

## What We Talk About When We Talk About NYC Bike Share Stations

By Kate Hinds | 01/31/2012

When New York rolls out its bike share program in July, ten thousand bikes will be spread across the city. In a place where every inch of space is contested, figuring out where to locate 600 bike share stations is no small task. And New Yorkers have been eager to weigh in: ever since the city put up an online map requesting ideas, more than 8,000 locations have been suggested.

Tuesday night the city held what will be the first of many planning workshops. About 50 people gathered in an overheated room on West 42nd Street to pore over large maps of Community Board 4, which stretches from 14th Street to 59th Street on Manhattan's west side.



People taking part in a NYC DOT-led planning workshop (photo by Kate Hinds)

“We’re very excited,” said Corey Johnson, the chair of CB4. “I’m glad New York is finally catching up to something that has performed quite well in other cities across the country and across the globe.”

City Department of Transportation employees walked community members through a presentation about the bike share program, then unveiled a large map of the district that had suggested bike share station locations on it. There had already been some vetting. “We have technical criteria,” said DOT policy director Jon Orcutt. “You’re not going to put one that blocks a fire hydrant, you’re not going to block a narrow sidewalk.” He said there’s no one-size-fits-all approach to station siting. Some will be on wide sidewalks, some will be in the street, some will be in plazas.



Renderings of types of bike share station locations (photo by Kate Hinds)

Corey Johnson said for him, pedestrian space trumped parking. “[Bike share stations] may eliminate a parking space or two on a residential block, but it’s not going to eliminate sidewalk space for pedestrians,” he said. “So is it worth having a dozen bicycles that are easy access on a residential block and give up one or two parking spaces? I believe the answer is yes.”

Orcutt said the DOT had held over 100 meetings about the bike share program so far. “We’re talking to property owners, talking to everybody we can, and carving out space here and there,” he said. “You can’t just say they’re all going to be 15 feet from odd-numbered street corners. There’s no way. You have to go and plan each single one of these.”



Members of the community were invited to put green arrows on the station locations they liked, red on the ones they didn't, and black on locations where they wanted to suggest one. (Photo by Kate Hinds)

So dozens of people gathered around six separate tables and scrutinized the map, block by block. “This specific site, I think, is very challenging,” said **Ben Donsky, the vice president of the Chelsea Improvement Company**, as he put a red arrow on the map at 14th Street and Ninth Avenue. He said there was already scant space for pedestrians to relax, and that the sidewalk

there is too narrow. “However, I think there are probably a dozen great locations right nearby.” Richard Gottlieb, who lives on West 44th Street, put a black arrow on West 57th Street. Why? “West 57<sup>th</sup> Street is a very busy area and it would strike me as a good place to have a stop. It’s that simple.”

Others were thinking more macro. “I really like the idea of using the bike share as a means of expanding the transportation network,” said Tyler Gumprecht, who lives in Jackson Heights. He’d like to see stations “both close to existing transit options, like the subway, and putting them a little bit further away from existing transit.”

Those long crosstown blocks between Eighth Avenue and the waterfront were also on the mind of Steven Collado, who works in Herald Square. “People will come in from the subway and want to get to say all the way down to the Hudson River or even 11th Avenue, they’d have a long walk. If they had a bike share, they would definitely take advantage of that.”

They were singing Orcutt’s tune. “One of the places we think this will really serve are the parts of the city are developing fast away from the traditional subway spines, like the waterfronts and other former industrial places,” he said, “so you’re seeing a lot of feedback there. Like ‘hey, it’s really hard to get anywhere from here,’ or ‘I can’t get to the next neighborhood without taking a bus that takes all day.’”

Jess Berlin, who lives on the Upper West Side and works near Herald Square, said after the workshop that the experience was valuable. “I really liked the fact that they had a large map that we could really envision how the system would work,” she said. She lives in a fifth-floor walk-up, she said, and didn’t own a bike because she didn’t want to have to carry it up and down stairs. Bike share “makes someone like me able to have a bike in the city,” she said.

Orcutt said the next step is to take all the public feedback and “synthesize it into a recommendation, and then come back to community boards, business improvement districts, electeds, and get further input, make some further adjustments.” He said the city would have a final station siting plan by early summer.