New York City’s newest bike racks recycle old meter posts in a beautiful design.

By Michael Greco, Michael Pipitone, Wendy Feuer, and Guillermo Leiva

In 2008, the New York City (NYC) Department of Transportation (DOT), in partnership with the Smithsonian Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, announced an international design competition for a unique NYC bicycle rack. The goal was to develop an attractive, functional rack that would expand the agency’s bike parking inventory and fulfill a need identified by New Yorkers who cited a lack of secure bike parking as a primary reason for not commuting by bike in a Department of City Planning study.

The competition was open to the international design community, including architects, artists, engineers, landscape architects, planners, urban designers, product and industrial designers, and manufacturers. The contest asked applicants to develop a design that would be consistent with the sleek, modern look and durability of the city’s existing street furniture such as its bus shelters, newsstands, and public toilets. In addition to the uniform aesthetics, all of these structures are constructed of high-quality materials that stand up to the elements and rigors of NYC sidewalks.

DOT received more than 200 designs from around the world. From that group, the first jury identified 10 possible racks, which were exhibited at Astor Place for testing and public voting. The jury selected Copenhagen-based industrial designers Ian Mahaffy and Maarten de Greeve’s “Hoop.”

Combining Efforts

During the competition’s second review stage, jurors realized that the Hoop could be integrated with single-space parking meters currently on streets citywide. At the same time, DOT launched efforts to modernize its parking meter inventory, replacing all of the city’s single space meters with networked multi-space meters commonly known as muni-meters. To explore this option, DOT’s Bike Program and Parking Divisions partnered to identify meter posts that could be outfitted...
with galvanized, durable ductile iron, hoop-style bike racks that could easily slide on to former meter posts.

“We’re turning meters into off-the-rack bike parking,” said DOT Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan. “This design removes the meter but leaves the parking for potentially thousands of bikes. It’s a creative way to repurpose obsolete infrastructure to meet the new and growing demands on our streets.”

The city’s decades-long history with multi-space pay-and-display meters, combined with the benefits of reducing street furniture, de-cluttering the streetscape, and the economics associated with upgrades to its public parking systems, aligned neatly with the potential use of decommissioned single-space meters for bike racks. Further, by taking advantage of existing infrastructure, the meter racks eliminate the cost of removing old posts and installing entirely new bike racks.

Creating the Next Generation of Bike Parking

In August 2009, DOT’s Bike Rack Unit (BRU) requested that the Bureau of Parking’s Meter Maintenance Unit (MMU) develop a secure installation method for a hoop-style rack. Staff created an engineering drawing that illustrated a secure, durable prototype design. The task of creating the parking meter rack was then assigned to the MMU unit that specializes in the fabrication, installation, and removal of all parking devices citywide. Importantly, the team tested and later incorporated proven security features pioneered by DOT to safeguard meters into the prototype’s design. Methods such as the double wall pipe, which prevented it from being easily cut, and hardware used for securing parking meter housings to their posts, were added.

With the testing completed for the newly-named NYCityRack, MMU and BRU developed an internal process to coordinate decommissioned meter pipe to bike rack conversions. Initially, the process required the Bureau of Parking to provide BRU with a “Muni Meter Conversion Project” schedule at the beginning of each fiscal year. The BRU would survey applicable block side locations and select single-space meters for conversion. That information then would be forwarded to DOT’s borough commissioners for their review and

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comment. Upon approval, the confirmed locations would be sent to MMU for bike rack conversion as part of the citywide “munification.” Once this took place, the MMU would remove meter heads and pipe sleeves, ensuring that the remaining meter pipe was plumb and secure. Lastly, MMU would install the muni-meters and proceed to remove all other single-space meters that were not selected for bike rack use.

In anticipation of a large-scale rollout, DOT also discussed the need for a bike rack identification system. Because maintenance of the parking meter racks rested with MMU, the DOT teams agreed to develop a numbering system similar to the one used for parking meters. The numbered area would include a “BR” to identify it as a bike rack area, and an MMU-designed label would be attached to the upper portion of the outer sleeve.

Conversion
During the fall of 2010, DOT developed an approximately one-year timeline for citywide conversion from single-space to multi-space meters. Due to the rapid implementation schedule, parking meter removals increased significantly and it became necessary for MMU personnel to take the lead and survey and identify meter pipes to remain in the field for potential bike rack usage. They received training from BRU staff for this task. MMU staff also catalogs this information, logging the existing meter numbers and in-front-of-addresses in an internal database for street furniture.

All permanent, temporary, and potential meter bike racks are entered into our computer system for reference. Bike rack area description sheets and meter racks are included in the MMU maintenance schedules, which are coordinated and tracked through the MMU handheld system. Finally, MMU route personnel check all current bike racks as well as the conditions of potential bike racks. All maintenance issues are reported through the same system that logs single-space meter maintenance requests. Any identified issues are addressed within 24 hours, with work orders being completed and entered in the computer system.

Currently, there are 230 meter racks installed in Manhattan, Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. The agency will be installing thousands more within the next three years to help the growing demand for bike parking in New York City.

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