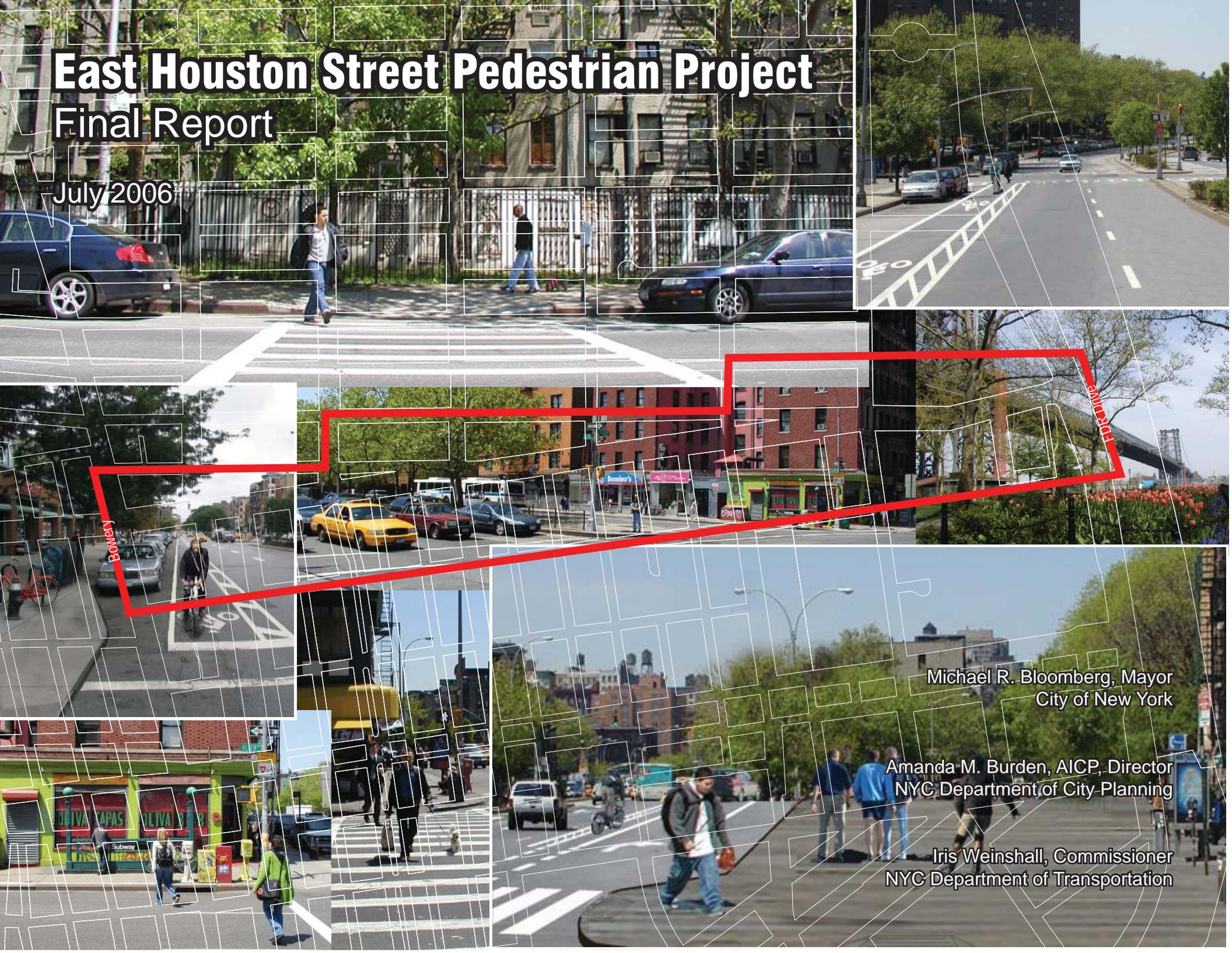


East Houston Street Pedestrian Project

Final Report

July 2006



Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor
City of New York

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Introduction

East Houston Street is a critical corridor in Manhattan, providing east-west travel across the island, access to the subway, buses, local parks, and tourist destinations, and defining the border between the Lower East Side and East Village neighborhoods. However, the roadway's substantial width and its position at the base of the Manhattan street grid, encourage high vehicular speeds and present problems for pedestrian, cyclist and vehicular circulation, making it difficult and potentially dangerous for locals and visitors to access the area's open space resources, commercial services and transit stations.

The East Houston Street Pedestrian Project will plan, design, and implement improvements for pedestrians and cyclists along East Houston Street, improving safety and circulation at dangerous intersections, facilitating access to commercial, recreational and transportation destinations, and improving the roadway's streetscape.

This project, a joint venture by the New York City Department of City Planning and the Department of Transportation, is funded by the Enhancements program of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). Funding in the amount of \$1,100,000 has been awarded to prepare this plan, test and evaluate the recommendations, and implement physical and operational street improvements. An Advisory Committee, comprised of elected officials as well as representatives of government agencies, civic organizations and community boards, has been assembled to inform and consult on the project at identified milestones.

Study Area

The primary study area for this project is East Houston Street from the Bowery to the East River Park entrance abutting the Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) Drive. Eight critical intersections are areas of particular focus for this study. These intersections - the Bowery, Second Avenue/Chrystie Street, First Avenue/Allen Street, Avenue A/Essex Street, Avenue B/Clinton Street, Avenue C/Pitt Street, Avenue D/Columbia Street and the FDR Drive - stand out because of their complex traffic flow and geometry and/or high number of accidents.

The secondary study area includes one block on either side of East Houston Street. While data was collected and examined for the secondary study area, the implementation of improvements is focused on the primary study area.

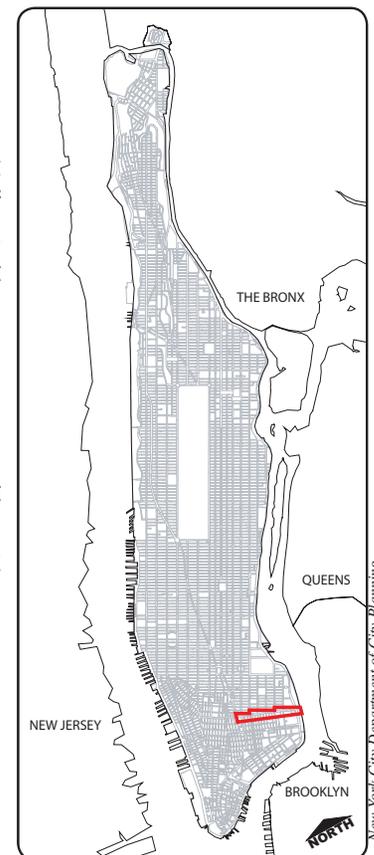


Figure 1: Study Area Locator



First Park (top); Entrance to East River Park (middle); Gustave Hartman Square (bottom).



Existing Conditions

This section inventories 2002 data on existing land use, zoning, street geometry, and signal timing in the study area. This assessment of existing conditions allowed the project team to identify issues and opportunities for improvement along the corridor. An Advisory Committee meeting held on September 25, 2002 introduced the project to the public and provided the opportunity for community input. In addition, a presentation was given to the Transportation and Public Safety committees of Community Board 3 on December 10, 2002, followed by a presentation to the full Board on February 25, 2003.

Zoning

The East Houston Street study area is primarily composed of two zoning districts. A C6-1 district is zoned on the south side of East Houston Street from the Bowery to Essex Street and on Second Avenue north of East Houston Street. This classification has a commercial Floor Area Ratio (FAR*) of 6.0, and a residential FAR of 0.87 to 3.44. The C6-1 district allows high bulk commercial uses requiring a central location, including corporate headquarters, large hotels, retail stores, and some residential development in mixed-use buildings (See Figure 3).

The north side of East Houston Street east of the Bowery (excluding Second Avenue), and the south side of East Houston Street east of Essex Street are zoned R7-2. R7 is a medium density residential district with 208 to 226 dwelling units per acre, which typically produces 14-story buildings.

The north side of East Houston Street, and First Avenue, Avenue A and Avenue C have C2-5 commercial overlays, permitting a range of local retail and service establishments, such as funeral homes and small bowling alleys, that serve a relatively large neighborhood. Avenues B and D have C1-5 commercial overlays which permit retail and personal service shops needed in residential neighborhoods. Regulations limit commercial use in these districts to one or two floors.

The western edge of the study area borders the Special Little Italy District, which was established to preserve and strengthen the historical and cultural character of the community; protect the scale of storefronts and character of the existing retail uses; preserve the vitality of street life by

reducing conflict between pedestrian and vehicular traffic; permit rehabilitation and new development consistent with the residential character and scale of the existing buildings in the area; provide amenities, such as public open space and street trees, improve the physical environment; discourage the demolition of noteworthy buildings which are significant to the character of the area; and promote the more desirable use of land in the area to preserve its value.

*FAR is the multiple of the lot area which permits the maximum development of the site.



Figure 2: Zoning

Land Use

East Houston Street is the border between the Lower East Side and East Village. The East Village, which borders the corridor to the north, is primarily composed of mixed-use residential and commercial buildings and multi-family elevator and walk-up buildings. The area boasts a kinetic nightlife with experimental music clubs, theatre and cutting edge fashion boutiques. South of the study area is the Lower East Side, which is characterized by a variety of uses, including commercial and office buildings, residential buildings, and vacant lots. A longtime destination for its bargain shopping and historic sites, the Lower East Side is now home to a burgeoning nightlife with new restaurants, nightclubs and music venues opening everyday.

Little Italy and the Bowery are at the west end of the study area. Both areas are in transition as the art and fashion worlds and nightlife of a gentrified SoHo, and newly gentrifying Lower East Side, expand into the frontier borders of the Bowery and Little Italy. The Bowery, long a major manufacturing hub, has been for decades a site for low-income and Artist in Residence (AIR) housing. Recently, new luxury residences have been erected, with many more proposed. Several new restaurants, bars and music clubs have turned what was once an underground art and music scene into an established nightlife destination. Little Italy pays homage to the neighborhood’s history as a home to Italian immigrants a century ago. Its cobblestoned streets are lined with turn-of-the-century tenements, restaurants, and souvenir shops making this neighborhood an international tourist destination. Both areas feature a variety of land uses, with heavy concentrations of mixed residential and commercial buildings in Little Italy, and commercial and office buildings along the Bowery (See Figure 3).



Figure 3: Land Use

The Lower East Side Historic District, listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, is bordered by East Houston Street to the north, Allen Street to the west and Essex Street to the east, and East Broadway, Grand Street, Division Street, and Eldridge Street to the south. The district comprises five hundred properties, including aging tenements, utilitarian commercial buildings, historic ecclesiastical buildings and works by some of the city’s most prominent architects.

New Development

There is currently a significant amount of new development within and surrounding the East Houston Street project study area, including within two Urban Renewal Areas (URA): Cooper Square and Seward Park. The New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (NYCHPD) has selected Chrystie Venture Partners to develop four properties within the Cooper Square Urban Renewal Area. The development proposal would bring an estimated 1,400 residents and 700 workers to the site. Construction began in Fall 2003 on the southern side of East Houston Street between Chrystie Street and the Bowery, and is planned for sites on the northern and southern sides of East First Street between Second Avenue and the Bowery. The development consists of 712 housing units (25 percent of which must be set aside for low-income households), 150,000 square feet of commercial and retail space, and 36,000 square feet of community facility space.

The action also preserved Liz Christy and Rock 'n' Rose community gardens, located on the north side of East Houston Street between the Bowery and Second Avenue. The gardens were transferred to the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYCDPR) and are open to the public seven days a week. The sale of other community gardens for housing development continues to be an issue in Community District 3.



New York City Department of City Planning

Figure 4: Rendering of Buildings within Study Area

The Seward Park Urban Renewal Plan calls for the acquisition of all but six structures in an area bounded by Delancey Street to the north, Grand Street to the south, Essex Street to the west and Willet Street to the east. The structures are to be demolished and the cleared land will be redeveloped for residential, commercial, public and semi-public use, and necessary street widenings. The six structures which will not be acquired - nearby historic and religious sites and community facilities - will be rehabilitated. The New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) currently has a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the sale and redevelopment of four city-owned parcels bounded by Delancey, Grand, Norfolk and Clinton streets.

Other new developments include the Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA) approval of a variance application for a 23-story residential building at 215 East Houston Street at Ludlow Street. The project is awaiting construction. Additionally, Cooper Union, located at Cooper Square between Third and Fourth avenues, has received City Planning Commission and City Council approval to develop two sites to consolidate their educational activities and provide new commercial space to finance their long-term educational programs.