American Cities Climate Challenge

The American Cities Climate Challenge is an initiative to accelerate climate action in 25 of America’s largest cities. The Climate Challenge provides support and expertise to help participating cities realize their aggressive climate goals in core policy areas, including transportation.

Climate Challenge cities are leading the movement towards sustainable transportation. With plans to implement high-quality bike and transit corridors, redistribute space on their streets, and strengthen the capacity to continue this work into the future, participating cities are at the cutting edge of transportation solutions in America.

The model established in the Climate Challenge sets a precedent for cities across the US. By focusing on a small set of cities poised to implement transformational projects, North America will have high-quality, clearly successful, and replicable examples to point to for further progress in more communities nationwide.

NACTO’s Role in the Climate Challenge

As a partner in the Climate Challenge, NACTO will provide technical assistance and expertise to cities developing high-quality bike and transit lanes. This engagement aims to improve and expand multimodal transportation networks to encourage and provide more access to low-carbon transportation options. This will set a precedent for future projects and help cities rewrite the status quo on their streets by designing them for people instead of personal vehicles.

In 2021, NACTO will focus our expertise on 11 cities with multimodal transportation actions. By providing direction, targeted support, we aim to address specific challenges to building equitable bike and transit projects, bolster internal project champions, and help cities strengthen their processes to deliver lasting change on their streets.

All 25 Climate Challenge cities are able to exchange knowledge across NACTO’s peer network, made up of 86 North American Cities and transit agencies. This includes the opportunity to request Design Charrettes, a digital exercise that taps into the technical expertise and practical experience of the peer network to help cities design targeted improvements to their streets.

Each Climate Challenge city will focus on different projects and tap into NACTO’s resources in different manners, but will leave with the same core results: More clearly defined internal pathways and refined technical expertise to implement street redesign projects.
NACTO's Climate Challenge Work in 2021

Building off the momentum of the past two years, NACTO is providing project development and implementation support in 11 cities that are working to build bikeway and transit projects and advance policies and practices supportive of multimodal transportation.

NACTO will provide focused guidance in 6 priority cities—Atlanta, Cincinnati, Denver, San Antonio, St. Louis, and St. Petersburg—to address specific challenges to implementing multimodal projects. NACTO will develop targeted programming—either expert-led workshops and coaching or office hours with technical and communications staff—to help work through specific questions and advance equitable bike and transit initiatives.

In 5 additional focus cities—Chicago, Los Angeles, Portland, San Jose, and Washington, DC—NACTO will foster a braintrust of peers that connects city staff across the ACCC and NACTO networks. These connections seek to address project barriers and strengthen internal capacity by creating a space for practitioners to brainstorm and refine ideas together, honing technical and professional skills to better advance multimodal projects.

Through specific, highly-targeted support for each of these focus cities, NACTO will work to bolster proactive city efforts to maintain momentum on high impact climate action, catalyze prioritization of racial equity and justice, further accelerate critically-needed multimodal initiatives.

NACTO Accelerator Program

NACTO’s City Accelerator program helps cities rapidly implement high-quality transit or bike corridors, from design to build out. The program was started in 2014 as a way to provide in-depth, on-the-ground support to member cities implementing new street design projects that may depart from existing practice.

Whether a red bus lane or protected bike lane, undertaking new projects requires changing business as usual. Under Accelerators, NACTO helps cities develop the new partnerships and pathways needed to implement these projects, bringing together the rich peer network to help cities move projects from idea to implementation through lasting programmatic change.

Since 2014, five cities have completed Accelerators outside the Climate Challenge: four have completed Transit Program Accelerators—Cambridge, Denver, Indianapolis, and Oakland—and one is currently working with NACTO on a Bike Program Accelerator: San José, CA. All Accelerator cities have completed the program with projects on the ground.
NACTO Accelerator Program

Through the Climate Challenge, NACTO partnered with six cities–Atlanta, Boston, Denver, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and San Antonio–to accelerate the implementation of high-quality bike or transit corridors. From 2019-2020, this approach provided targeted support to help each city rapidly develop new transportation infrastructure and the internal procedures to continue building impactful projects past the Climate Challenge.