

Better Buses Restart – 181st Street Busway Pilot

Community Advisory Board Kickoff – July 7, 2020



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Better Buses Restart

Better Buses Restart

Better Buses Program

- **Mayor's 2019 State of the City:**
Improve bus speeds 25%
- **Better Buses Action Plan**
Released April 2019
- **Bus Priority Projects**
 - 22 projects implemented in 2019
 - 24 projects were planned for 2020, heavy focus on coordination with NYCT Bronx Bus Network Redesign



Better Buses Restart

Impact of COVID-19

2020 Work Program was disrupted by the pandemic

- Limited ability to conduct data collection and outreach starting in March
- Bronx Redesign implementation postponed



Better Buses Restart

Bus Service During the Pandemic

- **Speeds increased by over 20%**
- **Ridership decreased about 70%**
- **Highlighted areas of particular need**
 - Essential workers using transit
 - Underrepresented communities hardest hit by virus
- **Good bus service needed for restart**
 - Support essential workers
 - Attract people back to transit

NYC Reopening

Phase 1

- **June 8**
- Approx. 300k workers returned
- Construction, manufacturing, some retail

Phase 2

- **June 22**
- More retail
- Outdoor dining
- Some office

Phase 3

- **July 6**
- Personal care services, some outdoor recreation

Phase 4

- **Timing TBD**
- Schools, entertainment
- Indoor dining

Better Buses Restart

Recovery Plan

In June, Mayor de Blasio announced a plan for fast, reliable transit service during reopening

- Buses played a vital role during the shutdown and continue to during recovery
- Bus ridership is already at 50% of pre-COVID levels, while subway ridership is only at 20%

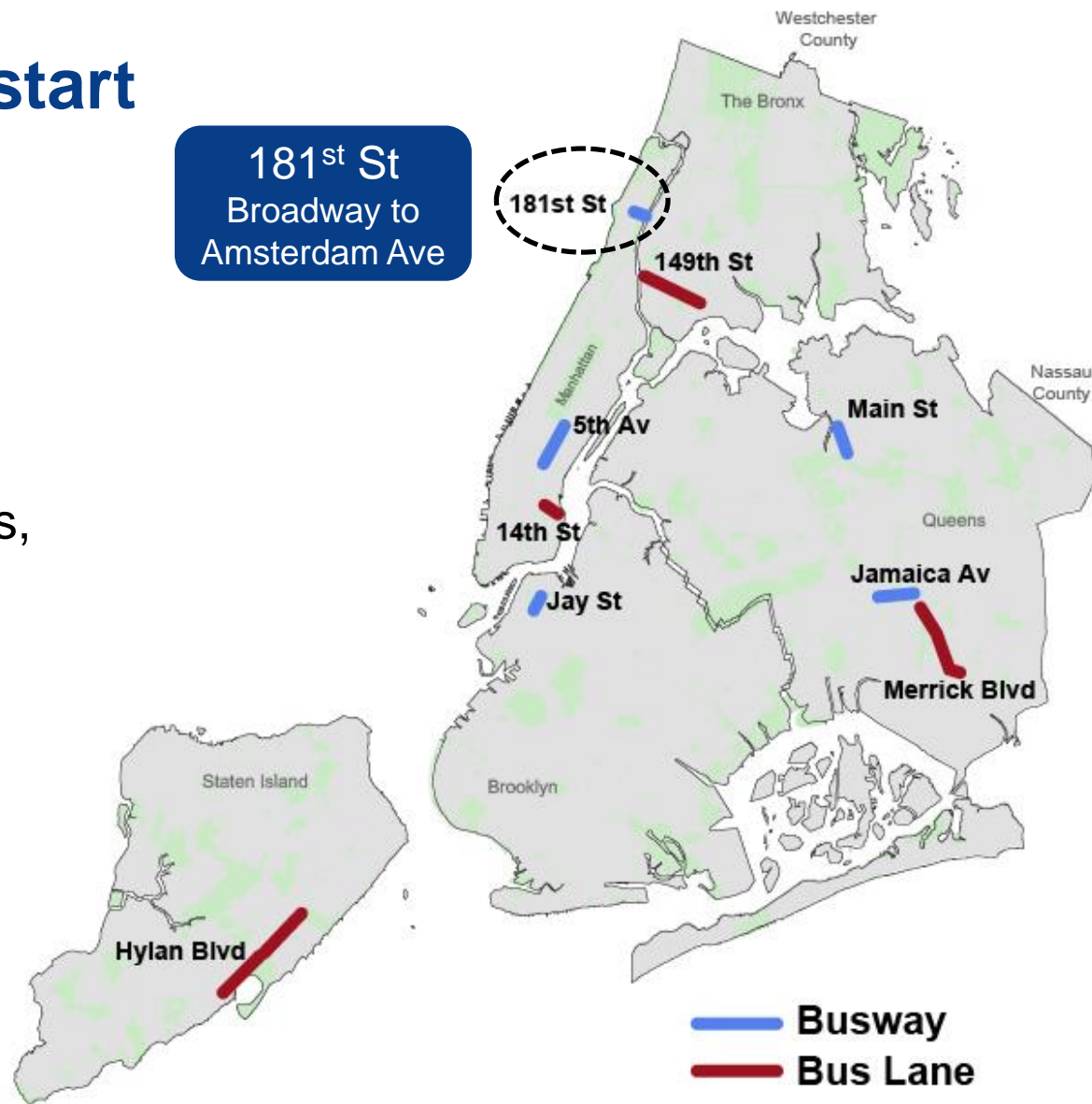


Better Buses Restart

Recovery Plan

9 busway & bus lane projects announced, focused on:

- Vulnerable populations, essential workers
- Number of bus passengers served
- Ability to implement quickly
- Geographic equity



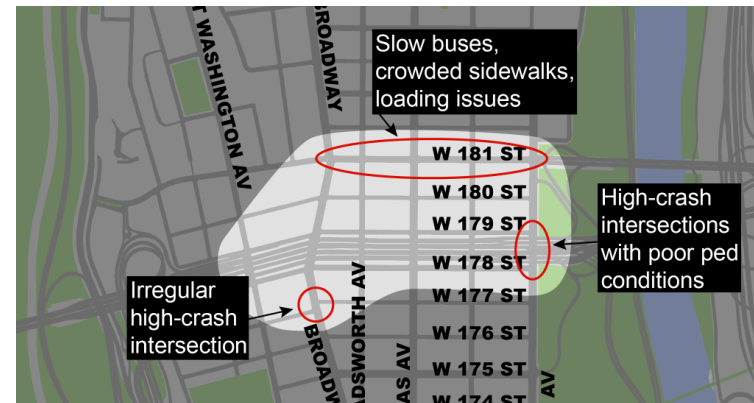
Previous Studies and Outreach

Congested Corridors Study

- DOT “Congested Corridors” study conducted 2008-2011
 - 3 public meetings, community walk-thru, and 4 Project Advisory Committee (PAC) meetings
- Identified issues: traffic safety, congestion, and poor curb management
- Implemented improvements in Summer 2011, including:
 - Eastbound PM Rush Hour Bus Lane
 - Left turn bays
 - Loading zones and additional parking meters
- Pedestrian safety improvements recommended in study will be built as capital projects starting in Spring 2021, including curb extensions at:
 - 181 St & Broadway
 - 181 St & St. Nicholas Ave

Washington Heights Neighborhood Transportation Study

- DOT study conducted 2014-2017 looking at 3 areas in Washington Heights, including 181 St corridor
- Projects developed based on feedback received during open houses and workshops
- Issues identified for 181 St corridor:
 - Slow, unreliable bus service (even with PM rush hour bus lane)
 - Bus stops with no shelters and/or benches
 - Lack of pedestrian safety amenities
 - Traffic congestion



Issues identified in 181 St / Port Authority / Cross Study Area

Outreach

- In November 2019, NYC DOT Street Ambassadors surveyed businesses on 181 St corridor to learn about loading and delivery needs
- Issues identified
 - Double parking
 - Lack of access to the curb for deliveries and loading
 - Traffic congestion



181st Street

181st St – Neighborhood and Regional Hub

- Commercial destination with hundreds of businesses
- Government, medical, and educational institutions
 - USPS, FDNY, New York Presbyterian
- Regional transportation connections
 - Bronx via Washington Bridge
 - New Jersey via George Washington Bridge
 - Cross Bronx Expressway



181st St – Neighborhood and Regional Hub



Busway Project Extents: Broadway to Amsterdam Ave

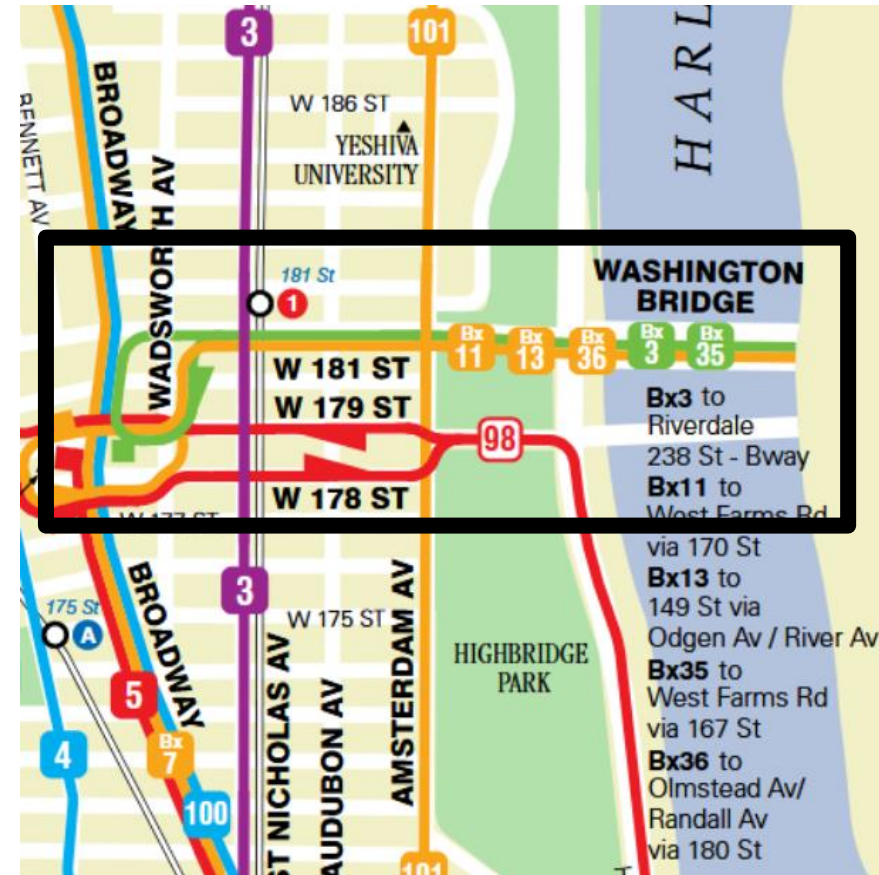
Washington Heights and Inwood Demographics

- The majority of residents do not have access to a car and rely on public transit to get them to work, shopping, and recreation
 - 69% of households are carless and commute via public transit. 16% commute via car/carpool
 - About half of residents have commutes of 45 minutes or longer
- Median Household Income is \$52k (vs. \$61k for NYC), which makes owning a vehicle cost prohibitive for many residents
- The busway proposal would directly benefit residents by shortening the time they spend traveling on transit to and from work and running errands

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey

181st St - Transit

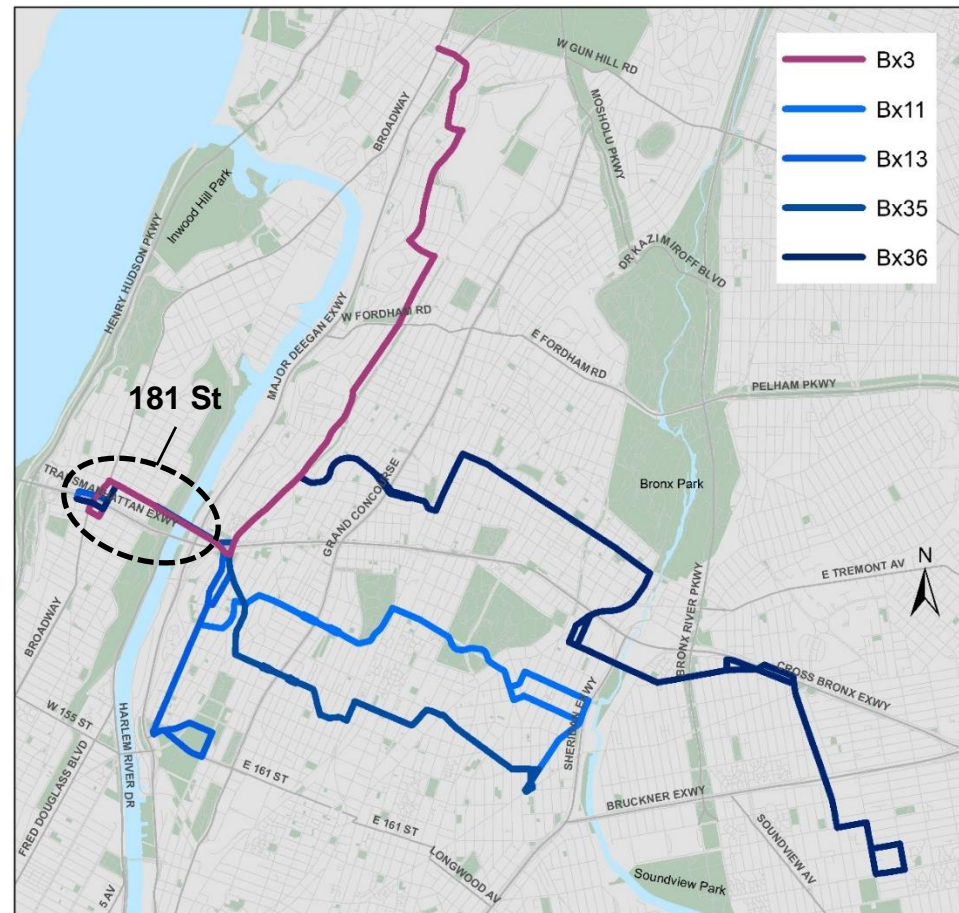
- 181st St is one of the busiest corridors for buses in the city
- 5 NYCT Routes carrying over 42,000 daily passengers on 181st St
- 50+ NYCT buses per hr during peak hrs
- Connections to 6 bus routes, 1 and A Trains, and GWB Bus Station



181st St – Regional Transit

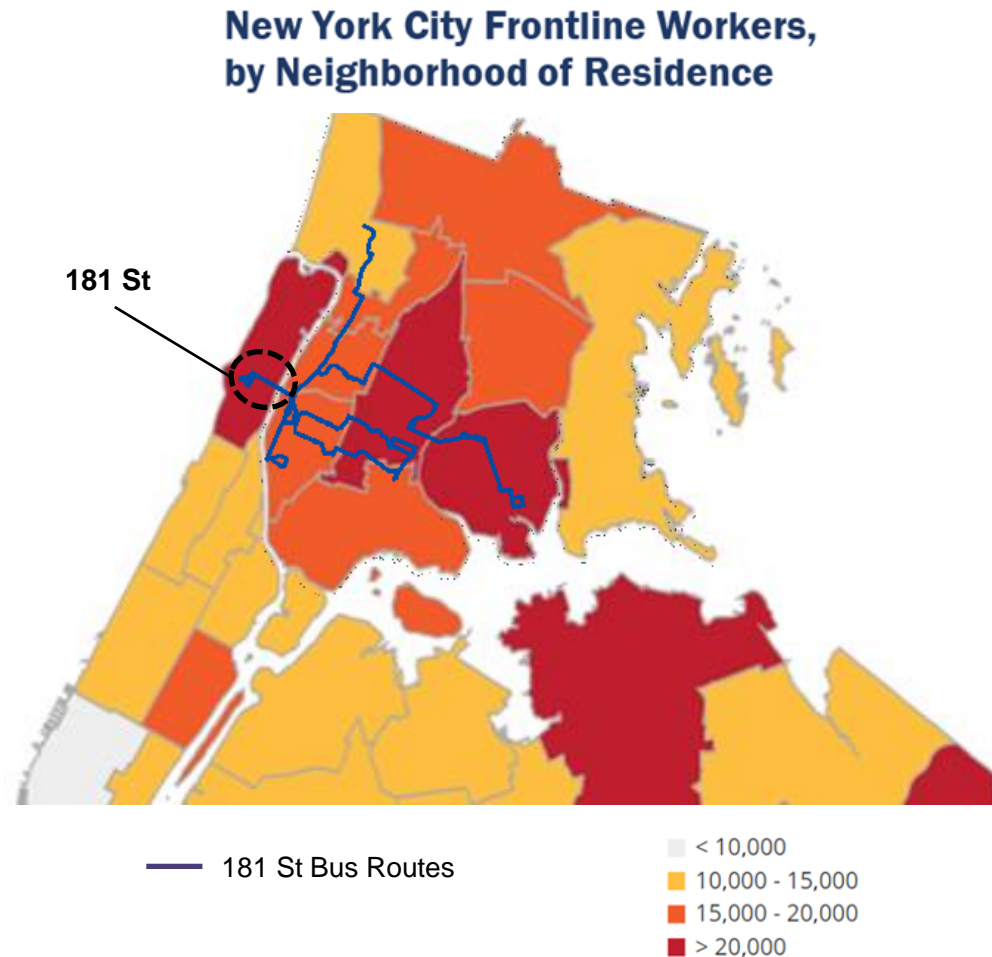
- Buses on 181 St provide critical connections between Washington Heights and numerous Bronx neighborhoods and destinations
- Connects to major transportation, commercial, and institutional hubs
 - 1,2,4,5, B, and D trains
 - Metro North (Melrose, Tremont)
 - VA Medical Center
 - Yankee Stadium
 - Bronx Terminal Market

NYCT Bus Routes that Travel on 181 St



Supporting Essential Workers

- Areas directly served by 181 St routes have high concentrations of frontline workers
- Frontline workers (e.g., nurses, transit workers, postal/courier workers, grocery store workers) make up 38% of transit riders in New York City
- 79% of the city's frontline workers are black, Hispanic, or mixed race



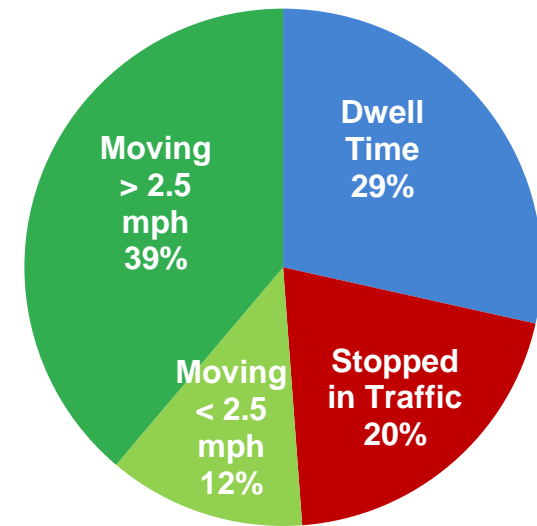
Source: NYC Comptroller, Bureau of Policy and Research

181st St – Transit Speeds

- Buses are slow and unreliable on 181 St
- Average bus speed is 3.7 mph
- Bus “bunching” causes long waits and overcrowding on buses and at stops



St. Nicholas Ave and 181 St, looking East



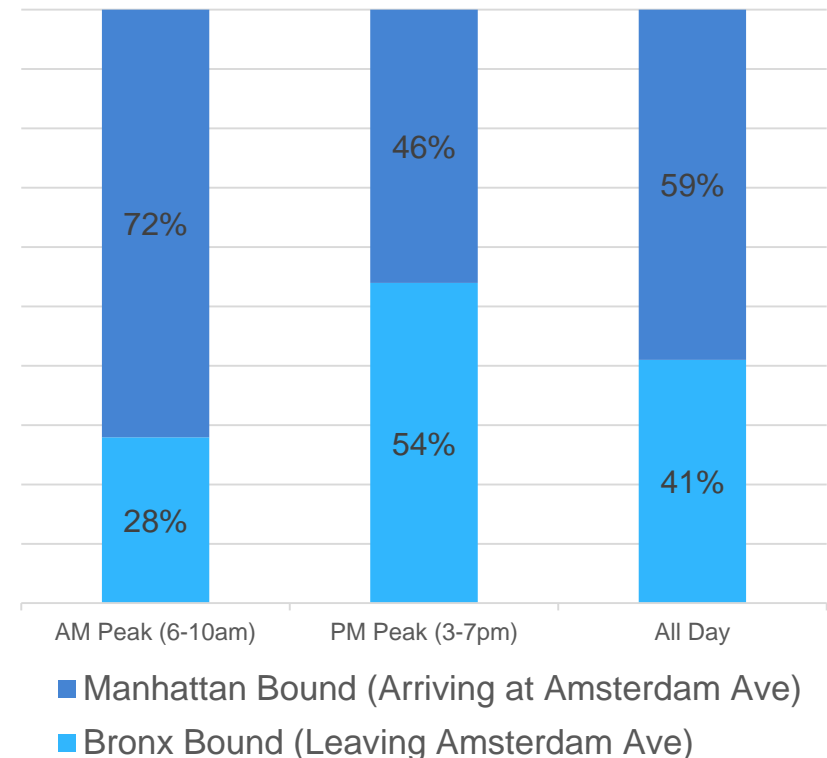
Data Source – MTA NYCT, May 2019

181st St – Transit Ridership

- Ridership is consistently high throughout the day in both directions
- Westbound spike in the AM Peak hour

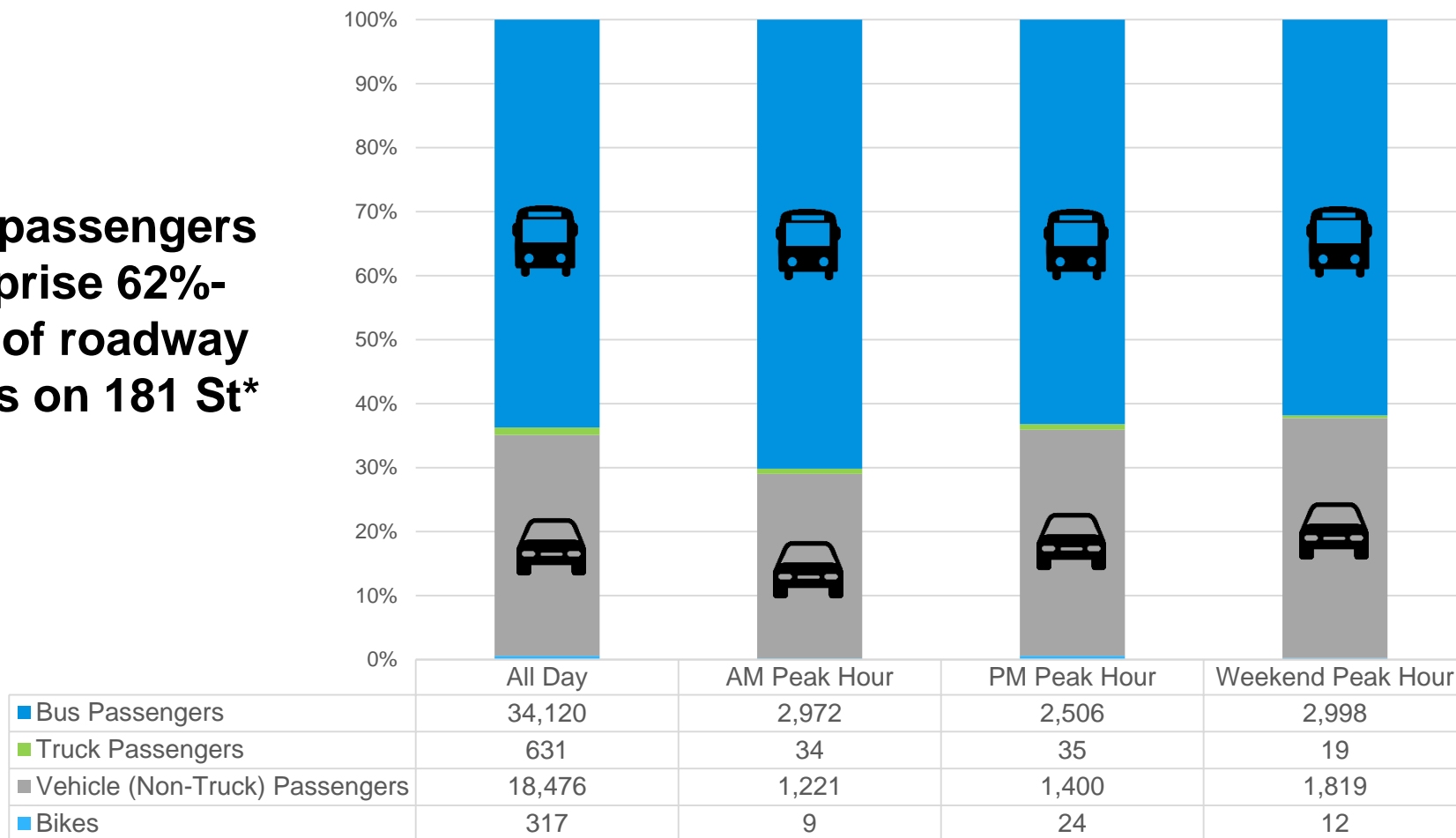


Directional Split of Bus Ridership
at Amsterdam Ave Stop



181st St – Mode Split

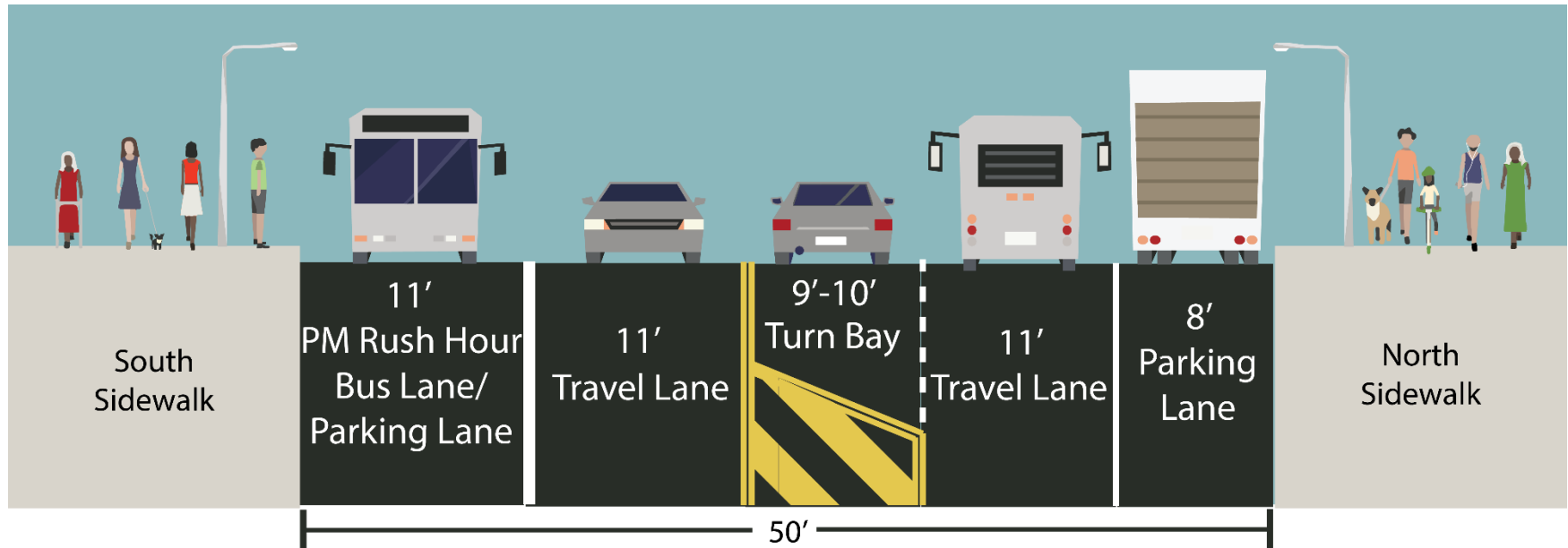
**Bus passengers
comprise 62%-
70% of roadway
users on 181 St***



*Between Audubon Ave and St Nicholas Ave

Data Sources: MTA NYCT, DOT Traffic Counts

181st St – Existing Design (Broadway to Amsterdam Ave)



- Buses move the majority of people on 181st Street, but only street space dedicated to transit is an eastbound PM rush hour lane, which is frequently blocked by parked vehicles
- Eastbound bus speeds during the PM rush hour are 2.3mph

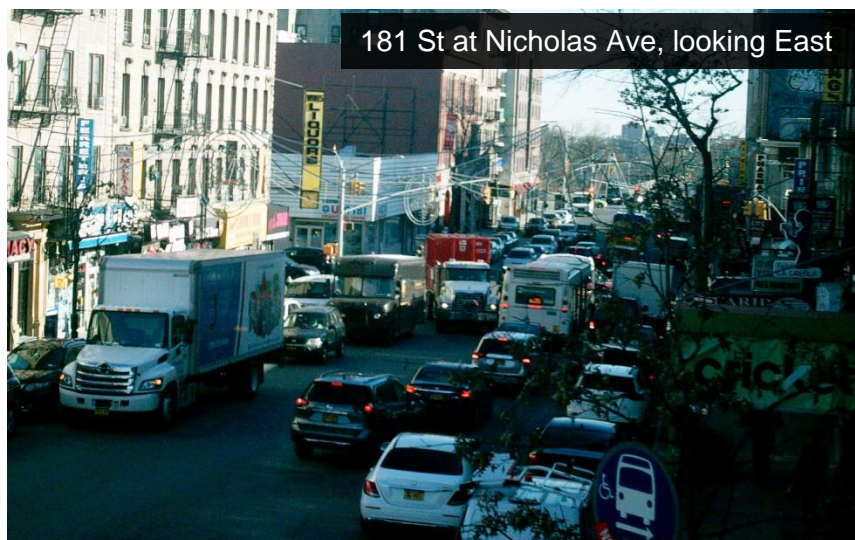
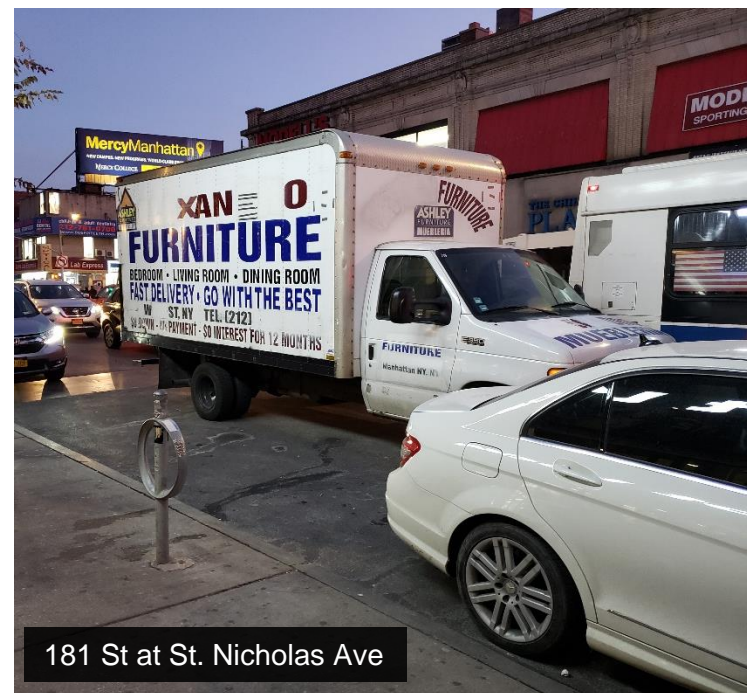
181st St – Traffic

181 St serves local traffic, but it is also frequently used as a shortcut for access to and from the Cross Bronx Expressway and George Washington Bridge, which creates congestion affecting local residents and businesses



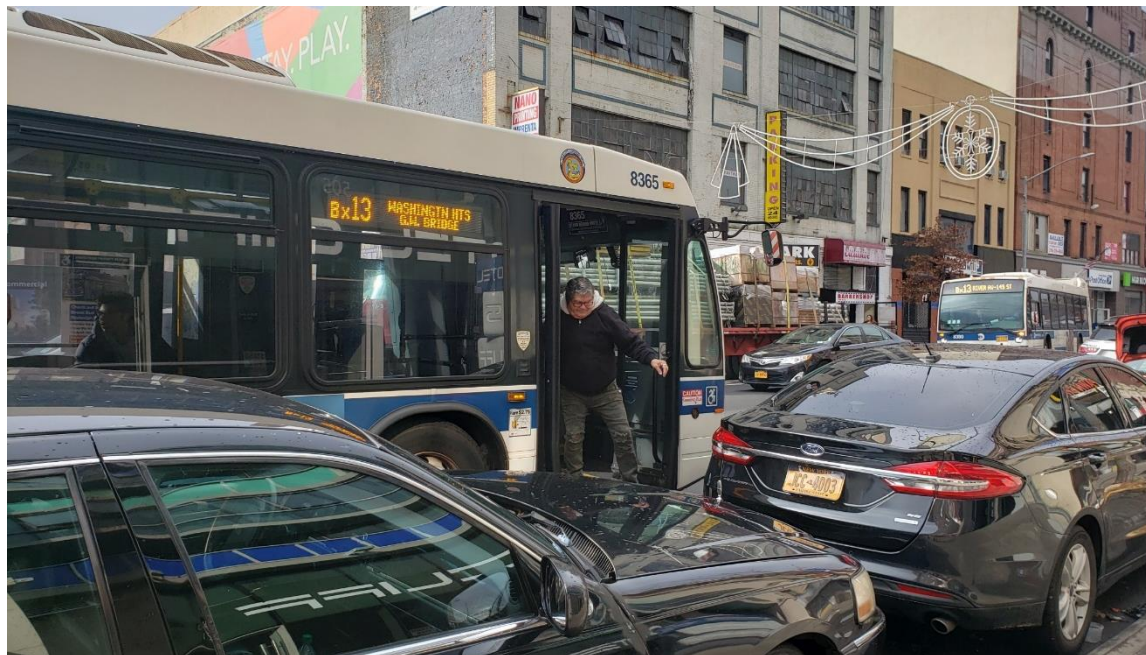
181st St – Curb Management

- Double parking blocks all roadway users
- 70% of surveyed businesses said that they consistently see double parking in front of their storefront on a typical day
- DOT will analyze time lapse camera data to inform curb regulation and traffic restrictions



181st St – Curb Management

In addition to loading / parking needs for businesses, better curb management is needed near FDNY Engine 93/Ladder 45/Battalion 13 and USPS Washington Bridge Branch



181 St at Audubon Ave

181st St – Pedestrians

- On weekends and in the PM rush hour, pedestrians make up a significant portion of the activity on 181 St*
 - Weekend Peak Hour: 2,200 peds/hr
 - PM Peak Hour: 3,000 peds/hr
- Sidewalks are often overcrowded, causing pedestrian safety issues



**Screenline counts on both sides of street between Wadsworth and St Nicholas Aves*

181st St – Traffic Safety

- Transit improvements also have benefits for traffic safety by reducing the amount of conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists, vehicles, trucks, and buses
- After implementation of the busway on 14th St, crashes resulting in injuries decreased 4%



**181 St, Broadway to Amsterdam Ave
Traffic Injuries, 2013-2017**

	Total Injuries	Severe Injuries	Fatalities
Pedestrian	43	5	0
Bicyclists	8	2	0
Motor Vehicle Occupant	155	5	0
Total	206	12	0

Example Busways

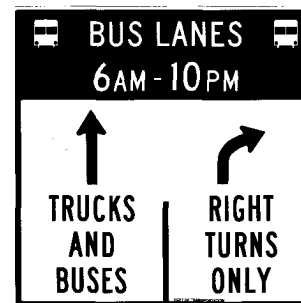
What is a Busway?

Lessons from Past Projects

- A busway prioritizes bus travel by restricting other traffic traveling through a corridor
 - Includes regulatory signs and bus lane markings
 - Only buses, trucks, and emergency vehicles are allowed to drive continuously along the busway
 - Other vehicles are allowed to turn onto busway for local access, such as visiting a business or pick-up/drop-off, but must make the next available turn off busway
- Thorough evaluation of curb regulations to match the needs of businesses and other entities along the corridor
- Thorough monitoring of bus and traffic operations
- Opportunity for pedestrian safety improvements

14th St Busway, Manhattan

- Thru traffic on 14th St between 3 Ave and 9 Ave is restricted to Buses and Trucks
- Local access permitted. Vehicles must make next right turn off corridor
- Changes resulted in significant gains for bus riders
- While side streets saw slight increases in traffic volumes, vehicle travel times minimally impacted (<1 minute)
- Project was implemented in Oct 2019, made permanent in June 2020
- Similar bus frequency as 181 St



BUS OPERATIONS¹

WEEKDAY AVERAGE TRAVEL TIME



**24% improvement
in travel times**

2.9 minutes faster

Combined for both directions:
3rd Avenue to 8th Avenue from
January 2018 to January 2020

WEEKDAY RIDERSHIP



14% increase in bus ridership
from January 2018 to
January 2020, up to
29,568.

3,526 riders

Main St, Queens

- Thru traffic on southbound Main St between 37th Ave and 40th Rd is restricted to Buses and Trucks
- Local access permitted. Vehicles must turn off corridor at next intersection
- Southbound bus speeds improved 23% after implementation
- DOT plans to implement treatment in NB direction on Main St in 2020



Fulton Street, Brooklyn

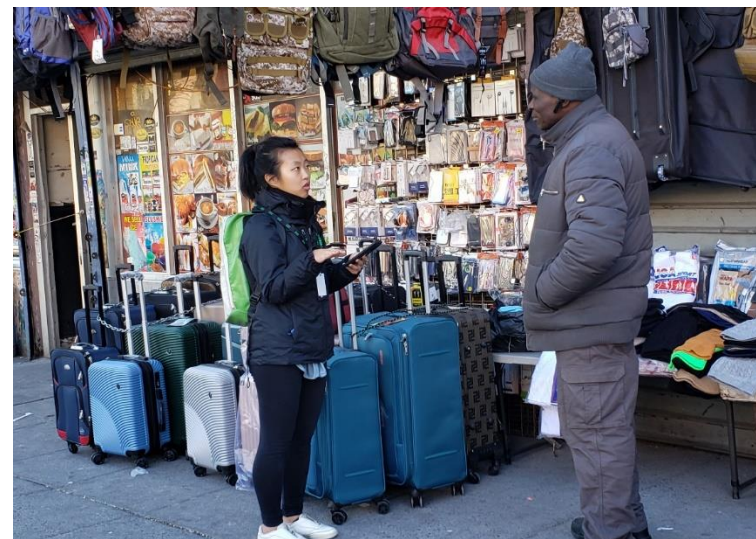
- Fulton Street between Flatbush Avenue and Adams St is restricted to Buses and local truck deliveries
- Supports commercial district with 230 stores
- 181 St has greater bus frequency than Fulton Mall



Next Steps

181st Street Design Development

- DOT will utilize best practices and lessons learned from other projects
- 181st St has important differences that need to be taken into account, including:
 - Washington Bridge access
 - George Washington Bridge access
 - Port Authority Bus station connections
 - High demand for the curb for business access and deliveries
- CAB can help identify other considerations for DOT to incorporate into analysis

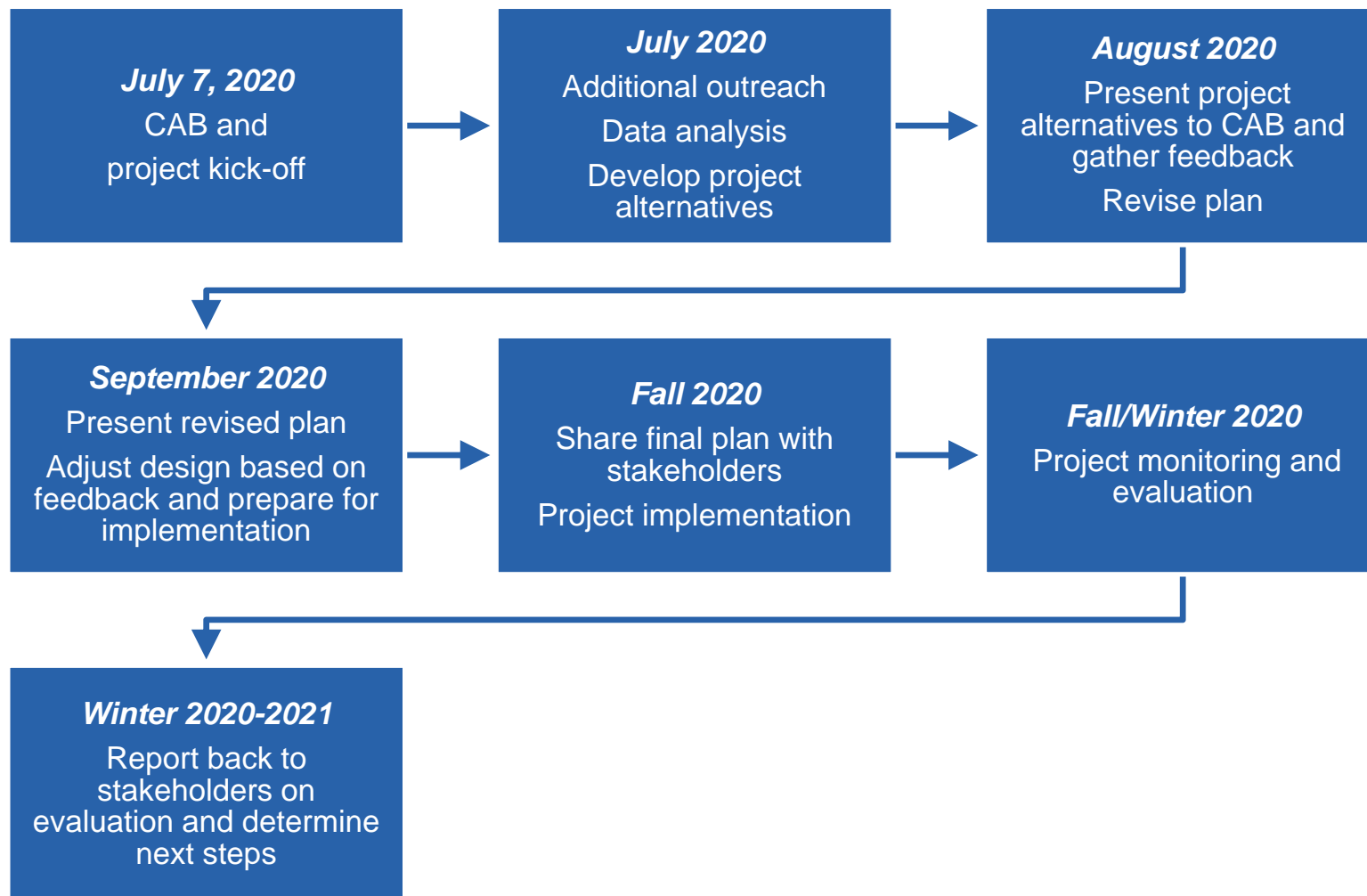


181st Street Process

181st Street outreach and implementation approach

- Community Advisory Board (CAB) will guide project before, during, and after implementation
 - CAB includes elected officials, nonprofit and community organizations, government agency representatives, advocates, and riders
- The design has not been determined. In subsequent meetings, we will show alternatives based on feedback we receive today and future meetings in addition to data analysis
- Additional outreach will be conducted with guidance from CAB (e.g. online surveys, virtual meetings with stakeholders)
- DOT will work with community to gather feedback throughout the project to make timely adjustments as needed
- Project will be a 1 year pilot and will be monitored and evaluated

Project Timeline



Thank You!

Questions?



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