



Photo Credit: Jim Wilson, The New York Times

OPEN STREETS

Running, Walking, and Biking During a Pandemic:
A Guide to Implementing Open Streets and
Helping Citizens Stay Safe on the Road



Prepared by Safe on the Road

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ABOUT OPEN STREETS



Photo Credit: Streetsblog, City of Oakland

What are open streets?

Open streets temporarily close streets to vehicle traffic and open them to people. Open streets create space for people to walk, run, bike, and — most importantly in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic — maintain **social distancing**. The CDC recommends that people practice social distancing by staying at least 6 feet away from others. In some cities and states, local governments have limited the size of groups that are allowed and banned mass gatherings in order to slow the spread of COVID-19. In the wake of these uncertain and stressful times, people need opportunities to safely move outside for their physical and mental health.

Here's where open streets come in: **by increasing the amount of public space available for people outside to safely walk, run, and bike, open streets enable residents to stay spread out, maintain 6 feet of distance around themselves, and limit interactions with others.**

THE CASE FOR OPEN STREETS

Why do we need more space?

As the COVID-19 pandemic has closed workplaces, schools, gyms, and athletic fields, many people are turning to the outdoors as a place to be physically active. Nationwide, parks have seen a surge of visitors, as people everywhere turn to walking, running, and biking for exercise. This increase in park usage makes it difficult to maintain safe social distancing. As a result, some park stewards are temporarily closing parks to the public.

What does this increase in park usage tell us? It means that people are desperate for an outdoor outlet and that **we need more space for people to be outside safely, not less.** Healthy people not under quarantine need the opportunity to exercise outside



Photo Credit: Two Pilots Run

for both physical and mental health benefits. Exercise has been shown to improve mental health, help manage anxiety, and support a robust immune system. Furthermore, the CDC recommends regular exercise as a way to cope with the stress of the coronavirus outbreak.

Park closures force people closer together on crowded sidewalks and into the road to contend with cars. **In order to create more safe spaces for citizens, we should tap into an abundant resource in cities — streets!** Miles and miles of asphalt are ready and waiting to be converted to open streets for residents to safely bike, run, and walk, all while maintaining 6+ feet of space between one another.

STRATEGIES

HOW

- **Close roads to vehicular traffic** (with the exception of emergency vehicles, which will be allowed at all times). Utilize barricades to close the street, with **monitoring and enforcement** by police; having police onsite can also enforce rules preventing people from congregating in groups.
- **Allow delivery/service vehicles** on closed sections of streets as part of regular operations, and allow local residents access.



- Use **bright barricades and orange cones** to cordon off streets. If the entire road cannot be closed to vehicular traffic, consider converting parking lanes into an **extended sidewalk** to allow for more space between pedestrians.
- **Include signage** explaining the road closure and suggesting alternate routes to take. Include **educational messaging** about the purpose of open streets and the importance of continuing to maintain at least 6 feet of space between people.
- Direct pedestrians and bikers to travel in **one direction** (i.e. clockwise) to further reinforce social distancing.

STRATEGIES

WHEN

- Close streets for select hours during the day to reduce impact on local residents (i.e. 10 am to 4 pm and after 6 pm).

WHERE

- In heavily trafficked and highly populated areas
- In high-density areas, where many residents lack access to yards and thus may lack safe spaces to be physically active outside
- On streets adjacent to parks or green space where citizens frequently exercise



Photo Credit: Jenna Deutsch

Signage indicating the transformation of a parking lane into an extended sidewalk on Beacon Street in Brookline, MA.



Photo Credit: Streetsblog, Angela Stach

A runner safely practices social distancing while police support the open streets policy in Queens, New York.

BEST PRACTICES

Dozens of cities across the United States have already implemented open streets, with great success.

OAKLAND, CA

4.10.20 — Mayor Libby Schaaf announced the Oakland Slow Streets program, which closes 74 miles of streets to cars to allow more room for walkers and cyclists to exercise safely during the coronavirus stay-home order.

MINNEAPOLIS, MN

3.27.20 — The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board closed multiple local parkways to motorized traffic and opened them to pedestrians to make more space for social distancing.

BROOKLINE, MA

4.8.20 — The Town of Brookline approved the implementation of #extendthesidewalk on many high-density streets, including Harvard, Longwood, Brookline, and Beacon Street.

DENVER, CO

4.4.20 — Mayor Michael Hancock followed the lead of other major cities and temporarily closed city parks to car traffic as well as a number of major streets in the city, making more space for pedestrians to move about safely.

THE TIME FOR OPEN STREETS IS NOW

Implement Open Streets to Keep Your Citizens Safe from COVID-19 and Safe on the Road

Now more than ever before, we need *more space*. In high-density cities, citizens need room to move with 6 feet of space around them as they walk, run, and bike, and they need safe places to be physically active free from the dangers of speeding cars. By implementing an Open Streets policy, elected officials can enhance public health and reinforce the social distancing measures in place to protect the public and prevent the spread of COVID-19.



Photo Credit: Sam Balto, Bike Portland

Need support in kicking off your open streets policy?
Safe on the Road can help.
Reach out to openstreets@safeontheroad.org.

ABOUT SAFE ON THE ROAD

Safe on the Road is nonprofit organization that educates and empowers individuals to advocate for pedestrian and cyclist-friendly streets in their communities. We help stakeholders reimagine our streets so they meet the needs not just of drivers, also of runners, walkers, and bikers.

Safe on the Road was founded by pro runner and public health professional Kaitlin Goodman, MPH, after she grew frustrated with one-too-many close calls with cars endangering runners, walkers, and bikers on the road. In 2018, while Kaitlin was out for a run on the streets near her home in



Providence, Rhode Island, she had to dodge out of the way of a distracted driver. The driver, looking down and unaware of pedestrians, nearly hit Kaitlin — and while she was able to successfully avoid the car, she suffered a major injury in the process. This incident, combined with countless other stories from fellow runners, pedestrians, and cyclists about close calls and near-misses with cars, led to the creation of Safe on the Road.

OUR VISION

Our hope is that our resources can help educate community members and local elected officials about for safer road design. We hope that our toolkits and guides can help policymakers make data-driven decisions about urban planning. And we hope that through education, community engagement, and advocacy, ALL road users — especially pedestrians — can **be safe on the road.**

LEARN MORE — safeontheroad.org

CONTACT — info@safeontheroad.org