

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 climate action leaders in America.

The model established in the Climate Challenge sets a precedent for cities across the U.S. 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 since 2019, NACTO has provided technical assistance and expertise to cities developing high-quality bike and transit networks. This engagement aims to improve and expand multimodal transportation networks, providing more access to low-carbon transportation options and encouraging more people to travel by walking, rolling, biking, or transit. The aim: 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.

All 25 Climate Challenge cities are able to exchange knowledge across NACTO's peer network, made up of 92 North American Cities and transit agencies. 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 2022

In 2022, NACTO will conclude technical and project delivery support with existing focus cities through multi-month working groups and workshops. Topics of these working groups—Developing and Strengthening Project Pipelines, Improving Transit Reliability, and Designing Safer Arterial Streets—focus on challenges in the Climate Challenge network, as well as the wider city transportation field.

Staff from focus cities across our networks will act as co-creators for the working groups, collaborating with peer practitioners to develop practice-oriented workshops.

The culminating workshops aim to transition each city's respective action plan into realistic, achievable outcomes.

NACTO will continue offering office hours on Bikeways & Shared Micromobility, Speed Management, Transit, Engagement, and Policy Strategy throughout the 2022 extension of the Climate Challenge. This will ensure a continuous and reliable forum for Climate Challenge city staff to discuss project and policy details with NACTO technical staff.

NACTO's Climate Challenge Work in 2021

In 2021, NACTO focused our expertise on 11 cities, providing project development and implementation support to help advance bikeway and transit projects and initiatives. Through this targeted outreach, we sought to address specific challenges to building equitable projects, bolster internal project champions, and help cities strengthen their processes to deliver lasting change on their streets.

NACTO provided 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 developed expert-led workshops which were tailored to the unique needs and conditions of each priority city, helping staff come together across departments to work through specific questions and advance equitable bike and transit initiatives.

NACTO developed an office hours program to serve the full 25-city Climate Challenge network. This model makes NACTO technical staff available for working sessions to problem solve directly with city staff, creating a space to solve design and policy challenges, break down barriers to success, and brainstorm ideas. Over 2021, NACTO met with over 50 staff members from 10 cities in over two dozen sessions to help advance on-the-ground initiatives.

Through specific, highly-targeted support for each of our focus cities, and through office hours with the full Climate Challenge network, NACTO worked to bolster proactive city efforts to maintain momentum on high impact climate action, catalyze prioritization of racial equity and justice, and further accelerate critically-needed multimodal initiatives.

NACTO's Climate Challenge Accelerator Program

From 2019 to 2020, NACTO partnered with six cities—Atlanta, Boston, Denver, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and San Antonio—helping to accelerate the implementation of high-quality bike or transit corridors. 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.

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.