

**BMTS Article Digest
August – September 2020**

BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee Members:

The following is a compilation of articles that may be of interest to BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee members. This and past digests can also be accessed in the Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee page of www.bmtsonline.com.

Scott

Pedestrian & Bicycle Information Center (PBIC) Messenger e-Newsletter

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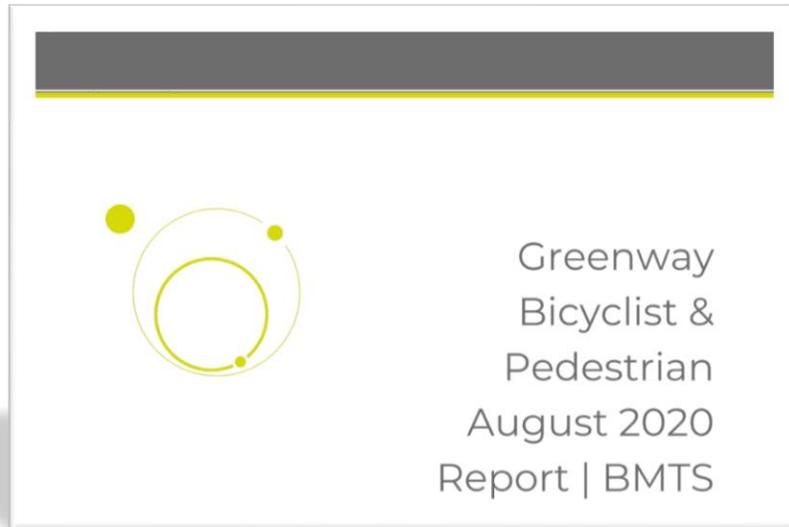


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The New York Times

Will Cars Rule the Roads in Post-Pandemic New York?

Newly emboldened, many New Yorkers want to repurpose streets for walking, biking, dining and schools, even as traffic returns.

Restaurants have taken over Dyckman Street in northern Manhattan, which has been temporarily closed to cars. Credit...Karsten Moran for The New York Times





By Winnie Hu and Nate Schweber

When New York went into lockdown five months ago to contain the virus, [traffic virtually disappeared](#), and the mostly deserted streets suddenly became a vast trove of open space in one of the world's most crowded cities.

But now as New York slowly recovers and cars have started to return, a battle for the 6,000 miles of city streets is just beginning.

Desperate restaurant owners have put out tables and chairs and want to keep them there. Anxious parents see the streets as a solution to crowded indoor classrooms. Cyclists and pedestrians are demanding more safe corridors as their numbers soar. And some virus-wary commuters are avoiding public transit and climbing into cars to protect their health.

Competition for New York's streets is nothing new — there have been growing calls in recent years to push cars aside — but the pandemic has emboldened more people than ever to stake their claim to a piece of asphalt and force a sweeping reimagining of the urban grid.

Under pressure from advocates for open spaces and the restaurant industry, the city has temporarily excluded cars from more than 70 miles of open streets for social distancing, biking and outdoor dining.



After largely disappearing from the streets, traffic has started to rebound from pre-pandemic levels even with many offices still largely devoid of workers. Credit...Karsten Moran for The New York Times

“The longstanding tension between those who see cars as evil and those who see cars as essential has been heightened by the pandemic because usable outdoor space is more crucial than ever,” said Jerold S. Kayden, a Harvard University professor of urban planning and design.

City officials have not presented any overall vision or comprehensive plan for redesigning the streets to accommodate more uses and have said they are waiting to see emerging traffic patterns as more people return to work and schools open for some in-person learning.

For now, they have taken a more piecemeal approach, including adding batches of open streets every few weeks and announcing five new busways to speed up service by taking cars off busy arteries. They have also expanded temporary outdoor dining to help restaurants, and Mayor Bill de Blasio said the dining setups would return after the winter.

“I think the fact is we want to keep expanding every conceivable option and alternative, and we’ve seen how effective things like open streets have been,” Mr. de Blasio told reporters recently. “We keep expanding that, we keep expanding bike lanes. We want to see how far we can take both of them.”



A pedestrian plaza set up along 34th Avenue in Jackson Heights, Queens, has become popular, and residents want it to be made permanent. Credit...Karsten Moran for The New York Times

But critics — many of whom have viewed Mr. de Blasio as a pro-driver mayor — have faulted what some describe as the city’s reactionary approach and contend that the moment is ripe for an ambitious blueprint, much like other cities are adopting to permanently redraw the streetscape.

“I think we’re missing a huge opportunity,” said Bruce Schaller, a consultant and former city transportation official. “This is the time to reconfigure the streets. Traffic will fill however much — or however little — street space it’s allotted. Now is the time to literally redraw the lines.”

Other cities have taken bolder steps. London has embarked on a plan to accommodate a surge in pedestrians and cyclists by creating new walking and biking routes, widening sidewalks and limiting traffic on residential streets — some of which could become permanent. And in Paris, officials are moving to add more than [400 miles of new bike lanes](#) across the metro region.

In New York, the growing conflict over the use of the streets will not simply end with the pandemic, Mr. Kayden said, since elected leaders, community activists, transportation experts and others who have long sought to repurpose roads for uses other than cars “will not want to give up their newly captured territory.”

Roberto Perez Rosado, 72, and his neighbors in park-starved Jackson Heights, Queens, are vowing to fight to keep a promenade that was opened on 34th Avenue during the pandemic. “If they take it away we will be petitioning, we will be going to meetings, we will be active on the streets,” he said.

Drivers are pushing back, too. Kenny Otano, an ironworker, said that dividing up the streets has made traffic worse. “One lane is thrown out for buses, half a lane is thrown out for bikes, and the worst thing is the restaurants,” said Mr. Otano, 50. “It creates more traffic. Five lanes becomes three.”



“If they take it away we will be petitioning, we will be going to meetings, we will be active on the streets,” said a Jackson Heights resident about the 34th Avenue promenade. Credit...Karsten Moran for The New York Times

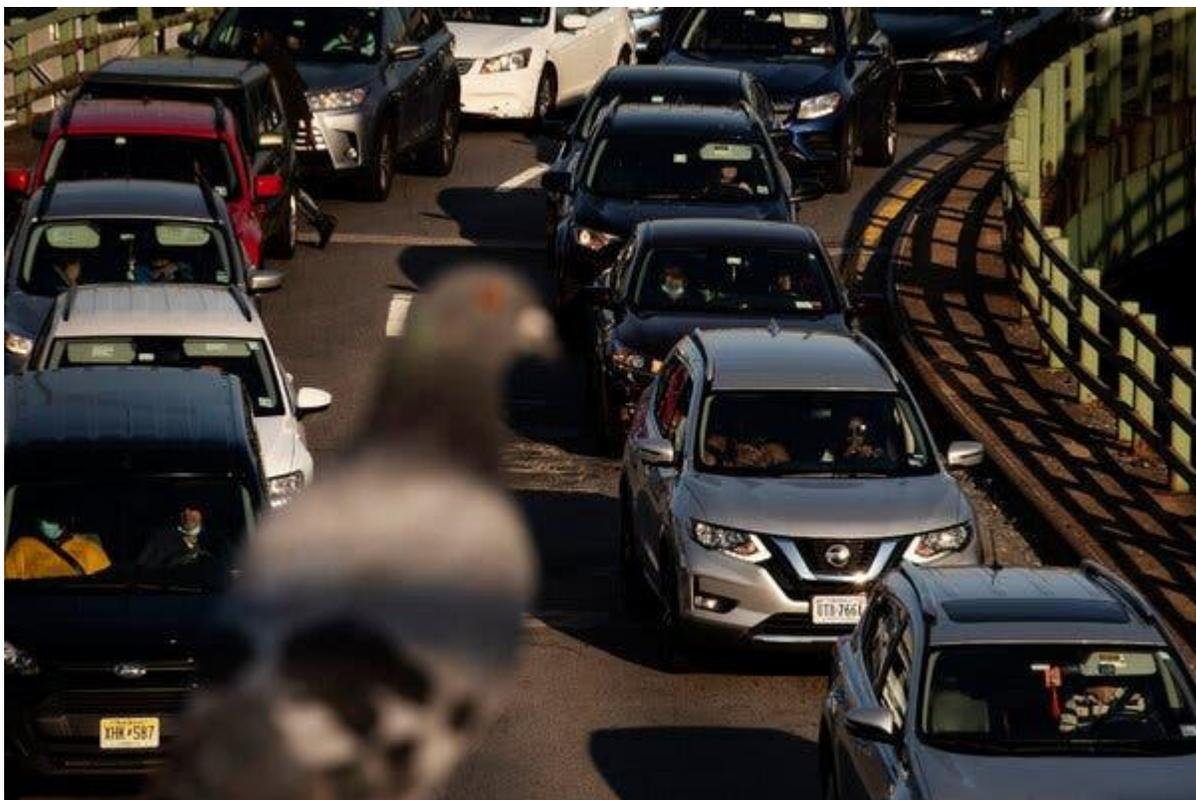
Leslie Andre Howard, 35, a contractor from Queens, has a kidney condition and has been driving to work because he does not want to take the subway during the outbreak. His blue minivan, he said, “feels safer and you’re more in control.”

Some cyclists and transportation advocates have criticized the city for creating a series of disconnected open streets instead of building a comprehensive network of continuous routes and public spaces. The result has been confusion and conflict at times among groups trying to use the same space, including bike lanes blocked by outdoor restaurant seating.

William Cazorla, 38, a cyclist, described crashing to avoid running into people gathered around an outdoor dining spot in Brooklyn. “I took the dive, self-sacrifice you maybe would say,” he said.

Danny Harris, the executive director of Transportation Alternatives, an advocacy group, said, “If we all have to fight for table scraps, the city is pitting us against each other rather than leaning on us as partners.”

City officials said they have moved more quickly than they have been given credit for to make significant changes, including expanding outdoor dining to every corner of the city.



Some people are choosing to drive rather than take public transit because of fear of being exposed to the virus. Credit...Karsten Moran for The New York Times

“We’ve used this crisis to make sweeping and popular changes to the urban landscape,” said Mitch Schwartz, a spokesman for Mayor Bill de Blasio. “There’s always more to do. But we’ve responded to New Yorkers’ calls for more public space, and we’re excited to keep going.”

City officials said they were also monitoring traffic and were prepared to take strict measures if the gridlock becomes acute, including restricting vehicles entering the city by their license plate numbers or requiring cars to have at least two occupants. Vehicle occupancy restrictions were imposed after the September 11, 2001, terror attack in Lower Manhattan.

Even though many offices and businesses are still closed and people are working from home, New York's streets, which had been quiet for weeks, are refilling again with cars and trucks. Traffic volumes have more than doubled at some of the busiest bridge and tunnel crossings from New Jersey to just below pre-pandemic levels.

Demand for monthly parking spots in the city is also soaring, suggesting that some workers are choosing cars over the subway, buses or trains. SpotHero, a digital parking marketplace, has seen monthly bookings in lots and garages increase 123 percent in early July from the same period a year ago. The average monthly parking price has also risen to \$351 from \$288.

The traffic is also encroaching on public transit, with average speeds declining on public buses, which carry many essential and low-income workers to Manhattan from so-called subway deserts.

"It's really a bad sign," said Danny Pearlstein, a spokesman for Riders Alliance, an advocacy group. "It means the bus is a less useful way of getting around."

Even before the pandemic, congestion already exacted a huge financial toll, costing the New York region an estimated [\\$20 billion a year](#) in lost worker productivity and higher fuel and operating expenses, according to the Partnership for New York City, a leading business group.

If transit riders stay away in significant numbers, that would also erode fare revenue from a public transit system facing its worst financial crisis in decades.

At the same time, New York's ambitious plan to cut down on traffic by imposing a fee on cars and trucks entering the busiest parts of Manhattan has stalled. That congestion pricing plan, which was expected to start early next year and raise money for public transit, has been delayed for at least a year by a federal review.

"We've been talking about traffic and congestion for years and we haven't done enough about it," said Carlo A. Scissura, the president and chief executive of the New York Building Congress, a trade association for the building industry. "Now, we're at a moment of reckoning. We need to come together and have a plan for moving forward."

Brad Lander, a councilman from Brooklyn, is supporting parents who want to [use streets around schools](#) for classes and activities. "You're reimagining your city's open spaces in a way that it feels like it belongs to people on foot and on bikes," he said. "It feels, in my opinion, like a crusade for a more sustainable city."

In northern Manhattan, dozens of restaurant owners are fighting to keep a temporary outdoor dining plaza on Dyckman Street. "We need it to survive," said Susana Osorio, who pays \$63,000 a month in rent for her two restaurants.

At Roof Top Republica, there is outdoor seating for 100 customers under twinkling lights, three times more than inside the small Dominican restaurant. The owner, Victor Sanchez, 52, said he is selling more meals than before the pandemic.

"I think it should be a permanent thing," he said. "There's going to be a fight for the streets, definitely."

Winnie Hu is a reporter on the Metro desk, focusing on transportation and infrastructure stories. She has also covered education, politics in City Hall and Albany, and the Bronx and upstate New York since joining the Times in 1999.
@WinnHu



The Pandemic Is Changing How People Get Around

August 16, 2020 7:59 AM ET

[David Schaper](#)



Cyclists enjoy a ride on Chicago's Lakefront Trail on a recent evening. Biking there and all across the country is up significantly during the pandemic.

David Schaper/NPR

The thought of packing herself onto a crowded bus or train makes Magali Olson cringe.

"I'm afraid to really take the train," Olson says. "I mean, I don't know if people are being clean or not, you know?"

She is able to work from home some days, but she's had to ride Chicago's Blue Line trains two days a week to her job at an insurance company downtown.

"Although I had Clorox wipes to clean everything, before I sat or touch anything, I was still a little scared," she says. "Some people weren't wearing masks, so it's a little scary."

Like other transit systems, the Chicago Transit Authority requires riders to wear masks and frequently and thoroughly cleans trains and buses. But like many Americans during this pandemic, Olson is still uncomfortable riding public transit, so she went out and bought herself an electric scooter.



Magali Olson shows her new electric scooter, which she bought a week ago so she doesn't have to commute on the train.

David Schaper

"It's really, really easy" to both ride and charge up in her garage on Chicago's northwest side, Olson says. "It doesn't go more than 30 miles per hour so I can just take it down[town] ... and call it a day. I'm actually looking forward to going to the office."

Scooters are just one of the transportation modes increasing in popularity among commuters during the pandemic, which is changing how many of people get around. Another of the two wheeled variety is the good

old bicycle. But if you don't already have one, it's going to be difficult to find one.

Over at Kozy's Cyclery, the phones are almost constantly ringing, but anyone looking to buy a bike is probably out of luck. This huge shop, with three levels of retail space, is almost empty.

Kozy's Cyclery in Chicago is one of the bike shops across the country finding it hard to keep shelves stocked. **David Schaper/NPR hide caption**

"Everything in a 2020 model in a bike has basically left the building," says Sherdon Weir, a manager at one of the three family-owned Kozy's Cyclery shops in Chicago. "We're left with high-end road bikes and high-end electric bikes ... and we're down to the smallest kids' bikes."

"2021 models are trickling in," Weir says, with just one or two sometimes arriving in a shipment. He says they're put together the night they arrive and go out the next day to customers who have been waiting for them. "We have a box filled with customers' [orders] that have had bikes on hold since March."



Weir says electric bikes, which give a person's pedaling a power boost, are especially popular among commuters.

"Because most people don't want to be sweaty when they get into work," he says. "It is a game-changer. Sales have basically tripled for electric bikes."

But while the sales side of the shop is empty of bikes, the service side is overflowing with them. Weir says at times, 15 to 20 people will be lined up out in front of the shop (social distancing limits the number of customers allowed inside at a time) to get their older bikes fixed up and repaired.

"Since they can't get a bike, they've dug up bikes from their basement that need either tires and tubes, that need tuneups."



It's the same story at bicycle shops all across the country, and while some of the demand is coming from those who want bikes to commute, much of it is from recreational users who see it as way to enjoy the outdoors with their families, or spend time with friends in a safe and socially distant way.

"Biking is really on fire right now," says Audrey Wennink, director of transportation for the Metropolitan Planning Council in Chicago, a regional nonprofit focused on urban planning.

She says many cities are expanding bike-share programs, like Chicago's Divvy bikes, to accommodate the increased demand. There are also more shared scooter programs, and some cities are working to accommodate the pandemic-related increase in walking, with new trails, sidewalk improvements and safety enhancements.

But as scores of bicyclists, skateboarders and rollerbladers whiz by her on Chicago's busy Lakefront Trail, she points to the hundreds of cars jamming up on the eight-lane highway next to it, Lake Shore Drive.

"We are seeing traffic levels, in terms of cars, having gone up to almost pre-COVID levels."

Even though many people are out of work or still working from home, many cities are seeing significant increases in motor vehicle traffic this summer.

In Chicago and in other cities with robust transit systems, people who have never owned cars before are suddenly buying them. In New York City, some are calling it "carmageddon," as residents there registered 40,000 new cars in July, the highest monthly total in years. Meanwhile, NYC subway ridership is still down more than 75% from last year.

Across the country, used car sales in particular are up, while people still largely avoid car-sharing and ride-hailing companies like Uber and Lyft. Their business remains down significantly.

At the same time, many cities are at least temporarily closing off many streets to cars, turning them into bike lanes and shared spaces for pedestrians, outdoor dining and even play lots.

"This is a real turning point," says Wennink, "and we can go one of two ways."

"One, where we see a huge uptick in car usage and car ownership and congestion," Wennink says. Alternatively, cities can support more active and sustainable transportation options, like walking and biking.

"Because the long term problems that we have of climate change, of congestion, of constrained spaces in urban areas, those are still conditions that will continue to exist."

She and other transportation and urban planning experts say there's an opportunity in the COVID-19 crisis: to rethink how people get will around and use urban spaces differently in a post-pandemic world.
Bloss



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Pedaling Towards Better Physical and Mental Health

August 10, 2020
Aida Byrne

"Nothing compares to the simple pleasure of a bike ride." – John F. Kennedy

A few months back, the snow started to melt and we headed out to the Erie Canal for our family walk/bike ride. My son, Matthew, asked if I wanted to ride his bike for a few miles so he could rest.

I laughed at the idea.

A bike? Me?

At age 42, I hadn't been on a bike since I was 16 – no, that isn't true. I was on a bike while at the boardwalk in Ocean City, Maryland a few years ago, but it was one of those beach bikes that holds four people and has a basket in front. Does that even count?

Anyway, I agreed. I got on the bike and wobbled a little at first. But then after about a mile, I realized... I love this feeling!

And this is how my biking obsession began. I worked out the details to purchase nice bikes for my husband and me that we could use on the roads and trails near our home in Chittenango, and within days we had our very own Trek bikes.



Aida's first ride on her bike

Aida finishing off her longest ride along the Erie Canal

Bike riding: I'm not alone

What I have learned since that day in March is that I'm one of many people who have this love for the freeing, stress relieving qualities of riding a bike.

As I take to the roads and trails every day with my husband and children, we pass dozens of biking enthusiasts. Some are sporting fancy gear and riding the cream-of-the-crop bikes, others are simply wearing their protective helmet and peddling a not-so-fancy bike like mine.

Take my friend and coworker **Erika Gruszewski**, from Monroe County, for instance. Since the pandemic started, she, her husband and their daughter have gone bike riding together as a family, which is a fun way to explore their neighborhood and get some activity at the end of the day.

“We also have a push-along trike for my toddler – she can’t reach the pedals yet, but she loves ringing her bell and wearing her helmet,” Erika said. “Pushing her around the neighborhood in the trike or the stroller is an almost daily activity for us. Getting out and moving in the fresh air always improves my mood!”



Erika and Ava out for a “trike ride”

As many people, especially families like Erika’s with [young children at home](#), are looking for lockdown-compliant ways to get outside and keep everyone as healthy and happy as possible, we’re all enjoying this physical activity, outside in the fresh air.

In fact, research shows that a growing wave of New Yorkers are embracing cycling and that it’s a booming method of exercise and transportation in larger cities. According to PeopleForBikes Foundation, “affordable recreational bikes and practical models for commuting and errands are in high demand right now.” During May and June of 2020, bike sales throughout the nation were up substantially from last year — 65 percent greater than year-to-date 2019.

A Bicycle Built for Sunday Funday

Lilac Inthavong-McEvoy, who resides in Monroe County, said it’s easy to understand why the popularity of cycling has grown.

“It’s a fun, easy way to get outside, spend time with others, and get exercise,” she explained.

Lilac spends her Sundays traveling bike trails and roads throughout Rochester with her coworkers at Excellus BlueCross BlueShield on what she calls “Sunday Funday.”



The “Sunday Funday” crew



The “Sunday Funday” crew

“On any given Sunday, we could have as many as 16 people – coworkers, their spouses, their kids – who meet and ride,” she said. “It’s a way to be together and spend quality time in a safe, socially distanced way.”

Connect, Reflect, and Recharge

Co-worker and friend, **Melissa Gardner**, who also resides in Monroe County, has benefited from Lilac’s cycling Sundays.

“In most aspects of my life I am an introverted person who is very self-motivated to accomplish any goal I set,” Melissa said. “That isn’t true for fitness, though. Any time I missed a goal or broke a fitness streak, I would borderline give up and allow too much time to pass before picking back up healthy habits.”

For someone like Melissa, who wasn’t a fan of group fitness classes or anything that felt competitive, cycling has given her the outlet she needed to connect with others, reflect and recharge.

On the weekly rides, Melissa says she enjoys the fact that she “can meet-up with riders for great energy and be completely by myself – all while burning calories and exploring our community.”

Benefits of getting on a bike and peddling

Not only do biking and other forms of outdoor activity allow families to get exercise, they also provide valuable peace of mind during stressful times, said **Nicholas Massa, MD**, medical director at Excellus BlueCross BlueShield.

“Being able to go outside and spend quality time with the family, while getting the physical activity that we all need makes getting on a bike an easy solution to maintaining your health.”

According to Massa, we should follow these physical activity guidelines for Americans.

“Adults need at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate physical activity each week,” he explained. “Adults also need to engage in strength-based activities (lifting weights, push-ups) at least 2 days each week. Following these guidelines can improve overall health and decrease the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer or diabetes.

There are also physical activity guidelines for children age 17 and under:

- Children ages six to 17 need at least one hour of moderate-to-vigorous activity every day. They should also include both aerobic activity (biking, walking, running) and strength-based activities (climbing on the playground, jumping rope).
- Preschool-aged children should be active for at least 3 hours per day to support growth and development.

Tips and Tricks for a Safe Bike Ride:

- **Wear a helmet.**
- **Be seen.** Dress like a fluorescent peacock—wear bright colors and reflective clothing, especially in the early morning, late at night, or on cloudy days.
- **Protect yourself from the sun.** Wear sunscreen, especially on the back of your neck, and sunglasses

- **Know the weather forecast.** Wear waterproof gear as needed.
- **Be alert.** Never ride with headphones or an earpiece. You need to hear everything you possibly can.
- **Ride with a buddy.** Two cyclists will be more visible than one. Plus, if something happens to you, your buddy may be able to facilitate the emergency response process (and vice versa).
- **Get creative with your route.** Choose roads that are extremely wide or have dedicated bike lanes. Opt for quieter neighborhood roads over high-traffic ones.
- **Always carry a patch kit.** Learning to patch up your own flat tire can prevent you from being stranded in an unsafe or remote location.
- **Carry a cell phone and ID.** If you don't have a patch kit and need a ride, your cell phone will come in handy.
- **Bring drinking water for longer rides.**
 - **Ride with traffic, never against it.**
 - **Always be ready to yield.** What you can do is go slowly enough that you could stop or give the right of way at a moment's notice.
 - **Be vigilant at intersections.** When coming to a stop, hang left in the lane so the drivers behind and in front of you can see you.
 - **Be on the lookout for loose gravel, ice, sand, puddles, and other road hazards.**
 - **Take bike-specific trails, whenever possible; follow the rules of the road; use bike line if there is one.**
 - **Don't share water bottles.**
 - **Practice good cough etiquette** by coughing and sneezing into your arm, not your hand.
 - **Wash hands with soap and water** after any possible contamination, before eating and after using the bathroom (or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are unavailable).
 - **Consider bringing hand sanitizer** or wipes to use after portable toilets.



[Aida Byrne](#)

Aida Byrne is originally from the Utica area and now lives in Central New York with her blended family of seven - six sons and one daughter. She and her husband, Tim, enjoy traveling to new states with their kids each season in their 12-passenger van; volunteering throughout the year for the Chittenango Central School District; and spending time making memories with friends and family each and every weekend. Aida is the director of communications for the eastern markets at Excellus BlueCross BlueShield.
