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Recycle-a-Bicycle's Youth Green Maps Brooklyn, New York



Go Green NYC!

written by [Sarahjane Sacchetti](#)

In July 2001, I started my first Green Map project with North Brooklyn's [Recycle-a-Bicycle](#) program, working as the Project Coordinator and instructing a group of ten young bicyclists as we created our own Green Map. Go Green Brooklyn focuses on mobility, human power and alternative transportation. We focused on the fact that NYC faces a critical challenge: transporting millions of people through five boroughs. At this point, New Yorkers have the longest commute time in the country, and our communities deal with the damaging effects of high air and noise pollution due to heavy traffic. Our goal is to encourage more of NYC's young people to use healthy, non-polluting ways to get around the city. Our mapmaking team researched and rode around NYC, and found that with few bike lanes, an overpopulation of trucks, difficult bridge access points and little respect from drivers, New York City is not a very easy or safe place to travel by bike. We want our map to bring attention to this issue, and to generate dialogue about solutions that will help balance the use of the city's streets.


Over a four-week period, our mapmaking team rode everywhere, exploring NYC's environment and transportation system by bike, buses, subways and ferries. We traveled on, over and under the rivers that define the borders of NYC, and met with experts in three of our city's five boroughs. My goal was to create a pivotal personal experience for each participant -- **Thomas, Leroy, Dain, Kendall, Darell, Jamil, Julius, Ricardo, Ahmed, and Mohammed**-- and to find a way to work together on defining problems and shaping possible solutions, then communicating them to hundreds of peers and other community members via the **Go Green Brooklyn!** map.

Our main questions began with: How are young people impacted by transportation?

What are the benefits and problems to the community from the present conditions? What is available now that's fun, fast, cheap, safe and cool? How should our mobility options change in the future? I found that these complexities were easily understood by the 12-17 year old mapmakers, who quickly adopted an attitude of responsibility and creativity. Exploring, drawing and writing narratives and captions for the **Go Green Brooklyn!** map has strengthened our understanding of mobility in the city.

I found that the highly significant issue of transportation became even more applicable when we connected broad based questions about pollution, safety, environmental justice and health with our own neighborhoods. Every day we used a Brooklyn map, charting our travels from our own homes to the sites we visited. Each mapmaker began to comprehend their personal connection to these problems, and their part in finding solutions. The next step of creating our own map added a further application of their experience, feeling responsible and proud of their work and ideas.

Here is one of the illustrations from our team, "The Demand Man," who sums up our wish list for safer streets:

<p>THE DEMAND MAN</p>  <p>Drawing by : Mohammed R.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. MORE BIKE LANES! (LOOK AT OUR MAP FOR SOME IDEAS) 2. FIX THE POTHOLES! 3. SLOW DOWN, CARS & TRUCKS! 4. GIVE TICKETS TO CARS & TRUCKS PARKED IN BIKE LANES! 5. GIVE US MORE PLACES TO PARK OUR BIKES! 6. PUT UP BIKE TRAFFIC LIGHTS! 7. KEEP TRUCKS OFF OF NARROW STREETS! 8. RESPECT!
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Our most stimulating discussions centered around safety, functionality and cost. 80% of us knew someone who had been hit by a car while walking or bicycling. Other personally experienced issues are asthma, intense noise pollution in our neighborhoods, bike theft, dangerous intersections and potholes. We charted the new car-free Greenways, suggested bike routes, new developments in transportation and infrastructure, and included advocacy methods to enact change. We also charted all the sites we toured, including:

The Brooklyn Trolley Project in Red Hook, where Bob Diamond is restoring electric trolleys to serve this far-from-the-subway neighborhood in a clean, safe and highly functional way; (718)941-3160

We **ferried to Staten Island and Hoboken, NJ**, discussing the importance of the ferry service as a low-impact and refreshing way to commute across our waterways with Carter Craft of the [Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance](http://www.waterwire.net), www.waterwire.net

We researched the history of transportation at the **MTA's Transit Museum**, and found ways to connect our present picture with the past - especially in imagining change; (718)243-3060

We looked into advocacy groups and their methods of enacting change, particularly

helpful was NYC's [Transportation Alternatives](#), whose publication gave us lots of information and ideas; www.transalt.org

[Green Map System's](#) director, Wendy Brawer, presented a fun and informative slide show about bike-friendly cities, work- and purpose-built bikes, which got everyone's imaginations rolling; www.greenmap.org

Manhattan's Hub Station was a site of particular interest -- this alternative transportation center showed our group the possibilities of electric vehicles, how bike-powered pedicabs are creating non-polluting, well-paying jobs and transporting people all over Manhattan, we saw cool bike and scooter designs and more, and the added bonus was getting to test out all of their great vehicles! www.hubstation.com

When we visited Emily Chan of the [Environmental Justice Alliance](#), she asked important questions about NYC: Why do some neighborhoods have five noisy bus depots, while others have none? And, why do some streets have safe bike lanes, while others have streets filled with potholes? As we discussed social equality and racial issues, our mapmakers understood what environmental justice means, and were highly vocal about their disagreement with the state of affairs. www.nycej.org

And, we focused on the positives: enjoying the beautiful Greenways along Manhattan's East and West waterfronts, discovering peaceful community gardens, the beautiful and free ferry trip to Staten Island, enjoying bike rides over the bridges, with incredible views and everyone's favorite: going down long, fast hills, and taking time to explore the city by bike: an awesome way to enjoy the environment.

I had a great experience during this four-week project with the RAB team. Their creativity, grasp of the issues and ideas have been very impressive! The **Go Green Brooklyn!** map lets the mapmakers' words, images and thoughts provide further impact. Go Green Map took a bit longer than originally planned to prepare for publication, in part because it covers so much of NYC -- in fact, it's been re-named: **Go Green NYC Map!**

Special thanks to: Wendy Brawer, Emily Chan, Carter Craft, Bob Diamond, Betsy Kissam, Bronwen Mauch, Karen Overton, and [Irene Van Slyke](#). See some of the other RAB Green Maps by clicking [here](#), and find out more about this wonderful youth program at www.recycleabicycle.org!

Here's the announcement from our fun Launch Ride on April 20, 2002:

Launch Ride -- An All Ages, Earth Day Event!

Join us for the **Go Green NYC Ride** to celebrate the launch of Recycle-A-Bicycle's latest youth-authored Green Map! This 25 mile, multi-borough ride will explore the diverse mobility options charted on the Go Green NYC Map.

Meet: 10am at 850 Grand Street Campus High School (corner of Bushwick and Grand, Brooklyn) or join us at **11:30am** in the Staten Island Ferry's Whitehall Terminal in lower Manhattan for the formal unveiling of the new Map! We'll take the **noon ferry** (join the ride at Boro Hall in SI at 12:30) and explore the hills and views of Staten Island before returning to our starting point in Brooklyn around **4pm**.

This special event is co-sponsored by [Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance](#) (800.364.9943, info@waterwire.net), Recycle-A Bicycle (212.766.9200 ext.211, lstein@recycleabicycle.org) and Green Map System. Special thanks to Citizens Network for NYC and Consulate General of The Netherlands. Bring your bike and helmet (required), a jacket, lunch and water to drink. Rain Date: April 21.

You may contact RAB's Executive Director, [Lisa Stein](#) for more information.

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