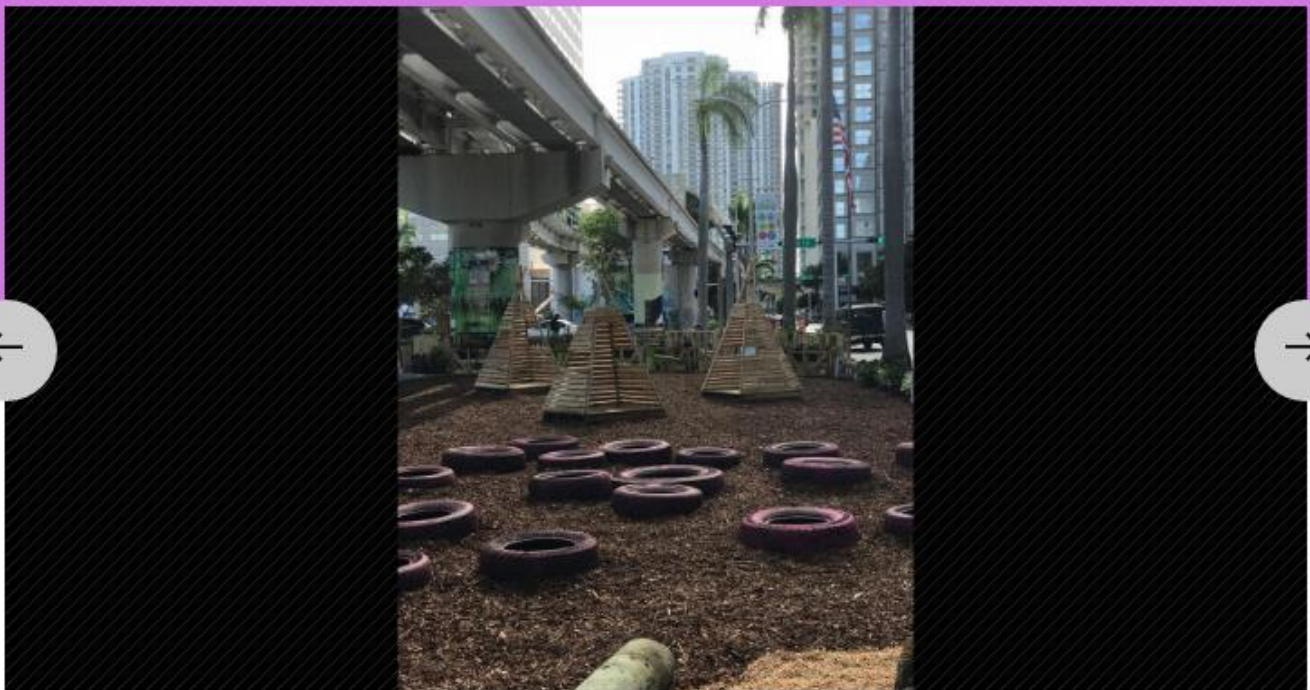


In Miami, They're Turning Part Of A Major Road Into A Park

The project is only temporary, but it shows how the spaces streets take up might be better used for things besides cars.



01/07 The goal of the three-week experiment: to prove to residents in a car-centric city that it makes sense to permanently redesign Biscayne Boulevard.

In the middle of a busy eight-lane street in downtown Miami, a new pop-up park is now temporarily home to a fire pit, exercise stations, a dog park, bike-share bikes, and movie screenings with free empanadas.

The goal of the three-week experiment: to prove to residents in a car-centric city that it makes sense to permanently redesign Biscayne Boulevard to become more pedestrian-friendly.

"I think that it's a much-needed change that people didn't know they needed," says Miami Downtown Development Authority chairman Ken Russell. "This goes against some of the traditional parts of the auto-centric mindset, and we're trying to shift that paradigm."



Over the past 15 years, the population in the downtown area has grown nearly 150%. Many of the new residents are millennials who value public space, but little public space exists.

There is, however, quite a bit of road space and parking. The temporary intervention replaced

three blocks of parking in the street's median, covering parking spots with mulch, paint, and turf to turn it into a promenade. During the three-week experiment, two lanes of southbound traffic will temporarily replace some of that parking and serve as a dedicated bus lane.

The city wants to build support for a much larger project called Biscayne Green, which would convert two lanes of traffic each way into bike lanes and transit-only lanes. Parking spots in the median would be permanently converted to public space, while new parking on the sides of the street would help buffer sidewalks from traffic. With a narrower road, the street would also be shorter to cross.

To create the political will for such a major change, the Downtown Development Authority thought it made sense to start with a demonstration.

"One of the greatest motivators would be the public opinion that would give the political

will the cover to move forward with something so different," says Russell. "This is a perfect experiment that will whet the appetite of the public for what this could be and what it should be."

The road has heavy traffic now, but because of the design of the lanes, it's unlikely that taking lanes away would make traffic worse. And in other cities that have slimmed down major roads—such as New York City, which redesigned Broadway to add pedestrian plazas, or Paris, traffic flow actually improved.



In a next step, the Development Authority will use a grant from Florida's Department of Transportation to study the impact of removing lanes. But building public support now may be the most important way for the project to move forward.

"I've traveled and seen even third-world countries exceeding what we're doing in terms of prioritizing green space and pedestrian, cycle activity, and it works," says Russell. "But unless we activate the space the public doesn't know that it could work."

A kickoff concert on January 6 brought 3,000 people to the pop-up park, and another 2,500 came to a "puppy brunch" two days later. A series of events is scheduled each week until the experiment ends on January 26.