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Citywide car-free day in NYC is ‘great idea’ but requires planning, expert says

Civil engineering professor suggests expanding idea to all boroughs to study neighborhood 'quieting' and transport needs.



On Earth Day, streets will be closed to cars in three Manhattan areas including from the Flatiron Building at East 23rd Street to Union Square at East 17th Street.

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Photo:

For the city that never sleeps, going a full day without cars on the road may seem like an out-of-this-world plan, but according to one transportation expert, the idea is possible — it just needs a little more planning.

On Wednesday, Councilman and Transportation Committee Chair Ydanis Rodriguez announced the launch of the first Car Free NYC to be held on Earth Day, the [New York Daily News](#) reported.

Cars will not be allowed on the streets April 22 in three Manhattan areas: from the Flatiron Building at East 23rd Street to Union Square at East 17th Street; around Washington Square Park; and in Washington Heights on Wadsworth Avenue from 173rd to 177th streets, the Daily News reported.

Although only streets in Manhattan will be closed off to car traffic, Rodriguez encourages all New Yorkers for that one day to leave their cars and opt for public transportation, riding a bicycle or taking a walk.

“This is something we can and should commit to, to drive home the cost of our overreliance on cars in New York City,” Rodriguez said, according to the Daily News.

Overall, the plan is for the car-free day to expand citywide.

Also on Earth Day, the Daily News reported, other transportation companies will encourage New Yorkers to be car-free. For example, [Citi Bike](#) will offer a free 24-hour pass to anyone who signs up April 22.

For Robert Paaswell, professor of civil engineering at CUNY City College, a car-free day is a great idea for helping quiet down the streets of New York City. However, in order to get the rest of the boroughs to participate, he suggests more planning to get everyone on the same page.

“New York is a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week city. You still need people to be able to get to work,” Paaswell said. “It’s a great experiment to try to help to quiet down the city. Car quieting is great because it relieves a lot of tensions on the streets.”

He suggests officials meet with borough presidents and put together a task force of engineers, planners and citizens to examine specific boroughs and neighborhoods.

Individual boroughs should have car-free days so the city can learn how each neighborhood responds and which need additional transportation options.

“You really need to study how to satisfy quieting the streets as much as you can and at the same time making it possible for people to [get around],” Paaswell said.

The professor also said for a car-free day to fully function in the city, there must be a good transit capacity, and the transit system must be fully funded in order to support a large number of riders. There should be added bus service to areas without subway access, and effort to inform New Yorkers of what’s happening on in their neighborhoods.

And although it is going to take a while for a citywide car-free day to occur, Paaswell said New Yorkers should be open to the idea of the one day of the year where streets would be quiet.

“Everyone wants to go to Europe, and they like to wander the streets that are car-free,” Paaswell said. “There is nothing that keeps us from creating that environment here. We’re not saying give it up for the rest of your lives. It’s a day.”

New York City isn't the only metropolis intrigued by car-free streets. [Philadelphia got a taste of a car-free Center City](#) during Pope Francis' visit to the City of Brotherly Love in September.