

Curbs, Streets, and Parking for Reopening

How communities can use their curbs, streets,
and parking to aid in pandemic response

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Adapting Parking, Streets, and Curbs for Reopening

As cities and states begin to lift stay-at-home orders related to COVID-19, there will be a phased reopening of business and other institutions. Physical distancing will continue to remain especially important prior to complete disease containment and the development of a vaccine. As restaurants and retail begin to reopen, new measures will need to be taken to ensure customers, visitors, and employees can maintain adequate physical distancing.

Most regulations for reopening include reduced capacities for both retail stores and restaurants. With research finding that transmission of COVID-19 is significantly less likely outdoors, cities are looking for opportunities to allow their local businesses to expand outside. In some instances, due to limited sidewalk space, there is potential to adapt the existing right-of-way, as well as private parking lots, to support businesses and reduce customers queuing or crowding outside. To ensure these efforts adequately consider the needs of business, customers, and residents—and are community appropriate and equitable—careful and considerate planning of public right-of-way will be essential. Creating plans and programs that efficiently use sidewalk space, the curb, and travel lanes can provide the space needed to support businesses and community members, while also allowing for adequate social distancing. Cities should consider strategies that will allow greater flexibility in how the right-of-way is used and empower businesses to open responsibly.

The purpose of the street is to serve people. A street is more than a path of travel or storage for vehicles, but rather a vital community space and asset that serves a variety of needs and modes of travel. Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and seeing how the street can play an important role in recovery presents an opportunity to experiment with how the public right-of-way—our sidewalks, curbs, and streets—can adapt, change, and serve a variety of needs both now and for the long-term. Despite the challenges of recovery, the potential outcome could be safer streets that promote access, move people around in the most efficient manner, support a multi-modal transportation system, and bring the most economic and societal returns. This also presents the opportunity to devote more space to people, bringing more activity to the street as well as supporting the mental and physical well-being by providing more opportunities to bike, walk, or enjoy time outside.

Space is Available

The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO), a leader in transportation planning best practices, recently released a guide entitled “**Streets for Pandemic Response & Recovery**.” This document provides a comprehensive guide for cities as they evaluate the use and allocation of their streets.

To create more space for businesses to expand operations outside in conjunction with supporting a multi-modal system of travel, NACTO recommends that communities consider the following approaches in reallocating their right-of-way:



NACTO Recommends

- **Remove individual parking space(s) or a curbside parking lane.**
- **Narrow a motor vehicle lane or lanes.**
- **Shift parking or loading away from the curb, even where it requires closing a vehicle lane.**
- **Designate a street as local access only to reduce vehicle volumes and speed to levels where street space can be shared.**
- **Close motor vehicle lane(s), or the entire street, to enable adequate physical distancing or improve accessibility and safety for other road users.**

A key takeaway is that there is **space available** if lanes typically devoted to cars are reimagined into spaces for people and multiple modes of transportation.

BEST PRACTICES

Based on a review of the NACTO guide, understanding how cities are already responding, and Walker’s experience with curb management and multi-modal planning, this list summarizes best practices for reopening during the COVID-19 recovery period:

1. With transmission rates lower outdoors, cities should consider opportunities to **move more people outside** while reopening.
2. Allow for **expedited permitting** and **waive permit fees** for parklets, parking lot conversion, and outdoor dining.
3. **Use alleyways and private parking lots** for pickup and waiting areas.
4. **Move dining off the sidewalks** to maintain pedestrian walkways that allow for adequate social distancing and reduce congestion of those waiting to enter a store or restaurant.
5. Partner with businesses **to maintain parklets and outdoor dining space** and create protocols for cleaning procedures.
6. Where appropriate, **consider closing streets** entirely for more dining, retail, and walking space.
7. **Engage stakeholders** – business owners, social services, community groups – to understand the immediate needs and work with these groups to modify plans as needed. Feedback should be encouraged.
8. **Make it clear to the public** why changes are happening.
9. **Consider needs on a case by case, block-by-block basis** to understand the needs and desires of specific businesses and communities. Ensure treatments and resources are distributed equitably.
10. **Develop a parking and wayfinding plan** for those who choose to drive and park and use mobile payment and contactless solutions for paid parking.
11. **Monitor and collect data** on how people and businesses are using new spaces.
12. **Create temporary structures** and evaluate efficacy and value over time; adjust and adapt as needed, then convert into a permanent feature (e.g. parklets).
13. **Collect data through the process** – how are parklets being used, the number of bikers using a lane, etc. and monitor over time. Use this data to inform your long-term planning post-COVID-19.
14. **Consult with the fire department** to ensure adequate fire access and safety considerations during design and implementation.
15. **Consult with public works** in the design and implementation to ensure adequate sight lines, drainage, etc.

Rethink the Curb

Space at the curb in most cities is devoted to on-street parking. However, even before COVID-19, cities had begun to implement curb management planning to accommodate the changing demands of the curb, including ride-hailing, bike and scooter sharing, commercial delivery, transit, and walking. With the ongoing response and recovery to the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses may need less long-term parking on the street, as parking demand has declined in some places. Many communities have already responded to this changing need by converting some on-street parking spaces into pickup space to assist restaurants in their increased demand for takeout. Pickup space will continue to be a major need for both restaurant and retail businesses. As more establishments begin to open, there will be a need to increase areas for people to walk, dine, and shop. These spaces must be designed to accommodate people with wheelchair or other accessibility needs.

Parklets



A parklet is an extension of the sidewalk that provides additional space for amenities such as seating and dining. Parklets are typically installed in parking lanes, replacing one or more on-street parking spaces. Parklets have the potential to provide additional outdoor dining, seating, queueing, and retail space for businesses as they reopen.

Outdoor Dining

Restaurants have been increasing their takeout and delivery offerings and are beginning to reopen with requirements that reduce indoor dining capacity. As fewer people dine-in, long-term parking for these patrons has become less of a need. Restaurants are also looking to outdoor space to accommodate more tables and customers. On-street parking should be considered for dining space as well as a dedicated short-term pick-up for takeout orders.

Creating parklets in on-street parking spaces has the potential to provide additional outdoor seating and dining space while helping maintain adequate sidewalk space for safe walking. Sidewalk seating can make it challenging for those walking to pass others while maintaining a six-foot distance.

It will also be important to ensure those needing mobility assistance can access parklets, as well. Ideally, the parklet would be level with the sidewalk to allow equitable access. Or, ADA compliant ramps could be provided. Depending on the space available, sidewalk dining also may limit queueing space for those waiting to enter an establishment, reducing the ability for those waiting to maintain adequate distance from each other.

Markets

Parklets can also be used for retail businesses as outdoor markets or as a queueing area for those wishing to shop inside the store. Businesses can take a “farmers market” model and sell goods at small booths and kiosks. This would allow a greater level of comfort to patrons as they can shop outside in a lower-risk environment, while still supporting their local retailers.

Pickup

Space for customer pickup and delivery services will continue to remain vital for businesses as they navigate recovery and reopening. Adequate pickup space should be considered on a block-by-block basis. Business owners should be consulted to determine the number of spaces needed, as well as identifying opportunities for multiple businesses to share the supply of pickup space.

Pickup space should be clearly identified with signage, indicating that it is for customer pickup only.

The design shown below has an outdoor dining parklet and short-term customer pick-up parking and queueing space.



Example of Design Considerations for Street Repurposing



Sidewalk Extensions

The parking lane or travel lane at the curb can be used as an extension of the sidewalk. To make it easier for pedestrians to maintain adequate social distancing, the sidewalk may be extended into this lane. Bollards or another temporary fencing should be used to provide a barrier between travel lanes and the sidewalk extension, with signage provided to indicate that the space is for pedestrians only.

A sidewalk extension could also provide additional queuing space for those waiting to enter a business if adequate sidewalk space is not available or is maintained for pedestrian travel.



Bike and Roll Lanes



The parking lane can also be reconfigured as a “bike and roll” lane. This would provide a dedicated multi-use lane for bikes, scooters, skateboards, etc. Parking lanes or travel lanes on the curbside could be converted to multi-use lanes to provide a clear, and separated path of travel for these modes. Given some of the increases in bike and scooter ridership during the pandemic, this would allow cyclists a more comfortable environment to maintain greater social distancing.

Design of a bike and roll lane should include five to six feet of space in each direction for cyclists as well as protection from moving traffic with items such as bollards or other temporary barriers.

Transit Lanes

Existing parking or travel lanes at the curb can also be converted into transit-only lanes. This would both allow transit to move more people and provide the opportunity to expand transit service and headways to accommodate the necessary reductions in bus and light rail capacity to maintain physical distancing.



Off-Street and On-Street Parking

With fewer people choosing to dine in at restaurants and visit retail shops, there is a related decrease in long-term parking demand in private off-street lots in some locations. Surface parking lots associated with businesses can be repurposed for additional outdoor dining and pickup space. Cities should consider allowing business owners to use their parking to set up temporary dining space or pop-up retail. Malls and shopping centers are especially good candidates for outdoor retail space as they typically do not use all of their parking supply on a typical day, even before COVID-19. Farmers market-style pop-up shopping can be provided in these spaces, allowing greater service outdoors.

While space devoted to on-street parking is an important resource, cities will also need to take a balanced approach in reallocation or conversion of existing parking. Converting some existing parking to dining and shopping is likely to provide several benefits, however, consideration should be given to how those arriving by car will park. Cities should take into account the overall impact and need for parking in their planning efforts as they decide which spaces will be converted to parklets. This should include understanding the existing parking utilization of the on-street spaces, alternative parking options in the area, as well as input from stakeholders directly affected by the loss of these spaces.

Understanding these factors will help cities plan to reduce any negative impacts resulting from the loss of space.

Slow Streets and Street Closures



In some locations, especially quiet, local, and residential streets, the concept of “slow streets” should be considered. A slow street involves restricting vehicle access on the street to allow for flexible use of the lane by walkers, joggers, bikers, and recreation. Emergency vehicles, deliveries, and residents would still be allowed access to the street. Signage, speed bumps, and movable barriers indicate that it is a pedestrian space and that vehicles should yield.

Cities are also considering street closures to vehicles in areas with a concentration of retail and restaurants to allow markets, increased outdoor dining, and additional space for pedestrians. If a street closure is considered, it is important to work with the business community on how and where to shut down the street to vehicle traffic and identify areas for customers and delivery drivers to park for short-term pickups.

Context Considerations

Additionally, with all curb management strategies, context is a key consideration. The type of treatments selected will vary depending on the environment. NACTO's guide provides a matrix of policy considerations for varying types of streets including:

- **Neighborhood: local/residential**
- **Neighborhood: main/high streets with small retail/office, residential, schools, and institutions**
- **Major urban streets: transit, retail/offices, institutions, and schools**
- **Edge streets and boulevards - in/alongside parks, waterfronts, etc.**

The matrix also includes considerations depending on a community's state of pandemic response:

- **Stay-at-home orders in place**
- **Pre-vaccine re-opening**
- **Vaccine (Post-COVID)**

A sample of some of the recommended policies for the pre-vaccine re-opening phase are below. [See the whole matrix in NACTO's guide.](#)

Sample of NACTO's Recommended Policies for Various Types of Streets During Pre-Vaccine Re-Opening

For Neighborhood Streets (Local/Residential)

- Local-access only treatments

For Neighborhood Main/High Streets (Small Retail/Office, Residential, Schools, Institutions)

- Tactical lane/parking space removal (and tactical bike lanes)
- Street closures for outdoor restaurant seating, outdoor markets, etc.
- Designated pick-up/drop-off delivery zones

Major Urban Streets

(Transit, Retail/Offices, Institutions, Schools)

- Bus-only lane, tactical islands/in-lane stops, bus priority signals, expanded bus stops
- Protected bike lanes
- Speed management

Edge Streets & Boulevards

(In/Alongside Parks, Waterfronts, Etc.)

- Street closures to vehicular traffic, e.g. for recreation, markets, schools, etc.
- Expanded bike lanes & bike/shared micromobility parking zones



A neighborhood street with a local-access only treatment in Oakland, California. Read more about Oakland's Slow Streets program on page 12.

Source: [Streets for Pandemic Response and Recovery](https://nacto.org/streets-for-pandemic-response-recovery/) at <https://nacto.org/streets-for-pandemic-response-recovery/>

Wayfinding

Parking

With the removal of on-street parking, careful consideration should be given to how people who choose to drive will now access businesses and where they may park. When implementing parklets, slow streets, or shutting down streets altogether, cities should develop a parking and wayfinding plan to direct customers where to park. This plan would indicate where visitors can park and how they can access locations. Adequate signage should be provided on the street at key decision points for drivers directing them to available parking. The plan should also be posted on the city's website and be integrated into any parking mobile apps.

Bikes & Pedestrians

Ensure adequate wayfinding and signage for bicyclists and pedestrians. Cities can also provide online resources with maps and directions.

Stakeholder Engagement

With any strategies or changes to the streets considered, it is important to ensure stakeholder involvement. Community buy-in and support will be key in successfully implementing programs that alter the right-of-way, as this space directly abuts and impacts businesses in these locations. Cities should seek input from business owners, the local chamber of commerce, social services, neighborhood groups, residents etc. to understand the specific needs and challenges and ensure implementation plans are community appropriate and resources are delivered in an equitable manner across neighborhoods.

Principles to Consider

NACTO developed six suggested principles that communities can use to inform ongoing response and recovery. While each city's principles should be based on the local context and need, the following provides an example approach that may be used to inform ongoing response and recovery phases.

[Read more detail about each of these principles in NACTO's guide.](#)



NACTO's Principles

1. Support the most vulnerable people first.
2. Amplify and support public health guidance.
3. Safer streets for today and tomorrow.
4. Support local economies.
5. Bring communities into the process.
6. Act now and adapt over time.

What are Cities Doing?

With some cities and states already beginning to reopen, many communities have begun implementing strategies to create more space in the public right-of-way to support businesses while maintaining health and safety standards. Execution of plans and programs vary across cities and states, but a key theme across each is support—of people, communities, and businesses—to responsibly and successfully reopen and navigate the changing climate of recovery.

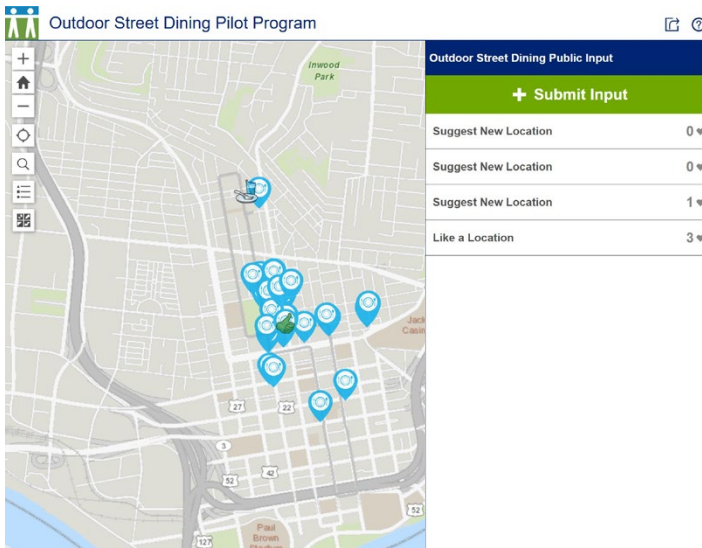


TAMPA, FLORIDA

The City of Tampa launched their “Lift Up Local Economic Recovery Plan,” which temporarily allows restaurants and retail businesses to expand their footprint onto the public right-of-way or in privately-owned parking facilities without meeting certain City codes and permit requirements. The Lift Up Local Economic Recovery Plan includes the following elements:

- Temporarily suspended certain code requirements to allow restaurants and retail businesses to expand into designated public right-of-way or to use privately-owned sidewalks or parking facilities for restaurant seating or retail merchandise. Includes private outdoor areas, parking lots, public right-of-way, and parklets.
- 14-day parklet pilot program that allows any business to establish a parklet on the sidewalk immediately adjacent to its establishment frontage or in its private parking spaces without applying for a City permit.
- Businesses may also request to use adjacent City parking spaces to expand parklets. The City may assist in disabling parking meters in these spaces.
- Restaurants may set up tables and chairs in parklets subject to separation and safety standards.
- Retailers may use space for “sidewalk sale” type set-up.
- Established seven café and retail zones for businesses in concentrated areas.
 - Zones are intended solely for dining or retail uses.
 - To participate, restaurants are required to use a reservation system to prevent congregating and loitering and a six-foot distance must be maintained between tables at all times.

The City of Cincinnati, Ohio implemented an “Outdoor Street Dining” program to help local restaurants and bars responsibly and successfully reopen. The program is a 90-day pilot that includes full road closures or partial lane closures to provide additional room for customers. The Outdoor Street Dining program includes the following elements:



- Allows restaurants to apply for expedited permitting to set up temporary outdoor tables on sidewalks, streets, and privately-owned parking facilities.
- Street and vehicle travel lane closures near restaurants to expand seating capacity.
- Includes a mixture of full street lane closures and partial lane closures.
- No permit application fees.
- Applicants are responsible for providing traffic barriers and all costs associated with implementing the site plan.
- Developed an online, interactive map, showing the locations of restaurants offering outdoor dining as well as if the street has a partial or full closure.

CINCINNATI, OHIO

Image Source: <https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/cityofcincinnati/news/new-interactive-map-shows-outdoor-street-dining-areas-across-city/>

The Town of Warrenton, Virginia launched its program, “RollOutWarrenton!,” which is a collaborative program designed to re-invigorate businesses while adhering to state guidelines, mandates, and phased reopening plan. RollOutWarrenton! Includes the following elements:

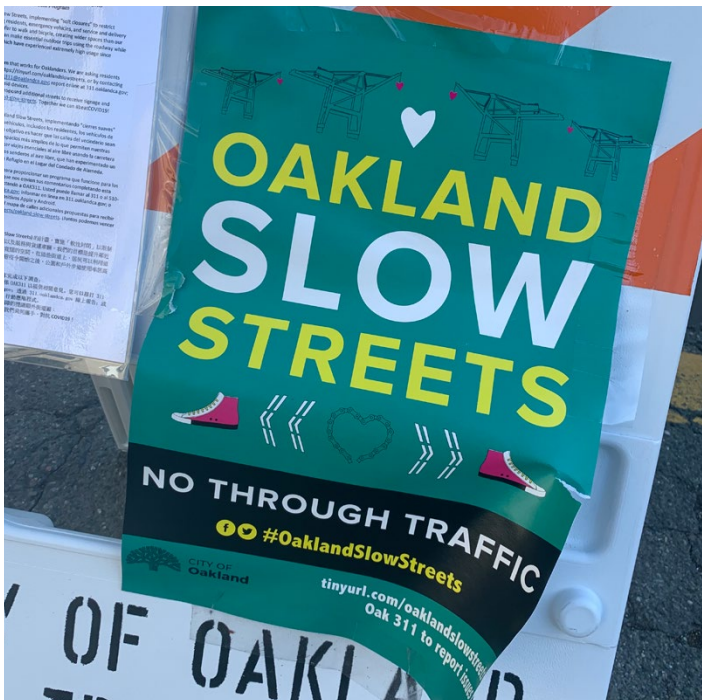


- Allows local businesses to provide outdoor services and display areas by expanding into streets, sidewalks, and parking lots.
- Town Council suspended some zoning regulations to accommodate flexibility and to maintain public safety.
- Full and partial street closures.
- Plan also includes help from the City in providing resources such as temporary traffic-blocking devices.

WARRENTON, VIRGINIA

Image Source: <https://www.rolloutwarrenton.com/>

The City of Oakland implemented a Slow Streets program to provide more space to its residents during the pandemic. The intent was to create more outdoor space and safer corridors for essential travel by foot or bike to support safe physical distancing. The program includes plans to restrict access to vehicles on almost 74 miles of city streets. Elements of Slow Streets include:



- Establish streets that are closed to through traffic to create a more comfortable and physically distant environment for those walking, wheelchair rolling, jogging, and biking across the City.
- Discourage drivers from using all Oakland Slow Streets unless necessary to reach their final destination and encourages all drivers to drive slowly and safely, expecting to see people walking and biking.
- Includes signage and soft barriers such as traffic cones. For example, one lane will be blocked off with cones, along with signage indicating it is a pedestrian space, making drivers think twice about entering the street.
- Emergency vehicles are still permitted to enter slow streets, as are delivery vehicles and residential traffic.
- No drivers are ticketed if they do drive on these streets.

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

The City of Wheaton and The Downtown Wheaton Association are temporarily blocking downtown streets for outdoor dining, in efforts to help revive restaurants during the state's reopening procedures. Elements of the expanded outdoor dining include:



- Allows local restaurants to meet social distancing regulations by providing additional outdoor dining services into streets.
- Covered canopies with temporary lights and plantings.
- Tables spaced 6 feet apart.
- Must have a reservation to dine.
- 6-person party limit.
- Wear face coverings over nose and mouth while on premises, except while eating and drinking at table.

WHEATON, ILLINOIS



Key Takeaways

The need is immediate.

The needs of the street are changing daily and cities are developing innovative solutions to support their businesses and the residents they serve. Permitting and regulatory processes can often impede the ability to quickly implement necessary plans. Cities should allow for greater flexibility in their permitting process to allow for immediate action. While plans may adapt and change over time, the ability to respond quickly will help businesses adapt to the changing rules and regulations associated with the reopening.

Stakeholder involvement is vital.

Stakeholders like business and property owners, the chamber of commerce, social services, local neighborhood associations, and residents, among others, can provide on-the-ground information and share specific needs. Including these groups will also help in creating community support for changes to the street that may otherwise experience opposition. Creating a transparent process with consistent and frequent dialogue can help ensure a successful program.

Be willing to adapt.

With information and guidance changing daily in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, communities will need to be flexible in their plans and programs. Any strategy or program should have an iterative approach, which evaluates regularly how these programs are serving people and businesses, what is working, and what needs to be changed.

Value the curb.

Curb space is finite and should be treated as a valuable asset, especially during and in the post-COVID world. This means implementing the right mix of plans and policies to both accommodate current and future transportation needs and adapt dynamically to the ever-evolving transportation and mobility industry. The curb must be designed, managed, monitored, and monetized to handle the increase in pick-ups, drop-offs, deliveries, scooters, bikeshare, carshare, parklets, and other uses.

Consider the long-term.

While many might view these strategies as a short-term response, these experiences can help completely rethink how the street, curb, and parking can best serve people and business. While initially, a bike lane, parklet, or slow street may be temporary, if it is shown to provide a great community benefit and garner support, these types of improvements could become permanent fixtures.

These experiments will provide data and learnings. Why not take those learnings and re-imagine the future of our parking and transportation systems? Many of these systems were created a century ago and simply adapted over time to fit new technologies or schools of thought. How would these systems look if we built them today?

We should completely rethink how our streets, curbs, and parking promote equity and access, move people around in the most efficient manner, and bring the most economic and societal returns. Cities that consider these changes now could have an economic advantage as we emerge from this crisis.

These temporary, inexpensive public improvements can be built in a day, but they can also have a long-term economic and livability payoff. They avoid what often overshadows infrastructure investments: a big price tag that means permanence—and push back. People can see and feel the change and try it out themselves, without the barriers. We can then learn in real-time what works and adapt based on data and business and resident input.

Let's create conditions now to rethink how our streets, our parking, and our curbs can help business, promote public health, and ensure equity. Then for the long-term, the bike lanes, parklets, and whatever else we've tried may become attractive, easier, and familiar options and regular tools built into the framework of our systems. This allows us to achieve the goals of moving more people, providing more access, and making our communities more equitable and livable.

Implementation Guide

1 Identify locations and opportunity areas.

Cities should work in partnership with local neighborhoods, businesses, and residents to identify areas that would benefit from additional outdoor space or other changes upon reopening. This may vary depending on the street or neighborhood. Cities should evaluate locations and opportunities in a holistic manner to ensure that investments are applied in an equitable manner.

For example, a main downtown street may need more dining, walking, and delivery space while a major arterial could benefit from a bus or protected bike lane to increase transit service in an area or provide greater service to essential services such as hospitals.

2 Develop purpose and assign priorities.

Once locations or opportunity areas are identified, cities should continue to work in partnership with local stakeholders to assign priority to the area. This means identifying the type of services or transportation options that should be prioritized to aid reopening. For example, if the street in question is known for high volumes of bicycle riders, the on-street parking lane may be converted into a temporary protected bike lane to provide more space for cyclists. Additionally, if there are several restaurants in an area, some of the on-street parking may be prime candidates for short-term pickup for takeout orders or parklets for outdoor dining.

3 Information gathering and stakeholder outreach.

Once locations and priorities are determined, information needs to be collected to determine how to implement. This may include items such as:

- Relevant codes and policies
 - » Does the City need to waive permitting requirements or fees for quicker implementation?
- Stakeholder input
 - » Gather information from local businesses and neighborhood groups to understand the immediate needs of the community upon reopening.
- Public works and fire department
 - » Provide a review of potential impacts to the street, right-of-way, and lines of sight with any new changes to the street.
 - » Have the fire department review to ensure adequate emergency access is still maintained.

Implementation Guide (continued)

4 Select treatments.

Once the city has a clear understanding of the needs of the community, street, or area in question, as well as an understanding of priorities, the city should work with stakeholders to select treatments. This would include the various options described in this document including converting parking lanes to sidewalk extensions, bike lanes, parklets, and outdoor markets. This may also include converting off-street parking to dining or designating a street as a “slow street.”

These treatments are also intended to be quick-to-implement, or temporary structures to allow changes to be quickly implemented. Cities can utilize traffic cones, movable bollards, and water barricades to create temporary barriers or delineation of these spaces.

5 Monitor and collect data.

While these spaces are intended to be temporary, cities should monitor activity to determine the need to make the structures permanent. Cities should also maintain regular communication with stakeholders and neighborhood residents to gather feedback on how the spaces are functioning and what changes need to be made. For example, if a parklet is found to have frequent visitation and activity, it may be a viable option to convert it into a permanent parklet in the long-term. Similarly, if a temporary bike lane or slow street is found to be widely used by neighborhood residents, plans could be made to ensure the treatment becomes permanent.

6 Make permanent.

As cities monitor the use and success of temporary changes, they should determine which changes proved viable and provide community benefits to an area, including increased transit service, more comfortable bike lanes, and more outdoor space for walking, dining, and shopping. Once this has been determined, cities should make efforts and plans to create permanent structures such as a new dedicated bus lane, protected bike lane, parklet, or slow street.

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