



# NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK NEIGHBORHOOD SLOW ZONES<sup>1</sup>

*A Community Speed Reduction Case Study*

DECEMBER 2013

*Credit: Photo used with permission from NYC DOT*

## THE PROBLEM

Pedestrian crashes in New York City (NYC) are the second-most common cause of injury deaths among children 5 to 14 years old and among adults over 45.<sup>2</sup> Vulnerable road users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorcyclists, accounted for 71 percent of NYC's traffic fatalities from 2005 to 2009.<sup>2</sup> Adults over 65 account for 38 percent of NYC traffic fatalities,

despite the fact that these older adults make up only 12 percent of the population. Crashes mostly occur at intersections and on arterial streets.<sup>2</sup> In 2010, 21 percent of all crashes with pedestrians killed or severely injured could be attributed to speeding, and those crashes involving unsafe vehicle speeds are twice as deadly as others.<sup>2</sup>



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## THE SOLUTION

### Speed reduction approach

The NYC Department of Transportation's (DOT) 2010 Pedestrian Safety Study and Action Plan proposed a series of recommendations to improve road safety in NYC. Among them is the pilot Neighborhood Slow Zones program, which is an approach intended to slow cars on residential streets. The program complements other safety interventions (especially those along major arterials) and is not a single solution to all traffic safety problems. NYC modeled the approach on the successful implementation of 20 mph slow zones in London, England, which has seen a 42 percent reduction in injuries and an overall speed reduction of 9 mph as compared to untreated areas.<sup>3</sup>



## **SLOW ZONES** are self-contained areas that primarily include **NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS.**

Blue “gateways,” comprised of a set of signs and markings at an intersection, announce the entrance to a Neighborhood Slow Zone. Signs and pavement markings indicate a 20 mph speed limit — reduced from 30 mph — and additional safety measures like speed bumps, street markings, and other traffic calming treatments turn the zone into a self-enforced reduced-speed area. The street design compels people to drive more slowly, even without the threat of being ticketed. NYC’s Neighborhood Slow Zones are implemented in areas with low traffic volume and minimal through traffic. The approach applies the same physical and visual cues to each designated slow zone, so that residents and drivers are aware when they enter a zone and are familiar with its rules.

The NYC Neighborhood Slow Zones program accepts applications from neighborhood groups concerned about vehicle speeds in their area of the city. Because it is both voluntary and participatory, the process helps mobilize residents around the issue of speed. In addition to lowering the speed limit to 20 mph within the zone, the slow zones are anticipated to help improve safety for all roadway users, reduce traffic noise and cut-through traffic, and enhance the social quality of the streets. The Neighborhood Slow Zones program was launched in 2012. Applications have been approved for fourteen zones, including the initial pilot project, and five have been implemented through spring 2013.<sup>4</sup>

NYC DOT addresses traffic safety and speed reduction comprehensively through design, speed limit setting, and enforcement strategies. NYC DOT has also taken steps to improve walking and biking infrastructure<sup>2, 5</sup> by:

- Adding bike lanes on many streets and physically protected cycle tracks. Over 360 miles of bike lanes were added between 2006 and 2013 across all five NYC boroughs;<sup>6</sup>
- Launching a bike-share program;
- Installing countdown pedestrian signals at 1,500 intersections;
- Analyzing crash data to inform prioritization of engineering upgrades for 60 miles of streets to achieve greater pedestrian safety;
- Re-engineering 20 intersections to achieve pedestrian safety on major two-way streets in Manhattan; and
- Implementing a pilot program to improve visibility at left turns along avenues in Manhattan.<sup>2</sup>

## THE PROCESS

### Key planning and implementation steps

A NYC DOT Technical Team, with support from the NYC DOT Commissioner, defined and proposed the Neighborhood Slow Zones program and presented its recommended program to elected and appointed officials. Groups such as community boards, civic associations, elected officials, or schools and churches are eligible to apply for a Neighborhood Slow Zone. Applicants must delineate an area of about 5 blocks by 5 blocks (roughly one quarter square mile) that is primarily residential and has strong boundaries, such as major streets or large parks. The application must demonstrate community support through letters from key community stakeholders.

To select Neighborhood Slow Zone areas, NYC DOT considers community support and prioritizes applications on the basis of such factors as the presence of facilities, including schools, senior centers, and parks; proximity to subway stations; strength of the proposed borders; and feasibility for implementation. The NYC DOT also analyzes crash data as part of the review and decision-making process.

For approved applications, NYC DOT works with the community to develop a plan for the implementation of the slow zone. NYC DOT reviews information about each area and determines how to best implement the physical and visual changes to slow traffic in that zone.

NYC DOT did not promote the program directly to the community, in part to manage the number of applications it would receive. The NYC DOT relied primarily on administrative channels, such as community boards and elected officials, to get the word out. The program proved popular even without extensive community outreach efforts.

### Costs

Costs specific to the neighborhood slow zones program are limited to such inexpensive road treatments as signage, street markings, and speed humps. NYC DOT funds have covered costs, with some additional funding from PlaNYC, a collaboration of 25 city agencies that share safety-related goals to enhance the quality of life for all New Yorkers.<sup>2</sup>

# CONCLUSION

NYC DOT has announced plans to undertake an assessment of the projects, using such metrics of success as a before versus after comparison of crashes, fatalities, injuries, severity of injuries, and average speeds.<sup>2</sup> NYC DOT received over 100 applications for its first round of funding, indicating a high level of support across NYC neighborhoods. The NYC Police Department believes that people drive more safely in the zones, an impression that will be verified through the formal assessment of the project. The nature of the opt-in process has encouraged civic engagement in the transportation planning process — a benefit in and of itself.

The requirement that applications enjoy broad-based community support has been a challenge in some neighborhoods that lack consensus about becoming a slow zone or in neighborhoods in which a well-organized neighborhood association is nonexistent. The opt-in requirement has, however, minimized challenges in the implementation phase of the pilot program. Changes in the application process based on lessons learned from the first round will place greater weight on the review of baseline crash data to address the need for interventions in the highest risk communities.

## **To learn more about how speed reduction can benefit public health:**

- Public Health Impact: Community Speed Reduction
- Speed Reduction Fact Sheet: Opportunities to Improve Current Practice
- Community Speed Reduction and Public Health: A Technical Report

## **Case Studies:**

- Chicago, Illinois: Child Safety Zones
- Columbia, Missouri: Lowering The Posted Speed Limit On Residential Streets
- Portland, Oregon: Neighborhood Greenway Initiative
- Seattle, Washington: A Multi-Faceted Approach To Speed Reduction
- Washington, DC: Automated Speed Enforcement

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## REFERENCES:

- <sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise cited, information in this case study was provided from an interview with a Senior Project Manager from NYC DOT.
- <sup>2</sup> New York City Department of Transportation. The New York City Pedestrian Safety Study & Action Plan. 2010; Available from: [http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/nyc\\_ped\\_safety\\_study\\_action\\_plan.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/nyc_ped_safety_study_action_plan.pdf).
- <sup>3</sup> Steinbach R, Cairns J, Grundy C, Edwards P. Cost benefit analysis of 20 mph zones in London. Injury Prevention. 2012 August 30, 2012.
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