

PlaNYC Program Will Bring 1,000 Sleek New Benches to City Sidewalks

by Brad Aaron on October 20, 2011



DOT Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan with City Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito (left) and Deputy Mayor Linda Gibbs (background right). Photos: Brad Aaron

Joined by East Harlem seniors, advocates and City Council members, transportation commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan today kicked off a program to provide new and improved sidewalk seating.

CityBench, a product of PlaNYC 2.0, will bring 1,000 shiny steel benches to locations across the five boroughs. The first two were installed outside the Leonard Covello Senior Center on E. 109th Street, where Sadik-Khan said the primary aim of the initiative is to make streets and sidewalks more accommodating to seniors and the mobility-impaired.

“CityBench brings a new design standard that elevates our streetscapes and simply makes it easier and more enjoyable for New Yorkers of every age to walk and take transit,” said Sadik-Khan. The benches will be sited strategically near bus stops, commercial districts and areas with large populations of seniors and the physically disabled. Members of the public may also recommend locations via 311.

“Not only will these benches allow seniors and other residents to sit down and rest, they will also enable them to chat with their neighbors about their day, their families, and the overall state of the community,” said Mark-Viverito, who was lauded by Sadik-Khan for her work in bringing separated bike lanes to First and Second Avenues. Council Member Jessica Lappin and Deputy Mayor Linda Gibbs were also on hand.

The lion’s share of funding — 80 percent — for the \$3 million CityBench program comes from the Federal Transit Administration, with New York State DOT covering another 10 percent.

After the crowd from the presser had for the most part dispersed, I spoke with bench designer Ignacio Ciocchini, who is director of design for Chelsea Improvement Company. Ciocchini said every facet of the bench was developed with the city in mind, from the powder-coated steel, designed to dissipate heat and shed snow, to the 26-inch seats, allowing for what Ciocchini described as “proper social space” and intended to leave room for whatever a pedestrian might be carrying, from a shopping bag to a small child.

“It fits all sizes,” said Covello Center executive director Suleika Cabrera. “It’s fantastic.”



Residents can suggest a CityBench location by calling 311.