

# InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

**Janette Sadik-Khan, Author, *Streetfight: Handbook for an Urban Revolution***

**Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA**

## **Streetfight: Handbook for an Urban Revolution**

*Streetfight* is a handbook for urban revolution because it is the story about the transformative power of streets and the future of cities. The book shows how to read the street and rewrite the road, and it shows how investing in infrastructure for walking and biking and buses can help traffic move better, and make the streets safer and better for business. To build the cities that we need for the future it's going to take more than an evolution, it requires a revolution.

## **Moving Beyond Car-Centric Cities**

We really need an asphalt revolution to reclaim our streets and save our cities. And when you think about it, our streets are really sick. In the United States we spent the last century building our cities around the car, but we've damaged our cities in the process and we're getting really diminishing returns on that investment. We've got congestion, we've got 33,000 traffic deaths a year, we've got hollowed-out downtowns, sprawling city limits, and streets that really leave you no choice but to drive. And it's also a trillion-dollar drag on the economy. Mobility choices—making it easier to walk and bike and take the bus—they're not lifestyle amenities, they're really investments in the safety and economy of a city. And so it's really important to move fast. It doesn't take years and years to get these kinds of changes done, and it doesn't take billions of dollars or megaprojects to make your city better. Instead of endlessly debating theoretical changes, I think you can try a project on in the short term and see how it works. There is nothing more powerful than the proof of the possible on the ground.

## **Progress Is Visible Around the Country**

In New York City in the six years under Mayor Mike Bloomberg we put in almost 400 miles of bike lanes, we put in seven rapid bus lines, we put in 60 pedestrian plazas, and launched the largest bike-share system in North America. And again, in just under six years bringing all sorts of new mobility choices to the table for New Yorkers so that they didn't have to have a car to get around. These are strategies that cities around the nation are doing. Houston and Los Angeles are in a surface-transit renaissance. You're seeing plazas in places like Chicago and San Francisco and Boston and Atlanta, and you're seeing protected bike paths showing up in car-dominated cities all over, and they're not just for riders but they actually make the streets much safer for everyone whether you're walking, whether you're biking or whether you're taking the bus. So these are really down payments on a much stronger economy for cities.

## **A New Road Order: Recognizing the Potential of Our Streets**

I think we really take our streets for granted and they've been in a status-quo state, almost in suspended animation, for 50 years. And our expectations haven't changed. The expectation for the street has been: streets are to move cars as fast as possible from point A to point B. And it's really left all of the other ways that a street is used by the side of the road. What we've found in New York City is that it is possible to integrate transit and biking and walking and driving, and they can play well together if you don't make them fight over the scraps. I think you're seeing cities and city leaders really looking differently at their streets and discovering the incredible opportunities that have been hidden in plain sight in the asphalt for decades. And so I think you're starting to see a New Road Order in cities that's based on the idea that city streets can be used for more than just driving. I think the future of cities depends on the decisions that we make today on how to use them more effectively and more efficiently.

## **Making Streets Work Better for Everyone**

People are coming back to cities, and people want lots of choices to get around. And what we've seen in New York and what we've seen around the country and what we've seen around the world is that more and more people are choosing not to even bother to get drivers licenses. You're seeing increasing popularity of Uber and Lyft and car sharing services, and public transportation is at an all-time high. What we've seen is that people really want to be in places, whether they're young or old, that are safe, that are fun, where the quality of life is good and they've got lots of ways to get around that don't involve driving. And when you don't have to own, operate, maintain a car, that's \$10,000 in your pocket. That's \$10,000 that can go for school, that can go for housing, that can go for healthcare, daycare, childcare, so there's a lot of opportunity there, and I think we're actually seeing a very different model. I think that what we need to do is also update our cities and update our streets to reflect the way that people want to use them. Our streets don't update themselves like an iPhone; we have to do that to make them work better for everyone, and I think that's really at the heart of this strategy, that there's more to streets than just cars and highways and stoplights. And streets make up a quarter or more of the public space in cities, so they're really our front yards, but most people don't even think about the way they're designed. And so what we've seen is that we can remake them, reclaim them, redesign them so that they work better for everyone. And the book that we wrote about how we did it in New York City, called *Streetfight*, documents not only the transformations that we brought, but the political narrative about how you overcome the backlash and how these ideas are spreading to cities across the country and around the world.

**[www.infrastructureUSA.org](http://www.infrastructureUSA.org)  
212.414.9220  
[info@infrastructureusa.org](mailto:info@infrastructureusa.org)**