



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NYC DOT ANNOUNCES COMPLETION OF UNION SQUARE REDESIGN, IMPROVING SAFETY AND PARK ACCESS

Project will enhance pedestrian space and safety around Union Square while accommodating the Greenmarket and local businesses

New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan and community and business leaders today announced the completion of the redesign to improve the streets and sidewalks surrounding Union Square, bringing safety enhancements to one of the city's busiest and most popular destinations while making Union Square Park safer, more accessible and more inviting for residents and visitors. The project, developed with input from the community, supported by the area's Community Board and backed by the Union Square Partnership and local businesses, will improve pedestrian crossings and simplify traffic patterns and also bring street furniture, streetscape improvements, bike lanes and new pedestrian plazas on Broadway below 23rd Street—a corridor that has seen 95 pedestrian injury crashes from 2004 to 2008. Along the north side of Union Square Park, new pedestrian areas and the conversion of 17th Street to one-way westbound traffic will provide safer pedestrian passage in an area through which thousands of pedestrians cross daily. The redesign improves access to the park and to the Greenmarket, a key destination four days a week, where thousands of New Yorkers shop for fresh, locally grown products. Vehicle access will be retained along Broadway and all streets throughout the project, allowing businesses to receive deliveries.

“With attractions like the Greenmarket, shops and restaurants, and the park itself, it's no surprise that Union Square sees up to 200,000 pedestrians on peak summer days,” said Commissioner Sadik-Khan. “By simplifying crossings and eliminating many of the area's most notorious hot spots, we're able to make the area safer and more enjoyable for everyone who makes Union Square a destination every day, whether by foot, bike, subway, or car.”

“DOT presented its plans earlier this year and worked to address concerns raised by our members and the community,” said Vikki Barbero, Chair of Community Board Five. “The changes being made will help transform the streets around Union Square so they're safer and more appealing for residents and visitors alike, and we will continue to work with DOT to make sure our community's needs are met.”

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“The City's Broadway-Union Square Improvement Plan addresses a number of important pedestrian safety and traffic congestion issues throughout the district,” said Jennifer Falk, Executive Director of the Union Square Partnership. “These changes, including the rationalization of some of the district's most complicated intersections, and creation of protected bike lanes and new plaza spaces, will not only enhance our vibrant neighborhood, but also make it safer for everyone who lives, works and visits Union Square every day.”

“We’re excited about these changes as they will really improve the function and ease of operations at the Union Square Greenmarket,” said GrowNYC Executive Director Marcel Van Ooyen. “It will benefit our farmers and shoppers as well as the general Union Square community and we look forward to working with DOT to explore other opportunities where Greenmarket operations can be similarly enhanced for the benefit of New Yorkers.”

Improvements in the redesign include:

- East 17th Street has been converted to one-way westbound traffic between Park Avenue South and Broadway, eliminating the notorious hot-spots where pedestrians crossed conflicting streams of traffic at East 17th at Broadway and at Park Avenue. There were 22 pedestrian injury crashes at those locations between 2004 and 2009.
- Traffic signals at East 17th Street and Broadway have been simplified from three phases to two, improving pedestrian safety and cross-town travel. The conversion reintegrates the street into Manhattan’s grid network and improves access for trucks trying to reach the Greenmarket.
- One traffic lane is maintained on Broadway from East 23rd to East 18th streets with parking on the east curb and a floating parking lane protecting a bike path on the west curb. One traffic lane is also be maintained on Broadway from East 18th to East 17th streets, with a standard bike lane and curbside parking lane on the west side. Turn lanes have been added on Broadway at East 18th, 19th, 21st and 23rd streets to better accommodate southbound traffic.
- Pedestrian plazas have been added on the east side of Broadway between East 18th and East 17th streets and continuing along the north side of 17th Street. The successful plaza implemented at Madison Square in 2008 will be extended one block south along Broadway from East 22nd Street to East 21st Street. The plazas will be maintained by local partners—the Union Square Partnership and the Flatiron Partnership.

These and other changes, which will simplify traffic patterns and improve safety for all street users, are part of DOT’s commitment to making New York City’s streets safer while also creating greener, more attractive streetscapes. DOT has worked extensively with local stakeholders throughout the planning process to make the area safer and more vibrant.

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“This neighborhood has certainly changed and grown a lot since Union Square Café’s doors first opened 25 years ago,” said Danny Meyer, CEO of Union Square Hospitality Group. “Union Square has become such a popular destination that it faces many of the challenges – like busy intersections and overcrowded sidewalks – that come with success. It’s a hopeful sign that the City is working to address the problem, and I’m optimistic that the new pedestrian plazas and bike lanes will enhance the area’s appeal by making the streets safer and more enjoyable for everyone. That would be good for business.”

“New York University is grateful to the Department of Transportation and Community Board Five for their efforts to garner community input on this forward thinking plan that will improve the safety of all who live, work and visit Union Square,” said NYU Senior Vice President Lynne P. Brown.

“The changes that DOT made in 2008 in our district, which included wonderful new pedestrian plazas, bike lanes, and the reconfiguration of traffic along Broadway and Fifth Avenue, have been very successful,” said Jennifer Brown, Executive Director of the Flatiron Partnership. “The enhancements that Mayor Bloomberg, Commissioner Sadik-Khan and her team envisioned more than two years ago have come to fruition, as evidenced by the traffic improvements and the thriving Flatiron Public Plazas that are enjoyed by thousands of people from the neighborhood and beyond. We look forward to continuing to work with the agency on the new enhancements south of 23rd Street.”

These changes build on safety improvements made across the city during the Bloomberg administration that helped reduce the number of traffic fatalities to the fewest ever recorded. Last month, Mayor Bloomberg and Commissioner Sadik-Khan released the Pedestrian Safety Report and Action Plan, which examined 7,000 crashes involving pedestrians to learn what the contributing factors are and what steps the City can take to reduce the number of crashes. Under the Action Plan, DOT will reengineer 60 miles of City streets every year to bring the City closer to the goal of cutting the number of traffic fatalities in 2007 in half by 2030. For more information please visit www.nyc.gov/dot.