

# Future City Lab: What If?

{ Questioning What We Know



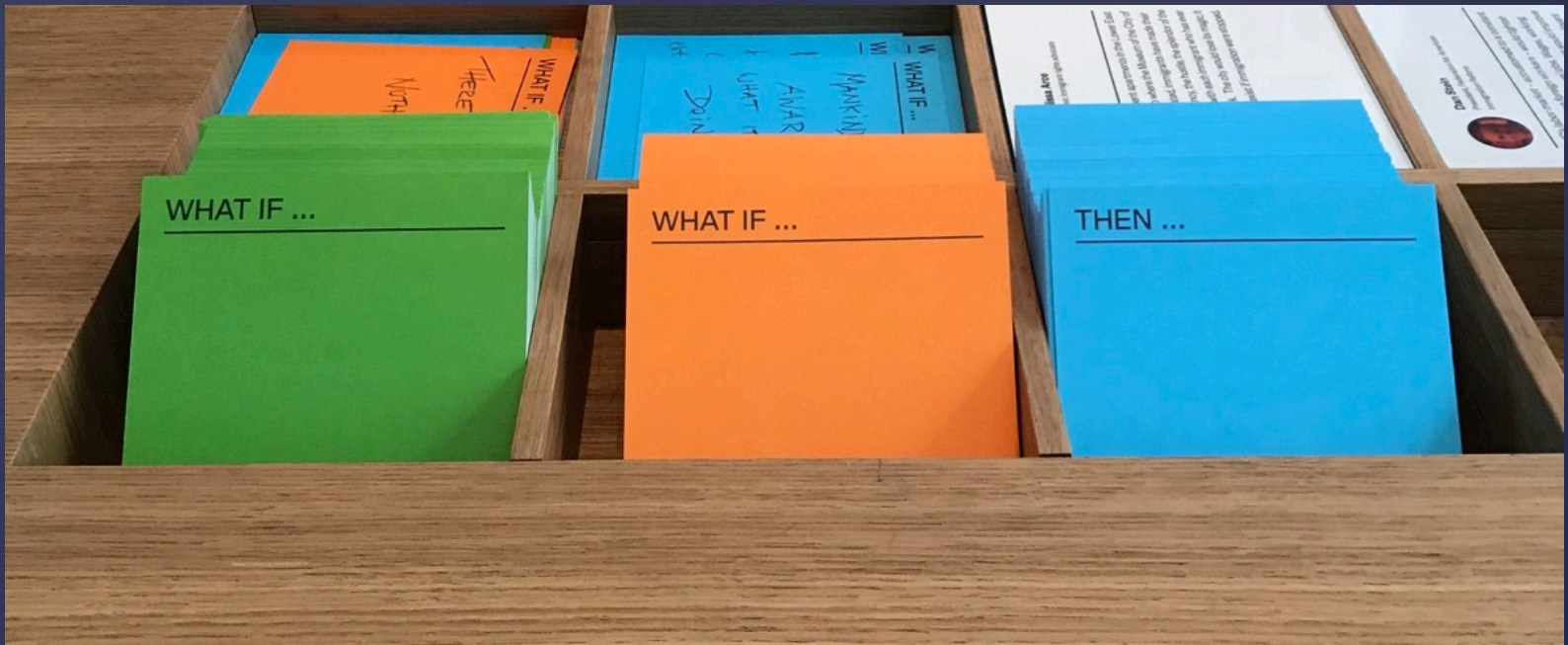


# What is a “What If?”



At the Museum of the City of New York's *Future City Lab*, visitors are encouraged to ask big questions on how to improve the city. Their question starts with a “What If...” and ends with what would happen: “Then...” The Lab's Director collects the visitors' questions and asks experts to respond to a few. The conversation is always changing and reflects the big questions our visitors care about most.







SCHOOLS  
AND ECONO  
REFLECT T  
THEIR STU  
WHAT IF

If all New York City public schools were  
integrated we would finally live up to our image  
as a progressive city that values equality and  
opportunity for all, no matter where children are

**Nikole Hannah-Jones**  
Journalist  
The New York Times



WHAT IF ...  
every street in NYC  
had bike lanes?

Buildings and transportation cause about 90%  
of NYC's greenhouse gas emissions. The same  
fossil fuels that create greenhouse gases emit  
air pollutants that trigger respiratory illnesses  
like asthma. Air pollution peaks in summer with

**Nilda Mesa**  
Adjunct Senior Research Scientist  
Urban Design Lab/Earth Institute  
Columbia University



ABLE  
RELEASED  
CES?

WHAT IF ...

WE CONVERTED TWO OF THE SIX  
CAR RDS AROUND MANHATTAN  
INTO 1 GREEN WALK/BIKE PATH

Cy Adler  
2/6/18

WHAT IF ...

PUBLIC TRANSIT  
STOPPED RUNNING  
LATE AT NIGHT,  
AS IN MOST  
OTHER CITIES?



**Sam Schwartz**  
Transportation engineer,  
former NYC traffic commissioner

New York City would become second-rate.  
We are the city that never sleeps, and we need  
trains running at all times. It would also be a blow  
to many hard-working, low-income people who  
work the midnight shift.

WHAT IF ...

all the taxi's  
were electric

-XOXO-



**Owen Gutfreund**  
Urban historian, Hunter College, CUNY

I think this would be terrible. "The city that  
never sleeps" needs 24-hour transit, not just  
to support all the businesses related to the  
city's world-renowned nightlife, but also for the  
countless workers whose days end long after  
midnight or start long before sunrise—at the  
wholesale fish and produce markets, at the  
airports, in the hospitality and tourism sectors,  
in entertainment, and in financial services.

WHAT IF ...

New York's transportation  
system was subsidized by  
those who stand to profit off  
it's success?



# WHAT IF ...

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These two small words open up a world of future possibilities unconstrained by today's realities. They don't just pose a question; they propose an idea about how things could be in the future.

The *What If Table* offers the views of knowledgeable New Yorkers on a variety of questions. Take a seat at the table and compose your own "What if ..." questions or react to the questions you see. The ideas and discussion will always be changing, and the conversation continues online at [mcny.org/nyatitscore](http://mcny.org/nyatitscore), where selected questions from visitors in the gallery will be discussed by experts.



What if *we* give it a try?

[www.mcny.org/whatif](http://www.mcny.org/whatif)



# What if?

## *Steps:*

- Review visitor questions on the Museum's website.
- What problem are they trying to address?
- What do we know about this problem?
- Review expert responses.
- What arguments do we find the most convincing?
- Can we think more deeply about the issue?



# Making our own “What Ifs?”

Before making your own “What If?” question, think about the following:

- What problem would I like to solve?
- What *specific* approach (or *strategy*) could be used to address it?
- What are the approach’s likely benefits (the “pros”)?
- What are its likely downsides (the “cons”)?
- Given the pros and cons, is the overall outcome likely to be good or bad?

Once you’ve answered these questions, formulate your own “What If?” question and its likely result (“*Then...*”).



WHAT IF ...

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We ended  
world  
hunger

WHAT IF ...

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They Replaced Bus lanes  
with Bike lanes

Before starting, look at the two “What If?” questions above.

*Which is worded more effectively? Why?*



THEN ...

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THEN ...

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It would be easier  
to bike + more people  
might commute by bike

Now look at the two “Thens” for each question.

*It looks like the person who asked Question 1 gave up. Why might that be? Why is the card on the right more helpful as we problem-solve for a better city?*



# Small Group Work

- What problem would I like to solve?
- What *specific* approach (or *strategy*) could be used to address it?
- What are the approach's likely benefits (the "pros")?
- What are its likely downsides (the "cons")?
- Given the pros and cons, is the overall outcome likely to be good or bad?

What if \_\_\_\_\_?  
Then: \_\_\_\_\_