

STREET WARS

These Are New York's Hottest Bus Stops. And Not in a Good Way.

Bus stops without trees or shelter are leaving riders sweating as they wait — and wait — for buses that a transportation group says do not come fast enough.

By Shayla Colon

Aug. 12, 2024, 3:00 a.m. ET

This is Street Wars, a weekly series on the battle for space on New York's streets and sidewalks.

Sign up for Street Wars. You'll also receive local reporting on the stories that define the city, via our daily newsletter, New York Today. [Get it sent to your inbox.](#)

Commuting by bus in New York City can be an exercise in frustration. The wait can be long. The ride through traffic can be slow. This time of year, the heat makes everything worse. And some bus stops are significantly sweatier than others.

A recent study by Transportation Alternatives, a transit advocacy group, found that the absence of bus shelters or shade trees leads to higher temperatures on certain routes and at certain stops. Some of the hottest are in Queens and the Bronx.

While New York is home to more than 15,000 bus stops, only one in five have bus shelters and just one in three are near tree shade, according to the report.

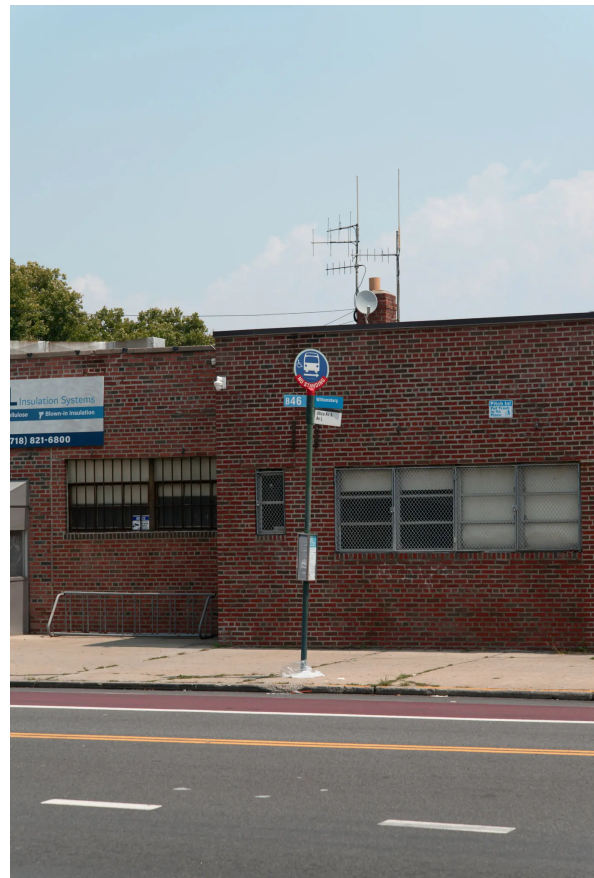
“It is a huge public health issue with the growing heat every summer, and worsening bus traffic, as there are more cars on the street,” said Em Friedenberga, a research manager at Transportation Alternatives.

The researchers mapped out how hot each of the city’s neighborhoods are in the summertime by averaging several years’ worth of data. Then they calculated the average temperatures logged at individual bus stops.

The average temperature at the 400 hottest bus stops — some of the busiest in the city, many located in impoverished communities with mostly people of color — was 14.5 degrees warmer than that at the 400 coolest stops, the analysis found.



Riders say buses are often delayed in the summer, making them wait even longer in the heat. Curtis Wallen for The New York Times



Even after buses come, riders may not find relief if their bus does not have working air conditioning. Curtis Wallen for The New York Times

In wealthier neighborhoods, even bus stops without shelters are sometimes located near trees, green space or a body of water. Those neighborhoods also generally have less industrial area, narrower streets and fewer parking lots.

Many communities in boroughs outside Manhattan are not directly serviced by the subway system, making city buses the best, if not the only, public transportation option for residents.

The study showed that more than half of the 400 hottest stops are in Queens, with 67 percent of the borough's bus stops being hotter than the citywide average.

And the average temperature at the seven hottest bus stops in the Bronx is 20 degrees higher than the average at the 400 coolest stops in the city. The Bronx has 27 percent of the hottest bus stops despite containing just 12 percent of all stops in the city, according to the report.

Transportation Alternatives identified 100 bus stops and three routes — the Bx6, Bx33 and B46 — that it says warrant high priority intervention from the city.

At the Bx6 stop at Hunts Point Avenue and Garrison Avenue in the Bronx, Marlene Castro said the only relief from the heat is when the bus arrives — if the air conditioning is working.

“When the heat is too strong, it can be suffocating to be standing here,” she said.

Jaymarie Genoa, 17, said it's tough enough having to ride the bus in the summer with so many people packed into tight quarters, the humidity heightening their body odors and sweat.

But waiting for the bus at a stop where the sun is beaming down and there is no place to sit makes it an even more vexing experience, especially when it feels like buses take forever to show up.

“In the summertime, the buses always say they're out of service,” she said. “It makes us wait a long time.”



The city's hottest bus stops, many of them in Queens and the Bronx, are 14.5 degrees warmer than the coolest stops, according to the report. Curtis Wallen for The New York Times

The issue of hotter bus stops disproportionately affects people of color and those with lower incomes. People living within a quarter-mile of the 400 hottest bus stops are 56 percent more likely to be Latino, 24 percent more likely to be Black and 62 percent more likely to live below the federal poverty line, according to the report.

The report also suggests an inordinate effect on the city's Asian population, since half of the 400 hottest bus stops are based in six largely Asian neighborhoods.

A spokesman for the city's Department of Transportation said there were about 3,500 bus shelters citywide, and that the agency planned to install 300 more over the next couple of years.

The spokesman said the agency takes several factors into consideration when deciding where to place bus shelters, targeting low-income communities and those where the most people take the bus.

He added that many of the hottest stops cited in the report couldn't accommodate shelters because they do not meet city requirements for sidewalk space and safety and accessibility needs.

Bus shelters must be 10 feet away from fire hydrants, for instance. They must be five feet from tree canopies and three feet from traffic lights and signals.



The problem of hotter bus stops disproportionately affects people of color and those with lower incomes. Curtis Wallen for The New York Times

A spokeswoman for the city's Parks Department, which works with the Transportation Department on developing ways to cool streets, said the agency has, in some cases, avoided planting trees near bus stops because of safety and accessibility concerns, including fears that riders will trip on tree beds while trying to board buses.

The Mayor's Office for Climate and Environmental Justice is researching ways to mitigate the effects of heat and bad air quality on transit riders, a spokesman said.

Friedenberg, of Transportation Alternatives, advocates a two-pronged solution to the problem of hot bus stops: Make the wait more pleasant, and make service quicker.

Her group has come up with a variety of recommendations for how city agencies should address the issue, including adding bus shelters with seating and countdown clocks at all high-priority bus stops by 2025; keeping rush-hour service all day for priority routes on days of extreme heat; and reclaiming parking spaces to make room for shelters and trees.



Enjoying our Street Wars series? Tell us what you like or how we could improve:
streetwars@nytimes.com



In Amsterdam, an unlikely way to improve traffic

By Nicholas Pasion

Waiting for a light to turn green in New York City can test your patience. Timed red lights can hold you up for a long time, even if there is no oncoming traffic.

The Dutch seem to have found an unlikely solution.

In 2016, at an intersection in the Alexanderplein neighborhood of Amsterdam, the city took out the traffic lights. No longer would cars, cyclists or pedestrians have to get the OK to cross the street. If the coast was clear, they could just go for it.

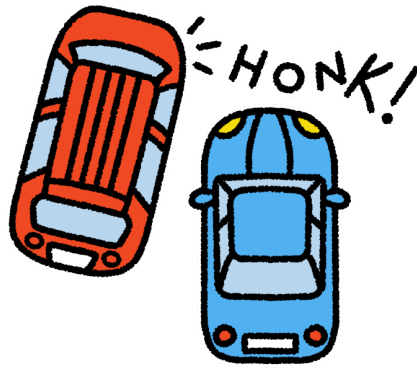
Initially an experiment, the removal of the lights was so popular that officials made it permanent. Sjoerd Linders, a traffic analyst for the city of Amsterdam, said there were no major changes in how safe the intersection was without the lights. An informal survey found that travelers slowed down as they approached, and, instead of following the directives of signals, communicated with each other — gesturing, talking and compromising over when to cross.

Since then, more than 10 traffic lights have been removed in Amsterdam, where more people travel on bicycle than in cars. However, Amsterdam also added nearly two dozen lights in the same period, too, mostly in the growing neighborhoods that flank the city's center.

But the city plans to remove more lights in the years ahead, targeting intersections that are generally used by fewer cars and more cyclists. It's not a quick process, according to Linders, who said intersections generally must undergo redesigns before they can operate safely without lights.

The idea is to make traffic run more smoothly and, as an added benefit, get people to start interacting with each other, not with street signals.

“I work with traffic lights a lot — that's what my job is,” Linders said. “I also want to get rid of them.”



Leon Edler

Shayla Colon is a reporter covering New York City and a member of the 2024-25 Times Fellowship class, a program for journalists early in their careers. [More about Shayla Colon](#)