boston Cyclists Union
Cambridge Bike Safety
Environment Massachusetts
Gateway Cities Innovation Institute at MassINC
Green Streets Initiative
Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP)
LivableStreets Alliance
Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition
Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative
Massachusetts Sierra Club
MassBike
MassPIRG
Safe Roads Alliance
Stepping Strong Injury Prevention Program, Brigham and Women’s Hospital
TransitMatters
Transportation for Massachusetts
WalkBoston
WalkUP Roslindale

Recommendations

Adapting Streets for Pandemic Response and Recovery in Massachusetts

June 16, 2020

