

## Mandu Sen's Pre-reads (2) for March 29, 2018 NYC Meeting

### Excerpted from The Fourth Regional Plan

#### Health

Everyone deserves the opportunity to live the healthiest life possible, regardless of who they are or where they live.

#### Goal

By 2040, everyone in the tri-state region should live longer and be far less likely to suffer from mental illness or chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease, with low-income, Black and Hispanic residents seeing the greatest improvements.

#### Learn More

[State of the Region's Health: How the New York Metropolitan Region's Urban Systems Influence Health](#)

#### **The Fourth Regional Plan provides a roadmap to address health inequities rooted in the built environment and create a healthier future for all.**

Recent improvements in health across the New York region have not benefited everyone.<sup>1</sup> Too many health challenges are concentrated in poor communities of color, due in large extent to planning and other policy decisions.

Many factors contribute to the health of residents, including where affordable housing and roads are built, the transit system and other infrastructure, and preparedness for climate change. Yet planning decisions continue to prioritize efficiency over health and well-being, or reflect institutional racism and other biases. These attitudes were reproduced in many policies and practices, such as discriminatory housing policies that led to the tri-state region having one of the highest levels of segregation in the United States.<sup>2</sup> As a result, low-income residents and people of color are far more likely to be isolated from the resources and opportunities needed to live healthy lives.

We can reduce health inequities by making different investments and policy decisions. We can create better health outcomes in marginalized communities, while expanding our economy and protecting our environment.

After all, connecting planning and health isn't a new idea. Modern urban planning began largely in response to infectious-disease epidemics. The development of sanitation and water systems, parks, and building codes saved countless lives. The connection between planning and health was recognized in the New York metropolitan region as well. As Thomas Adams, who led the development of RPA's 1928 "Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs," told the American Public Health Association in 1926, health was "the first object," the key goal of regional planning.<sup>3</sup>

Life expectancy has risen, but the residents of some communities still live significantly longer than others. Factors related to place, such as school quality, walkability and air pollution, affect people's health—and these vary greatly across the region. **Average Life Expectancy, 2010.** Source: Institute for Health Metrics & Evaluation

### **Reconnecting planning and health**

The Fourth Regional Plan would restore the connection between planning and health with actions that would correct past injustices and improve the lives of coming generations. As described below, the plan's recommendations seek to intentionally improve health while addressing challenges in four key areas: climate change, transportation, affordability, and governance.

### **Reform institutions to incorporate health into decision making.**

Institutional reform is a precondition to the implementation of any plan. This presents an opportunity to embrace a “culture of health.” Agencies would recognize they are responsible for the public's health and make decisions through the lens of health equity. Health impact assessments would be commonplace and funding tied to outcomes. Communities would shape their own future and the health sector would be a key stakeholder in decision-making. To achieve these outcomes would require the following:

- Reorient our transit agencies toward health as part of [the transformation of the way we govern and pay for transportation](#). Agencies should set health as a goal when evaluating planning and capital budget decisions. Health equity and the full range of social determinants of health, where relevant, should be considered. A chief health officer could promote a health agenda within the organization, guide implementation, and serve as a link to the health sector.
- Integrate health into the core missions of [newly created institutions to tackle climate change](#). A new regional coastal commission should use health as a lens through which to communicate about climate change, and health should be incorporated into the funding criteria of an adaptation trust fund. Expanded carbon pricing together with investment in community led efforts could help ensure reductions in carbon emissions benefit the communities most exposed.
- Leverage [reforms to the local planning process](#) to make it more inclusive, predictable, and efficient to include health. Engage from the get-go all community members, especially those not traditionally included in decision making. Incorporate health impact assessments—and technical support for them—into master planning. Leverage universities and hospitals to spur neighborhood reinvestment and [promote partnerships between anchor institutions and local communities](#) by engaging them as key partners in the process.
- Integrate health into the public realm through a new [21st century regional census agency](#). Start by developing consistent measures of street and public space conditions related to health. As data-driven decision-making advances, these measures could serve as inputs in street-management decisions. Prioritize street redesigns in low-income communities as a tool to improve health and [increase participation in local government](#).

### **Rebuild and expand the transportation network to serve everyone.**

A rebuilt and expanded transportation system would connect more low-income communities, be usable by all, and limit negative environmental impacts. New rail service would open up the region's downtowns to more jobs and other opportunities, and enable more walkable communities. New York City's subways would be safer, cleaner, quieter, and fully accessible to people with disabilities. The region's bus system would be fast, reliable, and integrated with other transportation options. Fewer communities would be burdened by poor air quality. And safer streets would have more room for more people of all abilities to enjoy the health benefits of walking and biking. Achieving these outcomes would require the following:

- [Create a regional public transportation network](#) by using commuter rail to connect job centers and underserved areas throughout the region with fast, reliable service and fare structures that allow more people to afford it.
- Increase the subway's capacity and reliability. Improve the riding experience by [adopting new technology for fast, reliable subway service](#) and [creating spacious and healthier subway stations](#) and making them accessible to all.
- [Extend and build new subway lines to underserved areas](#), such as the Third Avenue corridor in the Bronx, neighborhoods along Northern Boulevard in Queens, and Utica Avenue in Brooklyn.
- Expand the transit system. Provide more and better transit options in suburban areas with [affordable, on-demand service](#) and reform and expand the paratransit system.
- [Improve bus service](#) and introduce new streetcar and light rail lines in both urban and suburban areas, connecting communities, reducing auto traffic, and promoting walkable neighborhoods.
- [Remove, bury, or deck over highways that blight communities](#) of color and repurpose them to serve the communities they are in and expand nature into urban areas.
- [On city streets, prioritize people over cars](#) by closing certain streets to cars, limiting parking in others, prioritizing pedestrians, cyclists, and sustainable transit, and making goods movement more efficient, thus reducing congestion, air pollution, and noise.

### **Meet the challenge of climate change by creating a healthier environment.**

Preparing for climate change would prevent countless injuries and deaths from extreme heat and flooding, and fewer people would be displaced or live in damaged homes. Cleaner air and water would reduce disease. And many more people, especially communities of color, would enjoy the region's abundant nature and open spaces. To achieve these outcomes would require the following:

- [Create a greener and greater energy system](#). Modernize the electrical grid and sharply reduce carbon emissions by charging industry and consumers for the amount of carbon they produce, and investing in building energy efficiency, electric-vehicle infrastructure, and renewable energy sources.
- [Protect densely populated communities along the coast from storms and flooding](#) by deploying natural and built infrastructure and [transitioning people away from places that can't be protected](#) in a way that preserves social cohesion.

- [Mitigate the urban heat island effect](#). Reduce rising temperatures in urban areas by creating new design guidelines and community greening initiatives to cool our communities.
- [Connect open spaces](#). Create a tri-state trail network that connects people who have limited mobility and those without cars to nature via accessible walking and biking trails.

### **Create affordable and healthy communities.**

Measures such as fair-housing rules enforcement, land trusts, and support for homeownership will ensure that in the future, growth in the region happens in a way that benefits existing residents, particularly communities of color. More high-quality housing, jobs, public spaces, and services will result in more communities where living a healthy life is the easy choice. To achieve these outcomes would require the following:

- Provide affordable housing for all incomes, ages, races, and ethnicities through strategies such as [mandatory inclusionary housing](#) across the region, enforcement of [fair-housing](#) rules, reforms to [housing subsidies](#) programs, and [incentives for transit-oriented development](#).
- [Protect low-income residents from displacement](#) and homelessness by preserving existing affordable housing, strengthening tenant rent protections and homeowner protections, and enabling existing residents to capture more of the wealth created from rising property values.
- [Make all housing healthy housing](#) by adopting routine inspections for health hazards in at-risk communities, new technology to detect problems, and streamlined remediation processes that address multiple hazards at once.
- [Expand access to more well-paying jobs](#) by prioritizing investments in older cities and downtowns, preserving manufacturing, and [expanding affordable internet](#) access across the region.
- [Expand healthy, affordable food access in the region](#) by prioritizing the needs of food-insecure communities, supporting a diversity of food options, and integrating food planning into regional institutions.

If implemented, these actions could help everyone lead the healthiest life possible, regardless of who they are or where they live. But for that to happen, broad consensus around challenging topics will be necessary. Health could be a way to build new alliances, promote equity, understand the true value of different investments, and promote civic engagement.

## **New York City**

### **Sustain and broaden prosperity**

In the past two decades, New York City has experienced a remarkable turnaround. The city's dynamic economy, robust transit system, walkable neighborhoods, cultural diversity, and global connections have restored its leadership position both nationally and internationally. Nearly nine out of ten jobs

added in the region from 2005 to 2015 were in the five boroughs, after decades of being outpaced by suburban neighbors

While the city benefited from global urbanization trends, the resurgence would not have been possible without intentional policy choices. Large capital investment programs dating back to the 1980s restored much of the city's housing stock and returned public transportation infrastructure to working order. Public safety improvements starting in the 1990s made New York one of the safest big cities in America. And over the last 15 years, renewed focus on public health, education, and public spaces has improved the well-being of city residents.

But this success remains fragile and incomplete. Poverty remains high, incomes haven't risen for the majority of households, and increased demand for living in the city has resulted in skyrocketing housing costs. Neighborhoods that were once bastions of affordable housing have become too expensive for long-time poor and working-class residents, forcing many to move, with fewer and fewer options of places to go.

The city's wide disparities in race and socioeconomic status are perhaps most pronounced in the areas of health and longevity. Residents of the more affluent Upper East Side live, on average, ten years longer than residents of Harlem next door, who are primarily black, Hispanic, and less wealthy, and are more likely to have less access to stable housing, a good job, and a healthy environment.<sup>1</sup>

More than 360,000 more people call New York City home today than in 2010, and 610,000 more people work here. Yet investment in the city's infrastructure has not kept pace, leaving many systems in disrepair. Subways are overcrowded and frequently delayed—and more serious disruptions occur with alarming regularity. Streets are more congested than ever before, costing billions in lost economic productivity. Bus service is slow and ridership has dropped dramatically, due in part to passengers switching to faster and more reliable on-demand services. Two of the city's major transit hubs—Penn Station and the Port Authority Bus Terminal—cannot handle current passenger loads, and rail services are prone to frequent failures.

The impacts of climate change will add to these challenges. Many of the areas most susceptible to sea-level rise and storm surge are densely populated neighborhoods with lower-income residents, or residents of color. These include communities in the Rockaways, Jamaica Bay, Coney Island, and the East Shore of Staten Island. Much of the city's critical infrastructure is also located in the floodplain, such as power plants, rail yards, public housing, and hospitals.

Addressing these challenges will require reforming many of New York City's public agencies and authorities, and reforming their regulatory structures to enable faster decision-making and unlock new funding sources. And because these challenges are regional in nature, addressing them will also require greater collaboration with neighboring cities and towns outside the city's borders, as well as with state government.

Fortunately, New York City has a strong track record dealing with crises. Whether reducing crime or improving transit, the city's civic, business, and political leadership have usually come together to make things happen.

The Fourth Regional Plan recommends actions that would build on the city's successes to sustain and broaden its prosperity.

Modernizing the subway system to increase capacity and improve service is a priority. The plan proposes a Subway Reconstruction Public Benefit Corporation to oversee overhauling the entire system within 15 years, and providing fast and reliable service, clean and accessible stations, and better customer service. The subway system would also be extended to underserved neighborhoods.

Another transit priority for New York City is to significantly improve commuter rail service across the Hudson River by building and extending the Gateway tunnels to Sunnyside Queens, allowing through service at a renovated and expanded Penn Station, renovating the Port Authority bus terminal at 42nd Street, and building a second bus terminal under the Javits Center.

Longer term, the region's three commuter rail systems should be unified into a comprehensive regional rail network that would provide a second rapid transit service for city residents, with frequent service and affordable fares. High-speed train service to Washington D.C. and Boston, better transit connections to all three New York airports, and increased capacity at Kennedy and Newark would ensure New York remains connected to other cities.

Charging drivers to enter the Manhattan commercial core is an important strategy to reduce traffic and raise revenue for the transportation system. City streets should also be redesigned to prioritize walking, biking, and transit, with wider sidewalks, more bike and bus lanes, and new streetcar and light-rail lines. As on-demand, and ultimately, driverless vehicles become commonplace, the city must take steps to prevent additional traffic while taking advantage of the benefits these vehicles provide, such as reduced demand for parking and more efficient travel. Parking spaces should be converted to rain gardens, bus or bike lanes, or sidewalk space.

The plan includes many recommendations to relieve the city's housing crisis. Tens of thousands of homes could be added with new construction by encouraging more vacant units to be put on the market, and more two- and three-family homes out of existing single-family homes. Zoning regulations should be reformed to lift arbitrary density caps in Manhattan and allow for denser development near train stations in higher-income as well as lower-income neighborhoods. Inclusionary zoning should be applied not just citywide, but throughout the region.

The city must preserve the affordable housing that already exists, and invest in the public, shared-ownership, and supportive housing systems that can help end homelessness and build wealth in low-income neighborhoods. The city should also provide stronger legal protections for low-income tenants, and proactively inspect rental units to identify and address unhealthy living conditions. Many of these policies could be paid for by redirecting existing housing subsidy programs.

The city can support sustained, diversified job growth by expanding mixed-income districts near the Manhattan Central Business District and promoting job centers in places like Jamaica and the Bronx Hub. A diversified job market also requires that the city limit the conversion or redevelopment of older commercial buildings and industrial land so that different building types can accommodate a variety of businesses.

Adapting to climate change will require major investments in both green and grey infrastructure citywide. Green roofs, rain gardens, more trees, and permeable pavement would reduce heat, storm-water runoff, and contaminated water released into the harbor and other waterways. These features would also create healthier and more livable neighborhoods.

Many projects are already underway to protect the Lower East Side, Lower Manhattan, Edgemere and other communities from coastal storms and sea level rise. These projects should be fully funded and completed. But in the longer term, the city must make difficult decisions about coastal adaptation. In some neighborhoods, the best strategy may be to protect against rising sea level and storms, while a managed transition in other neighborhoods would be a better solution if there is greater risk or the densities don't justify the cost of protection. In those cases, the transition will need to be led by local communities and supported with effective buyout programs and assistance to low-income renters and other people who are especially vulnerable to climate change, including seniors. The proposed Regional Coastal Commission and state adaptation trust funds, capitalized with surcharges on homeowner insurance, could help coordinate strategies and fund these investments.