

TESTING TIMES

INTERIM PROJECTS SECURE LONG TERM REWARDS

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GRAND SLAM

STREETS // STREETS CASE STUDY

Times Square
Interim Project, New York City

OVERVIEW

The ongoing testing and development of Time's Square over recent years has highlighted the significant advantages of interim design. Using temporary interventions in the street space, the City Council have been able to test new ideas, prove their worth, and evaluate the concerns of businesses and local communities.

This case study outlines the process of how New York City reclaimed one of its busiest road intersections for pedestrian space. The site is Broadway, at the intersection with 7th avenue and Times Square. The project has become an international precedent for phasing out vehicles in a road space and gradually implementing a successful long-term design for public space.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The project started in 2009 as an experiment under Mayor Bloomberg and the New York City Department of Transportation Commissioner Janette Sadik-Kahn. The project was first titled 'Green Light for Mid town', and the initial aims were to improve pedestrian safety and to improve traffic flow. A temporary transformation was first implemented, giving New Yorkers the chance to voice whether they liked the change or not. They wholeheartedly voted for the change to stay, and an international design competition was launched, which was won by the Norwegian practice Snøhetta.

In late 2013 phase one of Snøhetta's long term redesign was unveiled, with an expected implementation of 2015. The final redesign encompasses the transformation of five public plazas between 42nd and 47th streets along Broadway.

The project has far exceeded its initial aims of safety and traffic functionality. The project has become an international benchmark for the successful transformation of a busy car road into well-used public space. Once complete the transformation will add 13,000 sq m, or 53% more of new pedestrian space to Times Square (Dezeen Design Magazine).



Broadway as it was with the temporary installation titled 'Cool Water, Hot island'.
Photo: Molly Dilworth

KEY PROJECT INFORMATION

STREET TYPE

PUBLIC SPACE

PROJECT EXTENT

25,000 SQ. M

DESIGN TEAM

TEMPORARY INSTALLATION
'Cool water, Hot Island',
by Molly Dilworth

PERMANENT RE-DESIGN
Snøhetta

PROJECT DATES

TEMPORARY INSTALLATION 2010 - 2011

PERMANENT RE-DESIGN 2015

PROJECT COST

\$55 MILLION RECONSTRUCTION FOR THE
PERMANENT RE-DESIGN. THE LARGEST
RE-DESIGN OF THE SQUARE IN DECADES

SITE LOCATION

BROADWAY INTERSECTION
WITH 7TH STREET, MANHATTAN

KEY PROJECT WORKS

The closure of Broadway along
five blocks. Multiple temporary
installations, and then a
permanent redesign, consisting of
a level surface, new paving, and
basic amenities such as benches.

CLIENT

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT
OF TRANSPORTATION NYC, &
DEPARTMENT OF DESIGN AND
CONSTRUCTION

OTHER FACTS

The previous Times Square had 70 pedestrians for every 10
cars (Janette Sadik-Kahn).

Times Square is the busiest tourist destination of the world,
with 400,000 visitors per day (Dezeen). It is known as "the
crossroads of the world".

Once complete the transformation will add 13,000 sq m, or
53% more of new pedestrian space to times square (Dezeen).

Revenue from businesses have risen by 71 %, the biggest
increase in history. (Janette Sadik-Kahn, Arch Daily).

Since the closure the area has seen a 33 percent reduction in
traffic related injuries (Dezeen).

There has also been a 180 percent increase in shop lets
around the square (Dezeen).

PROJECT TYPE

PUBLIC SPACE RECLAMATION

VEHICLE ACCESS

VEHICLE-FREE

Historically the street allowed
vehicles, but in 2009 an
experiment was implemented by
Mayor Bloomberg to close
Broadway to cars, and reclaim it
as pedestrian public space. The
formal re-design of the space
followed this trial period.

PROJECT GOALS

1. Increase pedestrian safety at this iconic public space for the city.
2. Decrease vehicle congestion to improve pedestrian amenity.
3. Increase public space in Midtown, Manhattan for the benefit of all New Yorkers.
4. Increase economic productivity within the neighbourhood.
5. Reduce pollution in the area.
6. Improve the interface and permeability of the ground floor of buildings with the public realm.
7. To create a platform for creative public art.
8. To re-focus the space for pedestrians, with “seventy pedestrians for every ten cars in Times Square.” (Department of Transportation, Janette Sadik-Khan). The former Times Square was dominated by vehicles, with a thin strip of footpath only for pedestrians.
9. Snøhetta was the winning design office chosen to undertake the long-term design for Times Square. Snøhetta’s goal, according to Principal Craig Dykers was “to improve the quality and atmosphere of this historic site for tourists and locals, pedestrians and bicyclists, while reducing the traffic impediments so the ‘Crossroads of the World’ will retain its edge while refining its floor.”



Initial markings of ‘Cool Water, Hot island’, by Molly Dilworth.
Photo: Molly Dilworth

UNDERSTANDING THE DESIGN PROCESS

1. The redevelopment of Times Square was originally an experiment led by New York City Department of Transportation Commissioner Janette Sadik-Kahn in May 2009. It was first titled 'Green light for Midtown', with the original aim to improve pedestrian safety and traffic flow. The original idea was to close the road to vehicles until the end of the year, and then give the citizens the chance to vote on whether it should remain closed.
2. Following the initial closure the public began to understand the great value of reclaiming this space for their city. When it came time to vote on whether or not the street stayed car-free, they voted unanimously for it to stay.
3. The site has undergone many design iterations, from the very temporary, through to a final permanent design.
 - Stage 1 : When the road was first closed off, inexpensive multi-coloured plastic lawn chairs were put out. This stage lasted a few months.
 - Stage 2 A temporary art installation entitled 'Cool Water, Hot Island', was painted as a mural over the road, by Molly Dilworth.
 - Stage 3 : Following these temporary trials, a final design competition was undertaken, which was won by Snøhetta.
 - Stage 4 : The redesign is being undertaken in phases; phase one was opened at the end of 2012, when the curbs were removed to create an even surface for pedestrians, with enhanced paving and new benches.
 - Stage 5: The last phase is due to open in 2015

4. There are many statistics that support the success of the redevelopment which has well exceeded initial ambitions. Business revenues have risen by 71 %, which has confounded many of the surrounding businesses owners who were initially skeptical and resistant to the changes.



Contractors laying down 'Cool Water, Hot island', by Molly Dilworth.
Photo: Molly Dilworth

GETTING IT RIGHT 1. DESIGN STREETS AS PUBLIC SPACES

1. Designing for pedestrians. The final scheme will add 13,000 m² of additional pedestrian space, significantly improving the comfort and amenity of the 400,000 pedestrians who pass through Times Square everyday.
2. Saving lives. The additional pedestrian space has led to a 33% reduction in traffic- related injuries.
3. The redesign and interim projects have provided additional seating, tables, chairs and shading to support a wider range of activities, and encourage New Yorkers to see Times Square as more than just an intersection.
4. Improving business. Business has also increased in Times Square, proving the theory 'more foot traffic creates more business'. There has been a 71% increase in revenue from businesses and a 180 % increase in shop lets around the square.
5. A progressive design move. The project has fundamentally changed the perception of street space in the eyes of New Yorkers, and has become a precedent for breathing life into busy city centre spaces.



Broadway as it was with the temporary installation titled 'Cool Water, Hot island', by Molly Dilworth.
Photo: Molly Dilworth

GETTING IT RIGHT 2. DESIGN FOR CONTEXT

1. Interim projects have been used to test ideas and evaluate how they respond to the conditions and context of Times Square.
2. Each of the interim designs and the final Snøhetta scheme respond to Times Square's historic associations with theatre and entertainment, providing public spaces that act like an outdoor stage, on which the rich tapestry of daily New York life can be lived.
3. The vehicle removal from Times Square was developed alongside other street and transportation initiatives around the city as part of a wider approach to improve the network within the mid town area. In removing vehicles it assists with the development of a new network of spaces, streets and connections.



Times Square is a centre of bustling energy; with bright billboards, a continuous flow of people, and all tightly enclosed by dominant sky scrapers.

Photo: Molly Dilworth

GETTING IT RIGHT 3. DESIGN FOR CONNECTIVITY

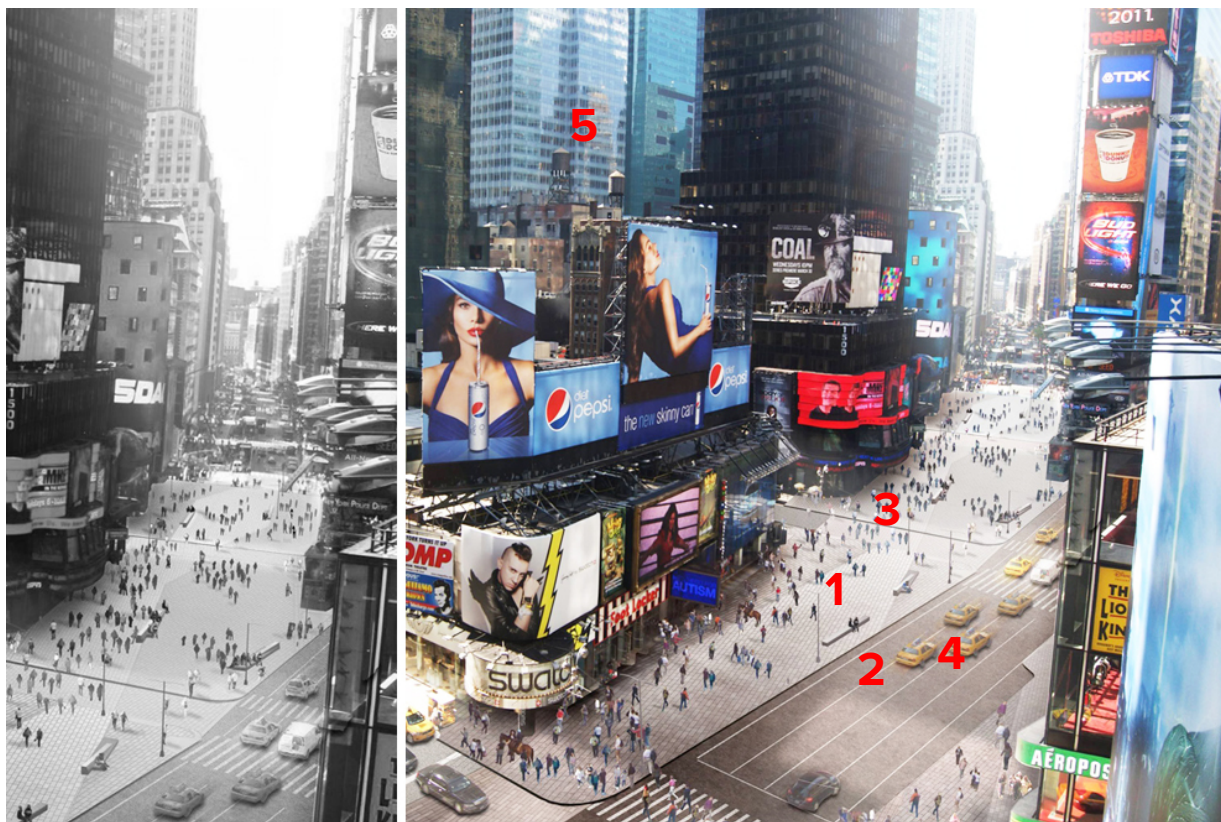
1. **A thoroughfare.** Broadway has always been a main pedestrian thoroughfare for Midtown, however increasing vehicle traffic has compromised pedestrian flows. Now pedestrians have the space to enjoy this infamous city centre street.
2. **Connections to commercial outlets.** Pedestrians now have more space to move through Broadway, enhancing the permeability with storefronts and entrances. This has helped to increase economic viability across the area.
3. **Better connection to the Metro station.** The project has created much more pedestrian space around the principal Metro station located at the south end of Broadway, improving access and safety in the area.
4. **Creating another main public space for Manhattan.** The creation of this new public space helps to develop the overall network of public spaces within Manhattan. This more evenly distributes the places within the city that are for people.



Broadway during one of the earliest temporary stages of pedestrianisation in 2011.

GETTING IT RIGHT 4. DESIGN FOR SAFETY

1. **Pedestrian safety.** The conversion of Broadway from a car thoroughfare into a pedestrian-only zone has reduced traffic related injuries by 33 %.
2. **Vehicle safety.** Within the process of transforming Times Square vehicle routes have been redirected. There is now a clearer segregation between vehicle routes and pedestrian routes, making it safer for everyone in midtown.
3. Generous pedestrian crossings provide sufficient capacity for people and buffer zones between waiting vehicles and crossing pedestrians.
4. **Smooth flowing.** The permanent redesign of Times Square by Snøhetta design office simplifies the public realm for pedestrians. There are now less signs, a flush surface, better laid paving, more rationally placed benches, and more subtle tactile elements for people with impaired senses.
5. **Eyes on the street.** With greater numbers of pedestrians there are more eyes on the street, which can help to improve the perception of safety within midtown.



Snøhetta design office's visualisation of Times Square.

GETTING IT RIGHT 5. DESIGN FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

1. The use of interim projects has allowed New York City Council to test ideas relatively inexpensively, saving on materials, energy and time.
2. Such experimentation should save in the long term by ensuring any significant street upgrades have been well tested and will not need to be revised or redeveloped anytime soon.
3. Temporary projects allow for the re-use and recycling / up-cycling of components / furniture from other interim projects, saving on costs and materials.
4. Durable materials. The Snøhetta design utilises robust precast concrete pavers that can withstand 400,000 people daily, providing a durable surface requiring minimal maintenance and that is also inexpensive to replace.



Broadway during one of the earliest temporary stages of pedestrianisation in 2011. The earliest stages of the transformation saw an immediate rise in cyclists and pedestrians in the neighbourhood.

GETTING IT RIGHT 6. DESIGN AND PLAN STREETS TO BE FIT FOR PURPOSE

1. Interim projects used cheap 'disposable' furniture making them affordable and adaptable, and allowing experimentation with layout within the space.
2. The final scheme uses simple and robust furniture and materials that provide a diverse range of options for sitting, leaning and playing on.
3. The final scheme simplifies levels, minimising level changes and prioritising curb alignments to maximise safety and support flexible movement across the spaces.
4. Final scheme pavers are two-toned precast concrete and respond to the angles of the individual plaza (there are five plazas in total). The paving is embedded with steel disks arranged in linear rows, to capture the neon lights that define Times Square as an entertainment district, bringing the light into the floor surface.



Snøhetta visualisation of Times Square.

GETTING IT RIGHT LOCATION PLAN



Times Square as it sits within Manhattan and the wider network of public spaces. There is a strong diagonal axis that disrupts the regular grid of Manhattan. Times Square sits central to this grid.

GETTING IT RIGHT PUBLIC SPACE EXTENT AND BLOCK STRUCTURE



A close-up of Times Square in its context of the Manhattan grid.

GETTING IT RIGHT CROSS SECTIONS

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