# 21 Easy Measures to Promote Pedestrianism and Complete Streets

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There is hardly a city left in America that doesn't have a Complete Streets policy, and Baltimore is no exception. Unfortunately, while talk is universal, action is much harder to find. While many cities have been relatively quick to paint a number of bike-lanes on their streets, a comprehensive shift from car-centric planning to planning that puts the pedestrian, bicycle, and transit first is barely detectable in most of these cities, save for a few.

Stop for pedestrians:
Baltimore traffic guard
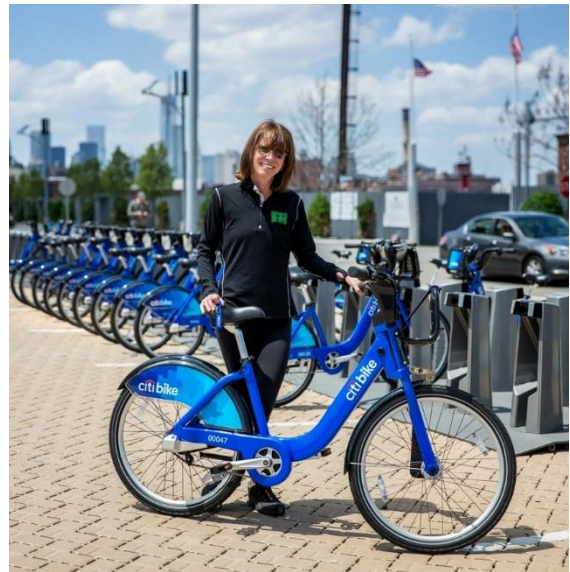
Jannette Sadik Khan
former NYC Transportation Commissioner

Interestingly, those cities that set the shining examples have planners and DOT leaders who are women:

- Rina Cutler, deputy mayor for transportation in Philadelphia;
- Janet Attarian, who is in charge of Complete Streets in Chicago;
- most famously, former transportation commissioner Janette Sadik Khan of New York;
- in Baltimore, transportation planner Valorie LaCour is Division Chief of the Department of Transportation.

And there has been much hope for a trajectory that follows the big city examples to the north. In spite of good intentions, though, Baltimore's efforts to start a new page in transportation planning are mired in compromises, budget cut-backs, personnel changes and bureaucracy.

Sadik Khan especially has propagated the idea that we don't have to wait years before important changes can be made, before the Titanic turns and results are visible. Instead, Khan took a page from " tactical urbanism" and moved very quickly to make temporary fixes to the streets.

The approach of using paint, barrels, and timber ties to try out new traffic arrangements fits very well with Jane Jacob's idea of observing people to see what works, a really obvious approach that has also made Jan Gehl of Copenhagen world famous. He, too, propagates tactical urbanism, quick and simple solutions that act as experiments and can gradually be improved towards a final installation.

After seven years of Complete Streets policy, there is still more talk about the budget process, about how expensive it is to make changes, and generally, how complicated the transportation department is, than about actual change.

I sat down and made a list of items that should be done in a city that is truly pedestrian friendly. Many of these items could be implemented, well, like tomorrow or the day after, because they are neither expensive, nor rocket science.

No turn on Red signs like this are spotty and need to be installed on all urban intersections with pedestrian traffic

1. **No right on red anywhere in the central city or where pedestrian traffic is heavy** (Easy to implement, practically no cost, maybe some marketing expense to send the message that there is a paradigm shift).

2. **No rush hour lanes directly abutting a sidewalk** (Easy to implement, minimal cost for removal of signs. Curb extensions could be done temporarily at intersections with wood ties for an observation period)

3. **Well-marked and well-lit crosswalks everywhere, especially mid-block** (All it takes is paint and some additional signs. Spot lighting may be a bit more involved and could come as a Phase II improvement. A cheap alternative would be solar activated flashers for when a pedestrian is present).

4. **No pedestrian signals requiring push-button activation anywhere downtown** (Cheap and quick, remove push buttons and adjust signal computer to provide pedestrian crossing phases automatically)

5. **Full enforcement of the pedestrian right-of way laws at crosswalks** (Simply a matter of assigning enforcement personnel and properly instructing traffic wardens) .

Pedestrian activated walk signals are a nuisance and should only occur where pedestrians are rare. And they should indicate that the signal is indeed coming.

6. **Longer crossing signal times, especially on wide streets** (Easy adjustment of the signal timing on central computer)

7. **No signals without pedestrian heads** (There are still plenty old signals out there, the cost of adding signal heads can be substantial with vehicle heads strung on wires and no electric feeds existing underground)

8. **All pedestrian signals should provide the "go" signal two seconds before vehicles get green light** (Easy to do adjustment of the signal timing on central computer)

9. **No pedestrian phase should be so short that it takes two phases to cross a street** (Easy to do adjustment of the signal timing on central computer)

10. **No inner city bus stop should be without extra space, shelter, and amenities** (This is a responsibility that is shared between city and transit provider and cost can be deferred through commercial advertising agreements)

11. **Fewer parking garages in downtown areas of desirability** (Baltimore has overbuilt downtown with parking garages, so this may be a tough one for a while but additional development should first use the extra capacity and some garages may actually be converted into other uses)

A practice that should be forbidden, i.e. a pedestrian path should be marked along the construction fence

12. **Fewer curb cuts across sidewalks with high pedestrian volume** (This is a matter of gradual change but pedestrian safety and convenience should trump short convenient access for cars)

13. **No construction sites that simply close the sidewalk, saying "Pedestrians use other side"** (this costs the public nothing, it requires simply that no sidewalk closure permits are given unless a safe pedestrian route on the same side of the street has been established)

14. **No sidewalks with less than 5' of actually usable space, free of obstructions** (This is a difficult and costly requirement that would begin with taking signal boxes and obstacles out of the pathway of sidewalks until a 5' clear width is universally achieved. Wider sidewalks are, of course, desirable in many places.)

15. **General maximum speed limit of 30 mph within city limits, except designated expressways, and 20 mph in residential streets and near schools** (This would greatly simplify the current hodge-podge of speed limits that are rarely understood or adhered to. NYC just started such a program.)

16. **No crosswalk without curb ramps, per ADA** (Cities are generally on this already, and given the thousands of intersections, this is a long-term endeavor)
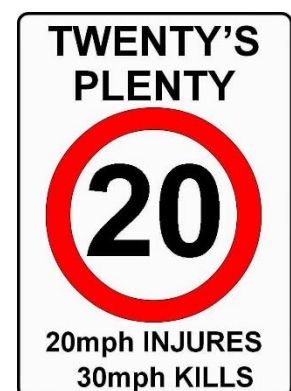
20 mph is a good speed for residential areas

17. **Reinstate the red light and speed camera system** (Baltimore had the largest such system in the country with over 80 cameras, and got into much trouble with poor management, erroneous tickets, and a "bounty system" encouraging fraud.

18. **No large parking lot or garage without marked pedestrian routes and refuges.** (Every driver becomes a pedestrian once the car is parked but most garages and lots provide poor guidance for pedestrians and rarely a safe passage).

19. **Each downtown block must have some visual interest point for pedestrians** (Many form-based codes now require "pedestrian interest" design, but it remains startling how many dreary city blocks remain where pedestrian have to rush along blank walls without any green space, variation, or views into adjacent structures. A creative program could create an inventory and competition based intervention program.)

Whimsical pedestrian markings in Baltimore's Westside arts district

20. **Install Pedestrian rest areas and trailblazing throughout the city.** (Like the previous point, areas of widened space, benches, and information can provide relief for pedestrians and make walking more pleasant, especially for the elderly that need to sit from time to time.)

21. **Reduce number of one-way streets.** (While two-way streets are certainly no panacea for pedestrian safety and actually increase conflicts at intersections, two way street patterns "tame" traffic and especially in narrower streets slow traffic and make it behave like local traffic.)

In case the main point got lost: Most of these items require simple measures, don't take long and cost little. This means they are also easily reversible should observation show problems here and there. All they take is courage, the courage that Janette Sadik Khan showed in New York, and which turned the Big Apple in a few months from a car-oriented and pedestrian and bike hostile environment, into a place that became a model for the whole country in terms of pedestrian and bike safety.

Of course, it helped that NYC always had tons of people walking in the street because it never gave up on urban living and on retail lining its street.

Many residents in cities like Baltimore need to learn how to walk again, and with it the whole culture of street vendors and urban retail has to be rediscovered.

That is what smart growth, healthy cities and sustainability is about. And who doesn't believe in any of that. It will also bring down the stubbornly and appallingly high pedestrian fatality rate. Let's do it!

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