



## Transformative Talks for Community Resilience

May 2020

# Open for Whom?

## A Mobility Justice-Centered Approach to Open Streets

In the COVID-19 era, the primary conversation around Open Streets has been centered around space for people to engage in recreational activities or framed around seizing the “opportunity” to remove cars from public spaces. However, conversations and actions that do not take a justice-centered approach will inevitably inflict harm on those that are already marginalized and those most impacted by COVID-19- Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), people with disabilities, and the unhoused. Often, another missing component to the Open Streets conversation is the reality that just being out in public spaces can be a risk for BIPOC individuals whose bodies are often targets of violence perpetrated by law enforcement or white supremacists. We are reminded of this again during this time as we demand justice for Ahmaud Arbery. May he rest in peace and power.

During the May 2020 Untokening Transformative Talk, our community engaged in a justice-focused conversation about Open Streets and emphasized the importance of focusing on the people, not infrastructure. Our co-facilitators were Lynda Lopez (Chicago) and Marcela Guerrero Casas (Capetown, South Africa). The following insightful highlights, that can be applied in the COVID-19 era and beyond, were provided by our co-facilitators and community panelists.

### PLAN WITH COMMUNITY

When there is a crisis there is often the reaction to move quickly with “off the shelf” ideas. However, that does not always lead to equitable or good outcomes for those that are most impacted by the crisis at hand. If moving forward is going to leave out people who have always been left out, will often do more harm than good. Communities, particularly BIPOC, need to be included in the planning process to determine if Open Streets is a good fit for them at this time, and if so, what specific considerations need to be incorporated into the program to ensure cultural relevance of street use and ensure it does not negatively impact the mobility and safety of essential workers and those most vulnerable to COVID-19.

*This recap was authored by Monique G. Lopez of Pueblo Planning with insight from co-facilitators and community panelists: Lynda Lopez; Marcela Guerrero Casas; Annie Koh; Anna Zivarts; Midori Valdivia; Alejandro Manga; Do Lee; Caitlin Guerra; Tracy Corley; Alejandro Manga; Denise Ramirez; Vivian Satterfield; Paola C.; Belen Herrera; Erwin Figueroa; Adonia Lugo; Martin Varona*

“There is a lot more room for nuance and the conversation around open streets is being presented as a false dichotomy – those staunchly in favor and those who oppose. We should be asking, ‘What is the role of open streets right now?’ There is a desire for more critical conversations because some are rushing in to move these initiatives forward without thinking about its role in this moment and its impact on BIPOC.”

**- Lynda Lopez**

## PRIORITIZE ESSENTIAL WORKERS & ESSENTIAL TRIPS

Colonial and racist zoning and planning practices have spatially organized cities such that BIPOC communities have to travel further from where they reside to access jobs and resources, such as healthcare and food. Hence, many rely upon transit or personal vehicles to travel long distances. Many essential workers and essential trips (going to the grocery store, seeking social services, etc.) are being made by BIPOC. Community members should be consulted about whether open streets will make it easier or more difficult to make essential trips and get to essential jobs. Additionally, delivery workers are making stay at home efforts possible for those to work from home and have the ability to do online purchasing. They should also be consulted about how Open Streets may negatively impact or help their ability to do their work safely.

## DO NOT EXCLUDE OR REMOVE

Open Streets should not be centered around the infrastructure, but revolve around the question “open for whom?” Open Streets must also include and adapt to those that are not able-bodied and unhoused individuals. The disability community should be asked about how the Open Streets program can include those that are not able-bodied and what are the potential barriers they may face as a result of Open Streets. Additionally, we need to stop the removal of the unhoused from public space and implement that policy shift into Open Streets programs.

## ACKNOWLEDGE & ADDRESS ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICES

Many BIPOC communities are located in or near areas with limited green spaces and polluting industries. Without acknowledging and addressing air quality in these communities, the streets being “open” does not mean they are out of harm’s way. In order for Open Streets to benefit these communities in a more positive way, toxic industries and practices need to be held accountable and air quality needs to improve.

## REMOVE POLICE PRESENCE

Police presence is problematic in BIPOC communities, as there have been numerous examples of police brutality in these communities both before and during COVID-19. The community should explore and implement options for open streets without police presence.

## TAILOR OPEN STREETS TO THE COMMUNITY

If Open Streets is determined to be beneficial by the community, we should have a more tailored approach to each neighborhood and street, even within a city. People use streets differently depending on culture, need, and values so building in nuance is important. Take this opportunity to explore what ‘open streets’ means to people beyond temporary car-free streets. What will improve streets on a permanent basis so that they become public space that is inclusive, safe and for people?

## PROTECT PUBLIC AGENCY WORKERS

Open Streets efforts oftentimes require the placement of temporary infrastructures, such as cones or barricades. These efforts do not happen on their own - it is public agency workers and community volunteers that make them happen. Therefore, we need to ensure that their needs are being met and that they are provided with appropriate resources, such as PPE, and support policies for protection.

### Additional reading

Our Streets Can Wait -- For Now, Stay Home

Supporting the transportation needs of essential workers

Open Streets, Shared Streets, Healthy Streets: Creating Mobility & Physical Activity Solutions Now & for the Future

### Learn more and get involved

Untokening: [untokening.org](https://untokening.org)

Pueblo Planning: [puebloplanning.com](https://puebloplanning.com)