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Open streets initiatives in the U.S.: Closed to traffic, open to physical activity

Jill A. Kuhlberg

Washington University in St Louis, Brown School, JKuhlberg@WUSTL.EDU

J. Aaron Hipp

Washington University in St. Louis, Brown School, ahipp@wustl.edu

Amy A. Eyler

Washington University in St. Louis, Brown School, aeyler@wustl.edu

Genevieve Cheng

Washington University in St Louis, Brown School

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1	RUNNING HEAD: OPEN STREETS IN THE U.S.
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12	Open Streets Initiatives in the U.S.: Closed to Traffic, Open to Physical Activity
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14	Kuhlberg, J.A., Hipp, J.A., Eyler, A.E., and Cheng, G.
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20 21	Kuhlberg, J.A., Hipp, J.A., Eyler, A.E., and Cheng, G. Open Streets initiatives in the US: Closed to traffic, open to physical activity. Journal of Physical Activity and Health

2	ABSTRACT
3	Background: The ciclovía, or open streets concept, is a community level physical activity
4	promotion strategy where streets are closed to motorized traffic and open for individuals to
5	engage in PA. This paper presents an overview of such initiatives in the U.S. to understand their
6	potential in PA promotion, comparing event and city characteristics.
7	Methods: We searched <i>ciclovía</i> and open streets initiatives held in 2011 in the U.S. using
8	internet searches, publication databases, social media, and personal contacts. We extracted data
9	on the each initiative's frequency, route length, attendance, evaluation procedures, and
10	sociodemographic characteristics of host cities.
11	Results: Our search yielded 47 U.S. cities with open streets in 2011. Cities were diverse in
12	sociodemographic characteristics. Route lengths ranged from a few blocks to 51 miles and event
13	frequency ranged from annual to monthly. Reporting number of participants for events was
14	sporadic. Few events conducted formal evaluations.
15	Conclusion: The number of U.S. cities hosting open streets is increasing. The
16	sociodemographics of the host cities suggest a potential to increase physical activity in
17	populations at risk for developing chronic diseases through these initiatives. However, further
18	evaluation is required. Identifying successful promotion and evaluation tactics would boost the
19	health promotion potential of these initiatives.
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21 Word count: 200

Open Streets Initiatives in the U.S.: Closed to Traffic, Open to Physical Activity

3	Background
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Nearly 75% of residents in the U.S. do not engage in the recommended thirty minutes of physical activity, five days a week, and over 25% report they have not engaged in any form of physical activity within the past month ¹. These striking statistics place a majority of U.S. adults at risk for developing chronic diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, and some forms of cancer ^{2,3}. With such a large proportion of the U.S. population at risk for developing chronic diseases due to physical inactivity, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advocates for community wide initiatives to promote physical activity ⁴. *Ciclovías* or open streets events, are one such initiative, where city streets are opened for residents to use for physical activity and closed to motorized traffic ⁵.

These initiatives originated in Bogotá, Colombia, and have recently become popular in the U.S. Descriptions of widely attended and regularly offered open streets initiatives in Colombia and other cities in Latin America make a case for evaluating their potential social, environmental, and health benefits at the community level ⁵. However, little is known about the growing number of open street initiatives in the U.S. Information about host cities, who and how many people are participating, what types of activities are organized for the initiatives, route distance, and frequency of events is necessary information for determining the potential of open streets to improve community health and increase physical activity. The purpose of the present study is to describe open streets initiatives in the U.S. and make comparisons across sites based on both the characteristics of the events (e.g., length of routes, frequency, number of participants) and the host city (e.g., demographics of residents, population).

Access to Public Spaces for Physical Activity

Scientific evidence from the Guide to Community Preventive Services (2009) shows that providing access to outdoor sites for physical activity, such as trails, influences the level of physical activity in a community. Studies have concluded that when trails are introduced in a neighborhood, people who were not regularly physically active begin to use the trail and increase their physical activity ⁴. However, access to open spaces varies greatly. There is considerably less access to safe public spaces for physical activity in lower income neighborhoods, than in higher income neighborhoods ⁶. Open streets initiatives democratizes the commons by creating safe, public spaces for community residents to engage in physical activity that can be accessible to all city residents regardless of disparity ^{7, 8}.

Ciclovías in Latin America: The first open streets initiatives

The regular closure of streets to cars and other motorized vehicles to give residents an opportunity for physical activity began in Bogota, Colombia, in the early 1980s. Residents could bike, walk, run, or participate in a number of free physical activity stations, including aerobics and dance classes on the streets. Starting with just a few block closures one Sunday per month, the event and others like it spread across Colombia and grew into weekly events. Currently, in Bogotá, more than 100 km of streets are closed each Sunday and more the one million residents participate each week. Sarmiento and colleagues (2009) found that 35 cities across nine countries in Latin America hosted *ciclovías* through 2008. The majority of the cities hosting events in Latin America report thousands of participants. Considering the regularity and high attendance at the *ciclovías* in several cities in Latin America, researchers have suggested the potential for *ciclovía* initiatives to increase physical activity levels in residents, and in turn, reduce residents' risk for developing chronic diseases ^{2,3,5}.

Ciclovía Initiatives in the U.S.

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Sarmiento et al.'s (2009) review of *ciclovías* found that by 2009 just three sites in the U.S. had hosted *ciclovías*. Although many U.S. cities hosted similar events, frequently referred to as 'open streets' initiatives, they did not meet the definitive criteria set forth for concept, event frequency (at least twice a month), and/or route length (more than one km of public streets closed) ⁵. Little is known about the origins of the open street movement in the U.S. Wayne County, Michigan is considered the first site of a *ciclovía* initiatives in the U.S., with its *Saturdays in the* Park events that since 1983 closes 6 miles of road every week from 9:00AM to 3:30PM in the warmer months (May-September; Wayne County Parks Department, 2012). However, the next documented US ciclovía initiative did not occur until decades later. Even today, few cities such as Atlanta, GA, Portland, OR, and St. Louis, MO, have publicized data on participation and attendance. The present study fills a knowledge gap about the nature and extent of these initiatives not previously reported. Although the number of initiatives appears to be growing, to date there has been a lack of empirical data that describes the initiatives. A detailed description of initiatives and the cities that host them can provide information for improving implementation. Additionally, demographic characteristics from the host cities can be used for comparison and diffusion of these initiatives.

Methods

For the purpose of this overview, U.S. open streets are defined as any free, public initiative held in a city where streets are closed to motorized traffic for a period of time and opened to residents with the primary purpose of encouraging physical activity. We used more general criteria than Sarmiento and colleagues (2009) for this overview of open streets initiatives

- and no event was excluded based on the absence or limits of these event attributes. However,
- 2 routes where streets are closed entirely inside the boundaries of parks were not included in the
- 3 search.

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Literature Review

5 To locate articles about open streets initiatives in the U.S., a review of the literature was 6 first conducted in databases of peer-reviewed journal articles including MEDLINE and Google Scholar, following search terms suggested in a previous review ⁵. Additional search terms were 7 8 added to reflect common names of open streets initiatives in the U.S. including, "ciclovía", 9 "open streets", "Sunday streets", "Sunday parkways", and "streets alive". A search of grey 10 literature, including agency, alliance, foundation reports, or national cycling and active living 11 websites was then employed, using the internet to locate additional resources that described open 12 streets being held across the U.S., and any results or studies from them. This effort included 13 collaboration with the Open Streets Project and the Alliance for Biking and Walking 14 (OpenStreetsProject.org). Finally, we used Google searches, and Google Alerts to search for any 15 websites that indicated an open streets was being held in a city, and searched for Facebook groups and Twitter ⁹. Although Google Alert notifications helped us to triangulate information 16 17 on events we already had collected from Facebook, Twitter, and other websites hosted by 18 organizations or city governments, they did not produce any knowledge of new events that had 19 not been found in previous search strategies. All searching was conducted between May 2011 20 and January of 2012.

Data Extraction and Evaluation

Cities hosting open streets initiatives were included in the final overview if they hosted at least one event in 2011. Data about the initiatives were extracted from the journal articles,

internet sources, and open street organizers and entered into a spreadsheet. A description of each
ciclovía included the following characteristics: 1) frequency (i.e., times per year), 2) year of
inception, 3) length of the route, 4) estimated number of participants per event, 5) hours of the
initiatives, 6) incorporation of other physical activity activities along the route, 7) sponsors and
organizers of the initiatives (e.g., public, private or both), 8) use of social media (i.e., Facebook,
Twitter, YouTube, etc.) in any way to promote the initiatives, and 9) any evidence of formal
evaluation. In addition to initiative characteristics, demographic characteristics of each host city:
city population, percent of residents living under the federal poverty line, percent of minority
residents, percent of Hispanic residents, and percent of the population under eighteen years of
age and minority ¹⁰ . These characteristics were obtained to gain an understanding of the
potential for these open streets to involve large populations, especially low-income communities
of color at-risk for developing chronic diseases related to lack of physical activity.
Analysis

Data was gathered and imported into an Excel spreadsheet. After all information was collected, descriptive analysis was used to capture frequencies, means, and ranges.

Results

> The search yielded 48 open street initiatives across 47 cities (Seattle hosts two separately organized open street initiatives, Bicycle Sunday and Summer Streets), in 26 states and Washington, DC, in 2011. Five host cities were found via peer-reviewed journal articles ⁵, and the remaining were found through web searches and Google Alerts which included mention of open streets or similar terms on websites of the city and county, local news sources, non-profit organizations sponsoring open streets initiatives, and social media sites.

General description of host cities

Five (10%) of the cities that hosted open streets in 2011 were large metropolitan areas with populations over one million residents (Chicago, Los Angeles, New York City, Phoenix, and San Antonio). Over half the cities in the analysis (n=27, 56%) have populations between 100,000 and less than one million, and one-third have populations less than 100,000, with the smallest being Cornwall Town, New York (pop. 12,646). The sociodemographic characteristics of the host cities' residents varied. However most of the cities hosting open streets in 2011 had a high percentage of residents that are considered at high risk for developing chronic diseases (i.e., low income minority adults and children). The average percent of the population living below the poverty line in the host cities was 16% (national average 15%), ranging from 3% in Albany, CA, to 31% in Cleveland, OH. Thirty-eight (81%) cities had minority populations greater than the 2010 national proportion ¹⁰. The average percentage of minority children living in host cities was 45%, with a range from 7% (Greenbrier, WV) to 85% (Ferguson, MO). Just over one-third (n=18, 36%) of the cities had a higher percentage of Hispanic residents than the national average of 16% ¹⁰.

Open street event characteristics

Although Wayne County Michigan is credited with the first open street event in the U.S., Seattle, WA (*Bicycle Sunday*), and Westchester County, NY (*Bicycle Sundays*), list the inception dates for their open street-type events in 1965 and 1974, respectively. Between 1983 and 2000, only one city (Phoenix, AZ: *Silent Sundays*) began new open streets initiatives, however, from 2000 through 2009, 15 other cities began hosting their initiatives. In 2010, 16 cities hosted their first open streets, and in 2011 13 cities hosted inaugural events. Most events hosted in 2011 were held on Sundays (n=39, 81%), fewer on Saturdays (n=8, 17%), and *Somerstreets* in Somerville, MA had events on both Saturday and Sunday. The average length of the events held in 2011 was

1 4.7 hours (SD=1.9). Most open streets spanned from morning through the afternoon (n=29, 2 60%), some *ciclovías* were afternoon-only events (n=14, 29%), with fewer morning events only 3 (n=4, 8%). Route length data was available for 27 of the events, with lengths from 0.14 miles in 4 Greenbrier County, WV (Parkersburg Park Day), to 51 miles in Phoenix, AZ (Silent Sundays). 5 The average length was 4.7 miles, the median 2 miles. 6 Over half of the open streets initiatives were considered annual events in 2011 (n=26, 7 51%) Ten (21%) were held less than quarterly, three (6%) more than quarterly, but less than 8 monthly, ten (21%) were held monthly. Estimates for attendance were found for just over one-9 third of the events (n=17, 36%), and attendance estimates varied greatly. The smallest 10 attendance was for Cycling Sunday in Winston-Salem, NC (250 estimated participants) and both 11 New York City's Summer Streets and Los Angeles' CicLAvia reported over 100,000 participants 12 at each of their open streets initiatives. Across all initiatives, the mean was 24,100 participants 13 (SD=33,600) per event day, and the median 10,000 participants. 14 **Partnerships and Evaluation**

The partnerships and collaborations that cities form to host the events vary across open streets sites. The majority of the events were organized with funds from both the private and the public sector (n=24, 51%), other open streets were organized with only public sector funds (n=11, 23%), and some were organized with only private funding (e.g., NGOs and/or private businesses; n=12, 26%). Lastly, of the 48 initiatives in the search, only 7 (15%) had some type of formal evaluation of their event.

21 Discussion

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This paper provided an overview of the 48 open street initiatives hosted in cities across the U.S in 2011. While the number of open streets has doubled since 2009, most of the events

are held infrequently (less than 6 times total per year). The cities hosting these events range in size from small suburban towns to large metropolitan areas, and also range in socioeconomic demographics. The events themselves are as varied as the cities that host them; the event time of day, duration of the event, length of the route, types of sponsors, activities offered, and number of participants all range broadly. Open streets events have potential to increase physical activity in community residents and raise awareness about the importance of physical activity, but can also produce additional social benefits such as enhanced sense of community among residents ^{5,7,8}. Open streets initiatives may also promote active transportation and positively contribute to the economy by creating jobs in event organizing and increasing revenue for vendors of goods and services, especially if held regularly. However, without adequate evaluation and documentation, the attainability of this potential remains unclear for open streets in the U.S. More research is needed on the most effective aspects of these events such as length of the routes and frequency ^{11,12}. Our results show that open streets initiatives are held in a wide variety of cities across the U.S. Initiatives take place in large metro areas and smaller suburban areas. Additionally, sponsorship and partnership varies by host city. Different combinations of private corporations, non-profit organizations, and city, state, and county governments are collaborating to sponsor ciclovía initiatives in cities across the U.S., indicating the support for community-wide health promotion initiatives across various sectors. Future studies should include research on the transdisciplinary nature and collaborative relationships in event planning and implementation. Although initiatives do not appear to be concentrated in any geographic region(s), further investigation is needed to understand the diffusion of this kind of event, as some states with high

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prevalence of obesity and chronic disease like Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana do
not host initiatives.

In addition to community and health benefits, open streets can benefit a city economically. Past literature on open streets has reported that residents and shopkeepers initially find public street closures to be a nuisance, but over time become engaged in the benefits of the events' objectives. For example, shopkeepers may experience increased business from the open streets participants as a result of the event, or may even find a way to creatively encourage business during the events. In this way, it could be that initiative organizers might experience a "worse before better" result, meaning business owners and residents may experience some delay in the benefits (i.e., increased business) these initiatives can generate. Sponsors and organizers should be aware of this lag in acceptance and actively work to engage stakeholders, as local governments have done in Bogota in the early years of their ciclovía ¹³. Event organizers from Bogota, as well as the Open Streets Project have created materials to help plan opens streets initiatives, detailing steps from talking with stakeholders, and route planning to evaluation and dissemination of event outcomes.

Although this overview found that nearly fifty cities currently host open streets initiatives, few initiatives had formal evaluation components. Evaluation can help organizers improve their initiatives and can help them report aspects of event success to the community and sponsors, Evidence of success can further increase support for the local initiatives. Evaluation results can also assist other communities interested in starting open streets initiatives.

Limitations

Although this paper is unique that it describes open streets initiatives in the U.S., there are several limitations. First, data reported for a one-year period (2011) was extracted from

1	diverse sources, ranging from peer-reviewed journals to local newspapers and event websites,
2	limiting the conclusions that can be drawn from any comparisons due to differences in what and
3	how event details are reported. Events for which attendance numbers were available in most

cases did not describe their methods for counting and estimation thus limiting comparability.

In addition, data on the characteristics of the events extracted from various Internet sources were verified with initiatives organizers when possible, but in a few cases no organizer could be contacted. Only events that have information on the Internet have been included in this review. While the use of the Internet is growing to be a standard method of reporting and event promotion, if events were only promoted in methods other than the Internet, these events would go unmentioned in this paper, introducing bias into the sample we examined. However, despite these limitations, this paper was the first to describe and compare open streets hosted in the U.S.,

Conclusion and Implications

As the number of open street initiatives hosted in the U.S. continues to increase, so does the potential to use these events for physical activity promotion in communities at most risk for chronic diseases related to lack of physical activity. However, to increase the effectiveness of these events, there is a need for standard evaluation methods of the events and mechanisms for host cities to share best practices.

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Table 1. Characteristics of open streets initiatives held in 2012 and their host cities.

				%								
		Pop.,	%	minority		Route						
City, State	Year of	% Below	minority,	under 18		Length	Durat.		Est.			
Event Name	Inception	Poverty	% Hispanic	yrs.	Day	(miles)	(Hrs.)	Freq.	attend.	Org.	Funded	Eval.
Albany/El Cerrito, CA												
Alberrito Streets	2010	42088, 8.1	46.1, 10.7	53.6	Sun.	0.2	3	1		Pub	Both	No
Atlanta, GA		420003,										
Streets Alive	2010	22.6	61.6, 5.2	73.1	Sat.	2.7	4	2	6000	NP	Both	Yes
Boulder, CO		97385,										
Green Streets	2010	21.1	12, 8.7	19.7	Sun.	0.7	6	1	15000	Pub	Both	No
Cambridge, MA		105162,										
Memorial Dr. Closed Sundays	2004	15.0	33.4, 7.6	50.1	Sun.	1	8	7		Pub	Pub	No
Charlestown, SC		120083,										
2 nd Sunday on King St.	2010	17.9	29.8, 2.9	43.1	Sun.	1.25	4	12		Both	Both	No
Chicago, IL	2008	2695598,	55, 28.9	65.4	Sun.	0.7	5	1		NP	Priv	No

Open Streets		20.9										
Cleveland, OH		396815,										
Walk + Roll	2006	31.2	62.7, 10	74.3	Sat.	3	5	1		NP	Priv	No
Coral Gables, FL		787033,										
Gables Bike Day	2011	21.4	38.5, 5.6	52.9	Sun.	0.8	5	1		NP	Priv	No
Cornwall (Town), NY		46780,										
Storm King Hike & Bike	2011	9.0	9, 53.6	7	Sat.	3.5	4	8		Pub	Pub	No
Denver, CO		12646,										
Viva Streets	2011	5.0	8, 8.3	11.9	Sun.	2	4	1	75000	BP	Both	Yes
Durham, NC		600158,										
Bull City Summer Streets	2010	19.2	31.1, 31.8	44.5	Sun.	0.9	3	1		NP	Priv	No
El Paso, TX		228330,										
Scenic Sundays	2007	17.9	57.5, 14.2	68.5	Sun.	8	6	12		Pub	Pub	No
Eugene, OR		649121,										
Summer Streets	2011	24.1	19.2, 80.7	21.2	Sun.	3	4	1		Pub	Both	No

Evanston, IL		156185,										
Bike the Ridge	2009	20.7	14.2, 7.8	22	Sun.	2	4	1				No
Fargo/Moorhead, ND		74486,										
Streets Alive	2010	11.4	34.4, 9	42.2	Sun.	3	5	2	6000	Priv	Both	Yes
Ferguson, MO		21203,										
Sunday Parkways	2010	17.6	70.7, 1.2	85	Sun.	1	3	3		NP	Both	No
Fort Worth, TX		741206,										
Open Streets	2011	17.0	38.9, 34.1	44.5	Sun.	0.85	4	2		Pub	Both	No
Greenbrier County, WV		35480,										
Parkersburg Park Day	2011	19.4	5.4, 1.2	7.4	Sun.	0.14	5	1		NP	Both	No
Las Cruces, NM		97618,										
Ciclovia	2003	20.4	24.7, 56.8	31	Sun.	7	4	12		Pub	Both	No
Lexington, KY		295803,										
2 nd Sunday	2008	17.5	24.3, 6.9	35	Sun.	1	6	12	15000	Pub	Pub	No
Lincoln, NE	2011	258379,	14, 6.3	22.3	Sun.	3.3	4.5	1	3000	Both	Both	No

Streets Alive!		14.9										
Long Beach, CA		462257,										
LB Bike Festival	2008	19.1	53.9, 40.8	63.7	Sat.	3	7	1	5000	NP	Priv	No
Los Angeles, CA		3792621,										
CicLAvia	2010	19.5	50.2, 48.5	55.9	Sun.	10	5	2	100000	NP	Priv	No
Madison, WI		233209,										
Ride the Drive	2011	17.9	21.1, 6.8	38.5	Sun.	6	5	1	15000	NP	Priv	No
Miami, FL		399457,										
Bike Miami Days	2008	27.3	27.4, 70	34.1	Sun.	0.4	4	1		Pub	Pub	No
Minneapolis, MN		382578,										
Open Streets	2011	22.7	36.2, 10.5	59.6	Sun.	2.6	4	1		BP	Both	No
Missoula, MT		66788,										
Sunday Streets	2010	22.1	7.9, 2.9	13.3	Sun.	0.8	6	2	3500	NP	Priv	Yes
New York, NY		8175133,										
Summer Streets	2008	19.1	56, 28.6	63.3	Sat.	7	5	3	100000	Pub	Pub	No

Oak Forest, IL		27962,										
Open Streets	2010	8.3	16.6, 13.4	22.1	Sun.	1.6	1.5	1		Pub	Both	No
Phoenix, AZ		1445632,										
Silent Sundays	1999	19.1	34.1, 40.8	43.7	Sun.	51	14	12		Pub	Pub	No
Pinecrest Village, FL		18223,										
Bike Days	2010	4.2	9.9, 41.3	10	Sun.	2	3.5	1		Priv	Both	No
Portland, OR		583776,										
Sunday Streets	2008	16.3	23.9, 9.4	37.6	Sun.	6	5	12	31600	NP	Both	Yes
Redding, CA		89861,										
Shasta Streets Alive	2011	17.3	14.2, 8.7	22		1.5	5	1		Pub	Both	No
San Antonio, TX		1327407,										
SíClovía	2011	18.9	27.4, 63.2	30.8	Sun.	2.2	4	1		NP	Both	No
San Francisco, CA		805235,										
Sunday Streets	2008	11.9	51.5, 15.1	64.9	Sun.	4.5	4	12	20000	Pub	Both	No
San Mateo, CA	2010	718451,	46.6, 25.4	52.9	Sun.		3	1		Pub	Pub	No

Streets Alive		7.0										
Seattle, WA		608660,										
Bicycle Sunday	1965	12.7	30.5, 6.6	42.6	Sun.	3	8	10	3200	Both	Both	No
Seattle, WA		608660,										
Summer Streets	2008	12.7	30.5, 6.6	42.6	Sun.	3	4	4		NP	Priv	No
					Sat.							
Somerville, MA		75754,			or							
SomerStreets	2010	14.7	26.1, 10.6	42	Sun.	2	4	5		NP	Priv	No
Spartanburg, SC		37013,										
Sunday Streets	2011	22.8	54.4, 3.4	69.6	Sun.	0.3	4	2		NP	Priv	No
Spokane, WA		208916,										
Summer Parkways	2010	18.7	13.3, 5	21.5	Sun.	2	4	3		Pub	Pub	No
St. Louis, MO		319294,										
Open Streets	2010	26.0	56.1, 3.5	73.9	Sat.	2	4	2	1200	BP	Both	Yes
Tucson, AZ	2010	520116,	30.3, 41.6	41.5	Sun.	5.5	5	1	10000	NP	Priv	Yes

Cyclovia		21.3										
Vineland, NJ		60724,										
Open Streets	2011	12.8	33, 38	42.3	Sun.	1	3	1		Pub	Pub	No
Washington, DC												
Feet in the Street/Ciclovia		601723,										
DC	2009	18.5	61.5, 9.1	79	Sun.	1.6	6	1		Pub	Both	No
Wayne County, MI		1820584,										
Saturday in the Park	1983	13.6	47.7, 5.2	54.2	Sat.	6.8	4	12				No
Westchester County, NY		949113,										
Bicycle Sundays	1974	8.2	31.9, 21.8	36.2	Sun.	6.6	4	12		Priv	Both	No
Winston-Salem, NC	2000				G	2			250	MD	ъ. т	.
Cycling Sunday	2009				Sun.	2	3	1	250	NP	Both	No