

# FROM GRIT TO GREENWAY

*To be able to ride my bike in NYC is cool because it's an experience. I have ridden in all five boroughs of NYC. My favorite is definitely Manhattan, thanks to their West Side Bike Path. It's easier to ride there than in Hunts Point.*

*In Hunts Point, the congested truck traffic and intervals of rancid smell don't always make riding that fun. When there aren't a lot of trucks, the streets are easy to ride, and that helps the ride be very smooth. When the South Bronx Greenway is completed, it will make Hunts Point the smoothest, coolest place to ride!*

—Sandra Garcia, Hunts Point

Hunts Point is a neighborhood in the South Bronx that hosts 15 waste transfer stations and 11,000 trucks per day. It has less than half an acre of open space per 1,000 residents, compared with an NYC average of 6.2 acres per 1,000 residents. This disparity creates numerous health impacts on neighborhood residents: One in four children have asthma, 27% of adults are obese, and 18% have diabetes.

To improve the health and quality of life for South Bronx residents, the organization I work for, Sustainable South Bronx, and its partner The Point CDC, helped to spearhead a feasibility study that laid the groundwork for the South Bronx Greenway—a recreational pathway planned to run along the Hunts Point and Port Morris waterfronts and throughout the neighborhood. Importantly, the study also provided a forum for neighborhood residents to voice their needs and desires. Already, nearly \$30 million has been secured to help build the greenway and related projects over the next few years.

The greenway will create more landscaped recreational space in the neighborhood as well as provide opportunities for physical activity and play. The first greenway projects are scheduled for construction in 2008. But two waterfront parks on the greenway route are already open—Hunts Point Riverside Park and Barretto Point Park. To encourage neighbors to get active, SSB hosts neighborhood events such as bike rides!

*Menaka Mohan is South Bronx Greenway Coordinator for Sustainable South Bronx (SSB). Founded in 2001 by Majora Carter, a life-long resident of Hunts Point, SSB is a nonprofit organization that promotes sustainable development projects for the South Bronx that are informed by community needs and the values of environmental justice.*

# A PATH TO BROOKLYN

When I first arrived in New York, I was on my bicycle almost every day. I moved to the city from central Oregon, where everyone rode a bike—in summer and winter, through snow and rain. Here, I loved the challenge of jumping onto my trusty mountain bike and heading out to explore the streets of Manhattan. One day I even “discovered” Brooklyn via bicycle, after waking up in my 112th Street apartment and wondering what would happen if I not only rode over the East River, but kept going into the vast uncharted territory of Flatbush Avenue and beyond... I don't think I stopped until I'd crossed the Marine Parkway Bridge!

I've now called Brooklyn home for 11 years, and I'm engaged with issues affecting cycling in the city in a completely different way. I am one of three co-founders of Brooklyn Greenway Initiative (BGI), whose mission is to plan and implement the Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway, a 14-mile route from Greenpoint through Sunset Park. The organization started as an all-volunteer task force in 1998, incorporated as BGI in 2004, and today works in partnership with city agencies and private property owners to coordinate the design, funding, construction, and long-term stewardship of the Greenway.

I began volunteering with the project almost six years ago because I thought a “greenway” sounded like a great idea, but I would have been hard-pressed to offer a definition. And, after many conversations with our greenway supporters, I've realized that its meaning is by no means set in stone. One of my challenges doing public outreach for BGI is that the definition of a greenway—in our case, the Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway—needs to be specific enough to meet individual needs, yet resonate broadly enough to build consensus and justify public funding. Joggers and rollerbladers, recreational cyclists and bike commuters, parents with strollers, kids with training wheels, people with impaired mobility, families out for a sunset stroll—each group needs to see itself as a greenway user in order for the project to be successful.

However one chooses to define a greenway—for BGI, it is a 30-foot wide path, physically separated from the roadway, landscaped, and with separate lanes for bicycles and pedestrians—it is hard not to agree on the broader public benefits. Some have measurable results, such as encouraging people to exercise, improving air quality, and offering new transportation options, but others are less tangible. When completed, the Greenway will connect Brooklyn residents to their northern waterfront, where for more than a century there were only four points of public access. It will be a unifying element, connecting neighborhoods, parks, and industries along the waterfront; yet the design of individual sections will reflect the distinct character of Brooklyn's neighborhoods, thus “connecting” the borough's past to its present.

Six years ago, I couldn't have imagined the complexity of this project, or the incredible number of people—contributing time, energy, expertise, and funds—that it would take to realize this vision. And today, even if I don't ride as much as I'd like, I always mark the arrival of spring by hopping on my same old bicycle and taking a long ride along the waterfront, visiting familiar sites, exploring new ones, and visualizing the future Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway. It's a long way from that first bike ride into Brooklyn more than a decade ago...or is it?

*Meg Fellerath is Director of Programs for Brooklyn Greenway Initiative (<http://www.brooklyngreenway.org/>).*