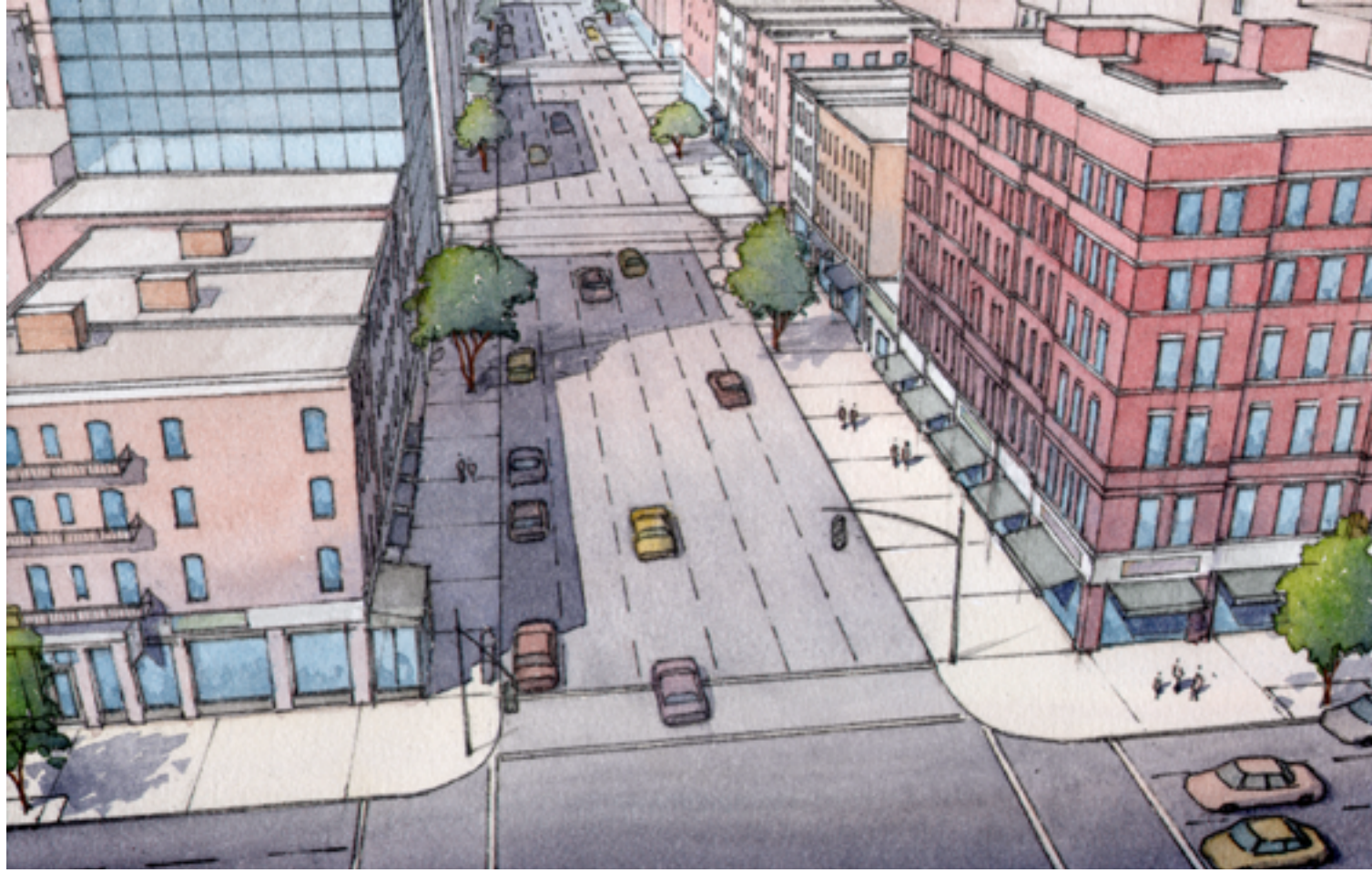




Yorkville Promenade on Second Avenue
Massengale & Co LLC • Dover, Kohl & Partners • H. Zeke Mermell



The “Before” view of the Ramble looking South on Second Avenue from 86th Street

FOR SO MANY REASONS, we must reduce auto use in New York City. Studies for Mayor Bloomberg showed that living on a high-traffic avenue in Manhattan is unhealthy, particularly for our children. To add insult to injury, 80% of Manhattan residents do not own cars, and only 20% of our out-of-town commuters drive to work. Our ugly, unhealthy avenues are more for the benefit of others than Manhattan’s workers and residents.

Most Manhattanites live in small apartments and spend a lot of time in public life. When the weather is nice, we spend lots of money to dine next to places designers call “auto sewers”: noisy, smelly streets made to move cars quickly, with wide, one-way lanes and no parking at rush hour so that the speeding cars and trucks are inches from the sidewalk. It doesn’t make much sense.

Then there are the problems of Climate Change and Peak Oil. We have built our way of life on an inexpensive but non-renewable resource that is simultaneously starting to run out, becoming more expensive than we can afford and changing the earth for the worse.

The New Yorkville Ramble

The Yorkville Ramble is an idea for a new way to rebuild Second Avenue, after the completion of the new subway under construction below the avenue. Inspired by the famous Ramblas of Barcelona, the design gives the center of the wide avenue that was once two-way to a new car-free linear park for walking, biking, sitting, dining and people watching. Cafés and restaurants along Second Avenue would be licensed to have tables on the center island. Narrow traffic lanes and short term parking lanes to each side would let cars and deliveries come and go while eliminating speeding traffic from Second Avenue.

Construction would be timed to work with the construction phasing for the subway, which will initially run from Sixty-Third Street to Ninety-Sixth Street. The Ramble would be a special place that enlivens the Manhattan grid, like Broadway on the Upper West Side and Park Avenue on the Upper East Side, with a vibrant street life unlike staid Park Avenue.



Section through through the proposed Second Avenue Ramble

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Google Street View of Second Avenue at 86th Street before new subway construction



NYC DOT design for Second Ave with green bike lanes and red bus lanes (hidden by bus)

WEST OF THIRD AVENUE ON THE UPPER EAST SIDE, the introduction of Madison and Lexington Avenues into the normal city grid produced shorter blocks that made the grid more interesting for pedestrians and thereby increased the value of the real estate.

Yorkville’s longer blocks are less pedestrian-friendly, and Second and Third Avenues both used to have that New York oxymoron—the elevated subway—depressing real estate values and building quality for decades. In recent decades the area has boomed, and the Yorkville Ramble will give it a linear neighborhood center unique in New York City, drawing from both the neighborhood and the access provided by the new subway line.

Proposed Congestion Zone

Mayor Bloomberg and the New York City DOT have proposed a congestion zone for the city. London’s congestion zone shows that roads like the Second Avenue design proposed by the DOT will then be oversized and inappropriate for the amount of traffic they will have. First and Third Avenues could go back to being two-way, as they once were, and traffic would move in a more civilized fashion. We don’t need to make express auto routes in and out of the city when we have the best mass transit in the country.

The bicycle lane in the DOT’s new design for Second Avenue is a good idea, but the design for the road shown above is still a traffic engineer’s dream, with wide, one-way lanes and no parking shielding the pedestrian from the speeding cars, buses and trucks. Studies show that walkers don’t like the visual clutter of all the signs and multi-color lanes that the engineers want. Walkers also of course want wider sidewalks.

Conclusion

Second Avenue is currently torn up for the subway construction and its rebuilding will start in the next few years. Combined with changing attitudes and perceptions about the car in the city, that makes now the perfect time for a humane and beautiful new type of post-auto road for New York.