

# The Boston Globe

OPINION

## Roads cleared of vehicle traffic should be open to foot traffic during the coronavirus pandemic

**As COVID-19 forces us to practice social distancing of six feet or even more and so little car traffic, we could temporarily take back roads dedicated to cars, and rededicate it to people.**

By Robin Chase, Updated March 31, 2020, 2:26 p.m.



*Pedestrians walk along a crowded Charles River Esplanade on March 20. Maddie Meyer/Getty*

Spring has sprung and millions of us have been advised to stay at home for another month due to the coronavirus pandemic. Logic tells us that it is likely to be extended even longer. Let's think about the million Massachusetts school children over the next months. While each day unfolds like an economic and social sci-fi horror story, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health [stay-at-home advisory](#) does permit "get[ting] some fresh air and exercise." With small adjustments to some streets, we could find that refreshment and exercise while keeping six feet from each other.

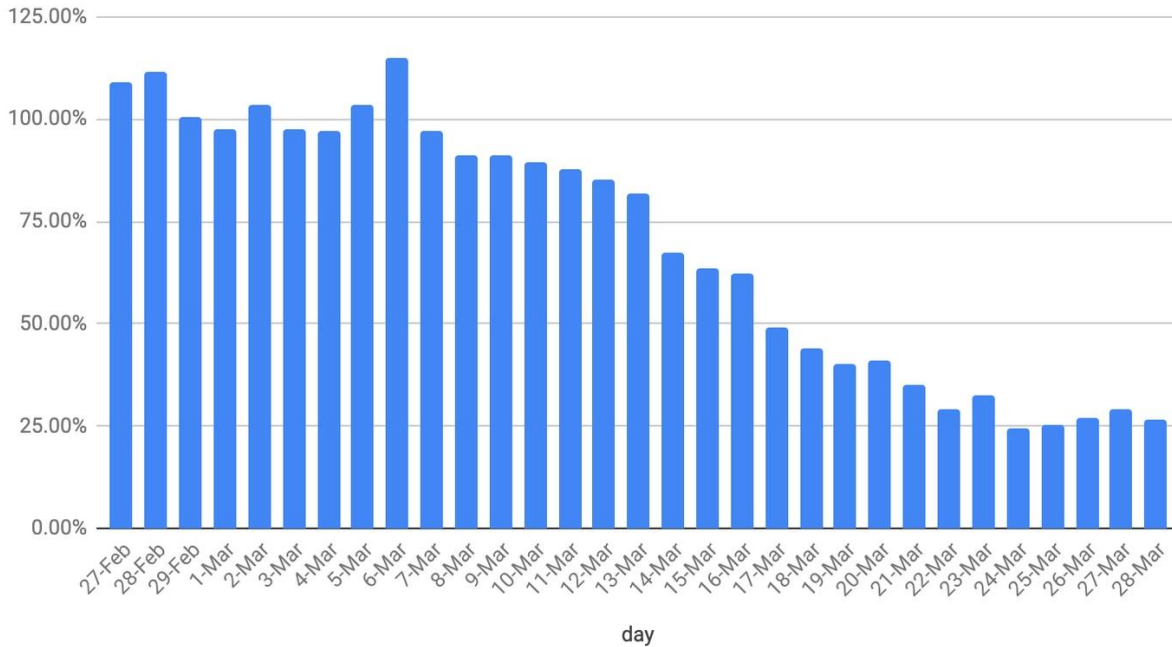
The distances driven in Boston are down 75 percent over February's average. This is not surprising, and it's proof that we are paying attention and following recommended advice. It also presents us with an opportunity to make this difficult period more viable.

I live in Cambridge and see the Charles River waterfront crowded daily with pedestrians. This isn't ideal in a time when health experts advise we practice social distancing of six feet or more. With so little car traffic, we could temporarily take back public roadways that are currently dedicated to vehicle traffic and rededicate them in service to foot traffic.

Boston could temporarily reclaim half the lanes of large, overcapacity streets like Blue Hill Avenue in Dorchester. And we can look to roads that were once parklands but have more recently been handed over to car commuters: Memorial and Storrow drives, Day and Greenough boulevards come to mind.

Boston and other cities and towns across Massachusetts, along with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (which can identify roads that border parks and open spaces), should quickly come up with what makes sense for their local communities. While emergency vehicles will always be permitted entry, we also need to be mindful of what is easy to do, and what will require too much policing by an overworked force.

## **Daily driven miles in Boston vs February average**



### Analysis by Waze

Cities around the world, from Bogota to Chapel Hill to Berlin, have instituted such [street-space reallocations](#) to [good effect](#). Here in Massachusetts, many advocacy groups, through the [Vision Zero Coalition](#), which seeks to eliminate traffic deaths, are currently working on this. The weekly seasonal closing of Memorial Drive is a beloved proof point. We need many more such conversions, and need to ensure that all neighborhoods benefit. In residential areas with few moving cars, we should reverse the rights: people and bikes on the streets, with car movement yielding to them.

Opening up more streets for the safe movement of pedestrians, bicycles, and any kind of light, low-speed vehicles (scooters, skateboards, and rollerblades, too). The goal of joy might feel like a stretch, but it will help to reduce the strain of stay-at-home advisories and social distancing it is an especially important one for children as this economic shutdown extends into the weeks ahead.

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