



# RELIEF ON ROUTE

Expanding Restroom Access for Platform Workers

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# Executive Summary

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The struggle to find a public restroom has a long and complex history, laying bare deeper tensions related to public health, equity, and the responsibility of the government and private industry for basic human needs. In recent years, this has become a global issue for cities and especially challenging for mobile workers, including bus drivers, mail carriers, couriers, for-hire drivers, and cab drivers, among other professionals, who spend their day navigating cities with few options for relief.

These professions face a daily dilemma with unpredictable work routines which provide no guarantee of restroom access. Many resort to planning routes around known public restrooms, losing valuable time in search of facilities, paying for bathroom access, or even, in moments of desperation, relieving themselves outside and consequently risking fines and other penalties. Furthermore, publicly available data on public and private restrooms is insufficient in nearly all places. This reality, combined with inadequate secure parking and charging infrastructure in many cities, exposes a gap in services that demands a comprehensive solution.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the issue. Delivery couriers, essential to feeding locked-down cities, found themselves banned from the restaurant bathrooms where they picked up orders. Media coverage of delivery workers forced to urinate in public or in plastic bottles drew attention to their daily ordeal. While these challenges were heightened in the context of social distancing, widespread negative biases towards delivery workers and other couriers persists today, further exacerbating the barriers to needed facilities.

This study addresses the challenge of restroom access facing platform workers and outlines solutions for improvements. Drawing on academic literature, media coverage, legislative proposals, and interviews with Uber Crew members and subject matter experts, we examine successful strategies and relevant precedents from multiple

cities. Altogether, the report seeks to guide platforms, policymakers, advocates, consumer-facing businesses, and private sector innovators in creating cities where all mobile workers have access to restrooms.

The report first outlines the background, history, and challenges of platform workers' restroom access (Chapter 1. Background and Context). It then identifies five key challenges that define and shape this issue today (Chapter 2. Problem Definition). Because the nature of this issue is shaped so significantly by environmental, economic, political, and cultural factors, the study next examines four case study cities where many of the key challenges named are at play: Brasilia, London, New York City, and Paris (Chapter 3. Case Studies). Finally, we offer actionable recommendations for stakeholders to expand public restroom access (Chapter 4. Recommendations).

Ultimately, the report recommends a comprehensive approach to improving restroom access for platform workers, guided by six key principles:

- **Understand specific context** by conducting localized research to tailor strategies to city-specific challenges.
- **Optimize existing infrastructure** by improving and expanding upon existing public and private restroom networks.
- **Improve data quality and access**, encouraging public-private collaboration to maintain comprehensive restroom data.
- **Forge strategic partnerships** between governments, businesses, and platforms to create sustainable solutions.
- **Harness technological innovation** by using cutting-edge restroom designs and access systems where possible, and investing in new modular and portable models..

- **Leverage synergies and co-benefits** by recognizing overlapping needs among diverse user groups, including investing in multi-use restrooms that meet many users' needs, or developing tools and programs that serve both platform workers and other groups.

Addressing this issue will require thoughtful cross-sector collaboration and a multi-faceted approach. The most effective efforts will combine legislation, smart design and infrastructure improvements, strategic partnerships, and digital tools – all working together.

# At a Glance: Restroom Access for Mobile Workers



**KEY  
CHALLENGES**

**CRITICAL  
STAKEHOLDERS**

**GUIDING  
PRINCIPLES**

# Key Recommendations

These recommendations are designed for a range of stakeholders in the public and private sectors. Tackling this challenge requires cooperation among businesses, platforms, sanitation and public health innovators, local governments, and advocates.



## UNDERSTAND SPECIFIC CONTEXT

- **Develop comprehensive Public Toilet Plans** based on city- and region-specific research and engagement.
- **Engage mobile workers** to gain localized insights and craft targeted solutions.
- **Engage private businesses** and other sites already offering—or with the potential to offer—restroom access.
- **Use data-informed strategies**, ensuring that all policies and programs to expand restroom access are informed by location specific analysis and research.



## OPTIMIZE EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

- **Establish universal design guidelines** for restrooms including standards for cleanliness, accessibility, safety, and user experience.
- **Design wayfinding systems** to ensure that

existing restrooms are easily identifiable and well marked.

- Support access policies for mobile workers, building on recent legislation in NYC, Ontario, and Washington, DC.
- **Explore Community Toilet Schemes (CTS)** as a strategy to expand the public restroom network through agreements with private businesses.
- **Expand operating hours** beyond business hours, including 24/7 facilities where feasible.
- **Leverage privately owned public space (POPS) programs** to incentivize the provision of public restrooms in new developments.
- **Prioritize maintenance and renovation** of existing facilities, with attention to high-need areas frequented by mobile workers, including transit hubs and commercial districts.



## IMPROVE DATA QUALITY AND ACCESS

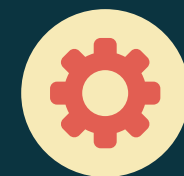
- **Standardize data protocols** for collection and maintenance, including coordination across agencies and jurisdictions.
- **Support and advance policies** like California's AB 1297 that require municipalities to maintain and disclose restroom data.
- **Foster cross-sector partnerships** to improve data accuracy and address challenges around semi-public restrooms, privacy, and data security.

- **Leverage user-driven data improvements**, learning from initiatives like the Great British Toilet Map.
- **Integrate restroom data into worker-facing apps**, and where possible, include features that allow workers to report on data quality and accuracy.



## FORGE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

- **Incentivize business participation** through models like ICI Toilettes and Nette Toilette that engage local businesses and municipal governments to expand restroom access.
- **Form public-private partnerships** to develop facilities designed to serve specific groups.
- **Engage Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)** to manage public restrooms and help cities meet rising maintenance demands.
- **Test and scale new cross-sector strategies** that align the resources and needs of local governments, platforms, and merchants, drawing on recent efforts such as worker hubs, mapping efforts, and prefabricated facility pilots.



## HARNESS TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION

- **Invest in modern restroom designs and technologies**, including self-cleaning mechanisms, touchless fixtures, and controlled access systems.

- **Adopt modular and portable restroom solutions** to provide flexible and adaptable options for changing urban needs.
- **Pilot restroom technologies**, enabling assessment and refinement before full-scale implementation.
- **Invest in adaptable solutions** that can shift in response to urban and public health needs.



## LEVERAGE SYNERGIES AND CO-BENEFITS

- **Consider diverse user needs** by developing restroom access solutions that benefit a wide range of groups.
- **Partner with advocacy groups** serving populations with special interest in restroom access to design interventions that maximize shared benefits.
- **Leverage existing initiatives** such as in disability, health condition, gender, and community development advocacy to find synergies across key groups.
- **Strategically locate restrooms** in high-activity areas, such as nightlife and transportation hubs, to ensure broad usability for night-shift workers, patrons, and mobile workers.
- **Emphasize shared benefits** to both mobile workers and various communities to create a united case for investment and action.

# Background

A decorative graphic on a dark teal background. It features a grid of rounded rectangular cells. A thick, light-colored line starts from the top left corner, moves right, then down, then right again, ending with a white circle. Another thick, light-colored line starts from the bottom right corner, moves left, then up, then left again, ending with a white circle. The overall style is modern and minimalist.

## Restroom Access in Perspective

Restroom access has long played a key role in shaping participation in public life, and in turn, participation in the workforce. In the early stages of industrialization during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, workplaces often lacked basic amenities, including proper restroom facilities, as productivity took precedence over worker welfare. However, as labor movements emerged in the late nineteenth century, advocacy for better working conditions gained momentum, leading to greater regulation of safety and sanitation in the workplace more generally.<sup>1</sup> Specific requirements related to restroom access for workers weren't put into effect until the late 20th century.<sup>2</sup> Such access was critical in helping to create the conditions for more people to be able to safely participate in the workforce.

The early twentieth century saw increased restroom access in public spaces, as well as in businesses

like department stores and restaurants. This facilitated newfound mobility in public particularly for women, and eventually—alongside the Women's Rights Movement—helped lay the foundation for their entry into the workforce. The expansion of employment opportunities for women, especially post-World War I, brought attention to the lack of designated restrooms for women in both factories and offices.<sup>3</sup> Labor rights advocacy for adequate restroom facilities was thus not only a matter of hygiene, but also one of equality, enabling women to work in environments not originally inclusive of them.

In addition to informing public life and workforce participation for women, restroom access has been instrumental in both hindering and expanding civic inclusion across race, ability, and sexual orientation. In the US in the late 1800s to early 1900s, Jim Crow laws mandated racial segregation of public facilities, including restrooms. Once these laws were lifted in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, Black

Americans could more freely move through public spaces, and possibly gain access to employment opportunities previously restricted due to racialized infrastructure (among other social, political, and economic barriers).<sup>4</sup> A few decades later, the 1990 passage of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) established accessibility requirements for both workplace and public restrooms, similarly broadening opportunities for people with disabilities to engage in both public life and the workforce.<sup>5</sup> More recently, advocacy for gender-neutral and gender-inclusive restrooms in public and at work has underscored the importance of restroom access in fostering environments inclusive of all gender identities and expressions.<sup>6</sup>

Twentieth-century advocacy efforts led to various regulations aimed at improving restroom access for transit workers and those without fixed workplaces. The United States Federal Highway Act, passed in 1956, mandated a comprehensive network of rest areas along all interstate highways, ensuring consistent restroom access for long-haul truckers.<sup>7</sup> In 1970, the establishment of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) set standards for workplace safety and hygiene, including later requirements that restrooms be made available for workers in industries where access was historically limited, such as in construction and agriculture.<sup>8</sup> By improving access to reliable and safe restrooms, these legal advancements opened up certain industries to people for whom lack of such facilities was formerly a barrier.

While the mid-twentieth century saw significant strides in the right to sanitation for multiple marginalized groups, the overall availability of public restrooms in countries including the US and UK began to decline beginning in the 1970s. This decrease in supply of public restrooms was particularly problematic for mobile workers, who have historically depended more on restrooms in the public realm, and whose lack of fixed workplaces have made access to sanitation especially complex.

Addressing gaps in restroom access is crucial for ensuring that all workers possess the basic resources needed to perform their jobs, and that the industries they work in are both safe and inclusive. In recent years, pivotal efforts have been made to recognize the unique needs of mobile workforces in this struggle. In 2019, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) published its [Transport Workers' Sanitation Charter](#), which outlines actions employers and governments can take to secure restroom access for transport workers.<sup>9</sup> Still, there remains a scarcity of concrete, tested solutions aimed at elevating restroom access for mobile workforces to the same standard as other industries, which serves as a challenge for the health and safety of these workforces, and deters certain groups (including women and those with health conditions) from participation in mobile work altogether.

## Recent Efforts by Platforms

In recent years, Uber, along with other rideshare and food delivery platforms, have begun efforts to better understand the issue of restroom access for platform workers, and have planned or piloted select initiatives to address the challenge.

In the United States, Uber launched a partnership with GasBuddy, an app that provides real time gas price information for users in the US. Through this partnership, US-based drivers can now use the driver-facing app to locate and navigate to nearby gas station restrooms, including information about operating hours. To date, 83,000 gas station restrooms are listed.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, rideshare platforms like Uber and Lyft invested in physical support hubs to assist drivers, offering amenities such as restrooms, vehicle maintenance, and communal spaces. The widespread shift to virtual support during COVID-19 led to the closure of many such facilities globally.

In Brasilia, amid pressure to expand restroom



Delivery scooters parked in Lisbon, Portugal  
(© Alexandre Rotenberg / Adobe Stock)

access in response to the district's 2021 support points policy, Uber has taken initial steps to expand restroom access. The company formed partnerships with large grocery stores, who agree to admit platform workers to their restrooms without a purchase and to be listed in the driver-facing app. Uber Brazil is also in discussion with other platform companies including iFood and DiDi to co-fund and manage potential support points. *Note: Brasilia's support points policy and related efforts by platforms are discussed in greater detail in Case Studies on page 32.*

In New York City, Uber partnered with The Independent Drivers Guild and hundreds of drivers to advocate for portable restrooms to be installed for drivers at JFK Airport.<sup>10</sup> They have since helped secure temporary, running water bathrooms at LaGuardia and Newark airports.<sup>11</sup>

Despite these nascent efforts, there is a strong need for more knowledge about best practices and potential strategies to improve access to restrooms for drivers and couriers – and the mobile workforce more broadly. In 2024 Uber commissioned WXY to develop a report providing context about this issue and outlining recommendations for improving restroom access for platform workers.

**Portland Loo in Colonel Summers Park in Portland, Oregon**  
(Mattsjc, Portland Loo in Colonel Summers Park, CC BY-SA 4.0)



# Restroom Access Over Time



## LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY

Greater participation in the workforce among women gradually leads to the inclusion of restroom facilities in both factories and offices designated for female employees.



## 1956: FEDERAL HIGHWAY ACT

By expanding the U.S. interstate highway system and mandating rest stops and services areas, the Federal Highway Act improves restroom access for long-haul truckers, laying the foundations for improved access for other types of transport workers.

## 1970S-2000S

Overall availability of public restrooms declines in the US and UK.



## 1990: AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)

ADA establishes accessibility requirements for both workplace and public restrooms, thereby broadening restroom access for people with disabilities.



## 2019: INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT WORKERS' FEDERATION (ITF) TRANSPORT WORKERS' SANITATION CHARTER

The ITF's Sanitation Charter outlines actions employers and governments can take to secure restroom access for transport workers, and advises employees and unions on strategies for advocating for improved access.

## 2020: COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly restricts public restroom access. At the same time, demand for delivery services soars, both of which raise awareness of this issue.

## MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY: INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Early industrial workplaces often lacked restrooms, prompting labor movements to advocate for better conditions and restroom access.



## JIM CROW ERA

A series of laws enacted primarily in southern states in the U.S. mandated racial segregation of all public facilities, including restrooms.



## 1970: OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (OSHA)

In addition to setting many other standards for sanitation in the workplace, OSHA requires that restrooms be made available for workers in industries where access was historically limited.

## 2010S-2020S: RISE OF GIG ECONOMY

Employment opportunities in the gig economy—especially through technology startups—grow significantly, leading to a larger subset of the workforce without fixed workplaces and for whom restroom access is a challenge.



## 2021: NYC LOCAL LAW 117

Local Law 117 guarantees app-based food delivery workers the right to use the bathroom at restaurants where they pick up orders.

Images, clockwise from top left: A group of women participating in the Working Women's Picket of the White House, late 1800s; Rest stop during the construction of Interstate 26 in North Charleston, South Carolina, 1962 (City of North Charleston, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>); ADA accessible restroom (© @ThamCK / Adobe Stock); ITF Sanitation Charter cover (<https://www.itfglobal.org/en/resources/itf-sanitation-charter>); Women factory workers, 1898 (Picryl, <http://www.loc.gov/>); Segregated restroom door (@Watts, Fredericksburg Museum Virginia, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>)

# Problem Definition

A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of rounded rectangles in various shades of teal. A white line with circular nodes at the intersections and midpoints of the grid lines is overlaid on the grid.

**Accessing restrooms can be challenging for many mobile workers, including platform workers, due to public restroom scarcity, denial from private businesses, and the nature of highly flexible work routines.**

**As stakeholders look to address this problem, they face a lack of reliable and comprehensive data and a shortage of proven best practices tailored to the unique needs of mobile workers.**

### Defining the Challenge

An examination of academic literature, media coverage, legislative landscapes, and recent initiatives, as well as engagement with platform drivers, couriers, Uber Crew members and issue experts in select cities reveals five key factors shaping the challenge of restroom access for platform workers.

These problems highlight that restroom access poses a challenge for many mobile workers, including platform workers, due to inadequate infrastructure, denial from private businesses, logistical challenges related to the flexible nature of their work, and a lack of reliable and consistent restroom data. Nearly half of Uber Crew members surveyed for this report noted restroom access as an area of concern.<sup>12</sup>

These challenges vary according to geographic context and driver identities. Women and drivers with health conditions or disabilities face heightened challenges around this issue, including concerns around facility adequacy and amenities, safety, and frequency of restroom breaks.<sup>13</sup> Platform workers in densely populated cities often face greater challenges accessing restrooms due to parking constraints and differences in the types of businesses in these settings. Restroom access is also a particular challenge for newly joined platform workers or those new to the city or region where they work.<sup>14</sup>



**Public restrooms have significantly decreased in many cities in the last several decades. Increasingly, mobile workers and the general public rely on restrooms in private businesses.**

Before the mid-20th century, public toilets were plentiful in the United States, but in the 1960s and 1970s they closed rapidly and en masse. The costs to install and maintain the facilities strained city budgets. Additionally, public restrooms were known to be used for illicit activity such as drug use and sex work. Public concerns around such activity only further fueled closures.<sup>15</sup> Following widespread efforts to ban pay toilets between the 1940s and 70s, in particular the grassroots Committee to End Pay Toilets, most states instituted bans on paid public restrooms and almost 50,000 had closed by 1980.<sup>16</sup> Paid facilities often weren't replaced with free alternatives, leading to an absence of public toilets altogether.<sup>17</sup> As of 2021, the U.S. had an average of only eight public toilets per 100,000 people.<sup>18</sup> Similar widespread closures have taken place in the UK since 2000. Over 1,700 toilets have closed across the country between 2006 and 2016. By 2011, 20% of London's toilets had closed, and the trend has likely worsened since.<sup>19</sup>

Budgetary, regulatory, and administrative obstacles slow the installation of public restrooms, even in cities who seek to increase access. In North America, public bathrooms cost between \$80,000-\$500,000 (not including ongoing maintenance and repair costs), depending on the size and model, and can cost far more.<sup>20</sup> European cities face a similar challenge, with high installation and maintenance costs obstructing infrastructural expansion.<sup>21</sup>

Given these trends, mobile workers—like the rest of us—rely largely on restrooms within private businesses. The willingness of any location to allow bathroom access can vary widely; thus, many platform drivers recommend getting to know one’s area and the specific businesses that are welcoming.<sup>22</sup> Drivers’ access to restrooms often depends on the policies of individual businesses and the discretion of their staff, exposing workers to personal bias and inconsistent practices. With rare exceptions, mobile workers’ access to restrooms in private businesses is far from guaranteed.

## 2

### Platform workers encounter barriers to inclusion from businesses and members of the public.

Given the scarcity of public restrooms and their lack of fixed workplaces, mobile workers rely heavily on restrooms in private businesses. However, many businesses are not willing to accommodate them—including restaurants for whom they are delivering.<sup>23</sup>

Recognizing the issue of private businesses refusing restroom access to delivery workers, some cities have taken legislative action. New York and Ontario have passed laws directly mandating restaurants to open their bathrooms for workers delivering their food.<sup>24</sup> Washington, DC introduced a similar law in 2023 that is still in Committee.<sup>25</sup> London has stressed that the same obligation is codified in their Health and Safety Executive Workplace Regulations.<sup>26</sup> While advocates have celebrated these measures as a win for delivery workers, questions remain about their efficacy. Uber Crew members and advocates report that compliance is mixed in New York City, and many businesses continue to deny restroom access to workers.<sup>27</sup>

Online posts by delivery workers suggest exclusion at restaurants is a widespread experience, and show that they find this kind of denial frustrating and demeaning.<sup>28</sup> Some have taken to online forums to exchange ideas as to how to access restrooms while driving or delivering, including sharing go-to businesses who tend to be accommodating, or tips such as purchasing a small item to gain access or recommending specific receptacles to have on hand for emergency use.<sup>29</sup>

It is worth noting that laws like those mentioned above mandating bathroom provision apply only to delivery workers for these restaurants and not to other platform workers. In interviews and online forums, rideshare drivers also report repeated rejection from businesses, yet lack the legal protection such policies may provide to delivery workers in some cities.

It is important to view these issues in the broader context of discrimination faced by platform workers. A [study](#) conducted by Uber found one in three delivery workers in France has faced some form of discrimination, prompting partnerships with advocacy groups to promote inclusivity.<sup>30</sup> Driver race and ethnicity further complicates this issue, as people of color face greater discrimination from businesses writ large, reporting higher levels of discrimination in retail settings overall.<sup>31</sup> The 2018 arrest of two Black men at a Starbucks who asked to use the restroom without making a purchase drew widespread attention to the racial politics of bathroom access.<sup>32</sup> In the US, 18% of drivers and couriers are Black and 13% are Hispanic.<sup>33</sup> And according to [research](#) conducted in 2021 by Pew Research Center, non-White Americans are significantly more likely to report ever having earned money in the gig economy. Hispanic adults are the group most likely to have earned through a gig platform (30%), at more than twice the rate of White adults (12%).<sup>34</sup>

## 3

### The flexible nature of platform work and lack of fixed workplace creates additional complications around bathroom access, also seen in other forms of mobile work.

The International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) has long recognized the unique challenges faced by transit workers with regard to access to decent sanitation, noting the impact of limited options on their health, safety, and well-being. Many transport workers lack dedicated workplace bathrooms, leaving them to share facilities with passengers or rely on paid or ‘customers only’ restrooms.<sup>35</sup>

The plight of mobile workers with regard to bathroom access predates platform services. Transit operators are a prime example of this, and have long fought for bathroom breaks, citing a lack of access on their routes and lack of sufficient break time.<sup>36</sup> Truck drivers also have a lengthy history of advocating for restroom access, with recent legislative victories in Washington state and in the U.S. congress protecting their rights to access restrooms during deliveries.<sup>37</sup> Delivery drivers at Amazon have also famously struggled with bathroom breaks, and have sued the company



Uber driver

because of it.<sup>38</sup> This issue came into the public eye after a viral stunt resold the workers’ bottles of urine as “energy drinks” on the Amazon website.<sup>39</sup> This issue is not unique to Amazon; similar practices have been reported among UPS and FedEx workers, as well as truckers, underscoring a common challenge across mobile work.<sup>40</sup>

Parking is a central concern for many mobile workers with regard to access to sanitation - many of whom cite concerns about lack of available parking and risk of receiving parking tickets as an obstacle to restroom access while driving or delivering.<sup>41</sup> Taxi drivers have long pointed to parking as a key challenge, with one report condemning public agencies in Los Angeles for failing to ensure adequate sanitation for this workforce, arguing that instead they “further punish drivers with citations.”<sup>42</sup>

Adding to logistical challenges like parking, the unpredictability of restroom access often requires workers to plan their routes around known facilities or travel farther, potentially missing earning opportunities to reach a reliable restroom.<sup>43</sup> Taxi drivers also report regularly “holding it” throughout 12-hour shifts, which advocates report has led to health complications for many.<sup>44</sup>

## 4

### There are many challenges to obtaining and managing restroom data, and existing data sets have key gaps and limitations.

Platforms and other stakeholders aiming to improve restroom access for mobile workers face significant hurdles related to the access, management, and quality of restroom data. In many cities, publicly accessible information on public restrooms is sparse. Different agencies often maintain isolated

datasets for facilities under their jurisdiction (such as transit agencies or parks), without consolidating this information across systems.

Acknowledging this challenge, New York City recently took steps to integrate public toilet data from parks, libraries, and other spaces into a [Google Maps layer](#), previously accessible only through separate sources.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, a report from the London Assembly Health Committee highlighted the absence of a centralized public toilet database, emphasizing that resolving the decline in public toilets would be more feasible with clearer government access to such data.<sup>46</sup>

Cities and regions with robust public restroom strategies often emphasize the central role of accessible, high-quality data. For example, [Australia's National Public Toilet Map](#) exemplifies an advanced, collaborative approach where local jurisdictions contribute data to a centralized platform, which includes detailed and customizable data on available restrooms (from opening hours,

to specific amenities). The City of Seoul, South Korea's [City Life Map](#), similarly contains a layer showing public restroom locations across the city (among many other public health and recreation-related facilities). However, many jurisdictions lag far behind, and may struggle to get policies off the ground that improve public restroom access. This struggle was seen recently in California, where a policy requiring local jurisdictions to inventory local restrooms and publish the data online remains stalled in committee.<sup>47</sup>

Comprehensive and reliable restroom data is especially important for mobile workers and other vulnerable groups who require real-time information on accessibility, operating hours, and ideally other factors like safety and cleanliness. This critical information is often missing, unreliable, or poorly maintained even in official datasets.

The unreliability of restroom data is not lost on users of restroom web and mobile applications. Platform workers surveyed and interviewed for this

report reported a lack of confidence in restroom data available to them in Uber's mobile application through the company's partnership with GasBuddy, with some claiming they would prefer to travel to a known restroom farther away than try an unknown restroom listed in the app.

In the absence of reliable public restroom data, efforts to map restrooms using crowdsourcing, such as [OpenStreetMap](#), have emerged, amassing significant entries in major cities. The [Great British Toilet Map](#), which has compiled over 14,000 restroom facilities throughout the UK through user entries, demonstrates the potential of user-generated mapping for restroom access. Importantly, the map's monitors claim there have been very few instances of inaccurate or misleading entries. However, other user-generated datasets are frequently incomplete and uneven in coverage across urban areas, and the considerable maintenance and oversight required by such efforts may be a deterrent for stakeholders looking to expand access to restroom data.

and proven best practices that effectively address the current context of this challenge.

As discussed above, several jurisdictions in North America, including [New York City](#), [Washington, D.C.](#), [Ontario, Canada](#), and the [state of California](#), have considered or passed legislation related to the issue of restroom access (either generally or specifically for platform workers) and public restroom data. In some cases these policies have stalled or failed to be enacted; in others, they have passed but are still too new to evaluate their impact or effectiveness.<sup>48</sup>

Private sector innovation around this issue has involved the introduction of mobile applications and restroom technology start-ups aimed at addressing the issue of public restroom access. These efforts point to the potential for technology to play a role in mitigating the challenges of restroom access for platform workers; again, however they have yet to be widely tested or scaled to meet the current need.

Both public and private sector stakeholders have also made attempts to establish "worker hubs" and/or "support points" for rideshare drivers and couriers, but such efforts have mostly proved unsustainable over time. Platforms have established physical support hubs for platform workers, however the COVID-19 pandemic led to the widespread closure of such sites, with both Lyft and Uber transitioning to virtual support. In November 2024, Lyft closed all its Hub locations, while Uber maintains on-site support at its Greenlight Hubs in select cities.<sup>49</sup>

In 2023, Chick-fil-A established a temporary hub for food delivery workers in Manhattan offering many amenities, dubbed the Brake Room.<sup>50</sup> Other support hub models, including San Francisco's We Drive Progress [Support Hubs](#) and New York City's proposed [Deliveristas Hubs](#) in defunct newsstands, have focused on providing rest areas and other amenities, but have not incorporated restrooms.<sup>51</sup> These examples underscore the need for additional research and pilot testing in this realm.



Subway public restroom in Osaka, Japan (© @Cowardlion / Adobe Stock)

## 5

### Platforms and other stakeholders face a shortage of tested efforts and proven best practices that speak to the current context of this issue.

In recent years, various efforts have been made to address the issue of restroom access for mobile workers. Both the public and private sectors have attempted to tackle this problem through different initiatives, but many have lacked roadmaps for long-term viability. Some initiatives, meanwhile, are simply too new for their efficacy to be fully evaluated. Ultimately, despite these efforts, there remains a significant shortage of tested approaches

# Case Studies

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## Four Cities in Perspective

Restroom access is a complex issue which intersects with all facets of a city's ecosystem, from built environment, to economy, to culture. This report examines four cities as case studies: Brasilia, New York City, Paris, and London.

These cities are highly urbanized centers where the challenges discussed in this report are at play. Each are economic and political powerhouses within their respective regions, with considerable density and cultural diversity. In response to barriers to restroom access for platform workers, there are emerging efforts in each of the four regions to address the issue from the public and private sectors.

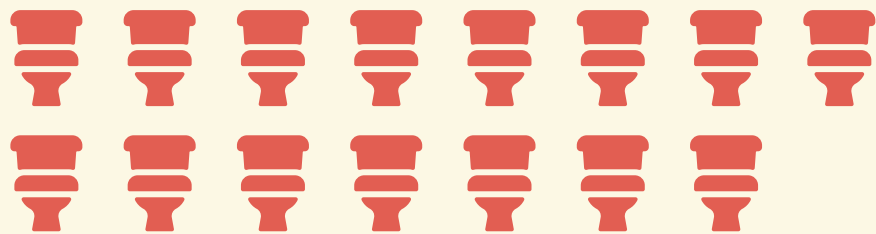
### Brazil

1 

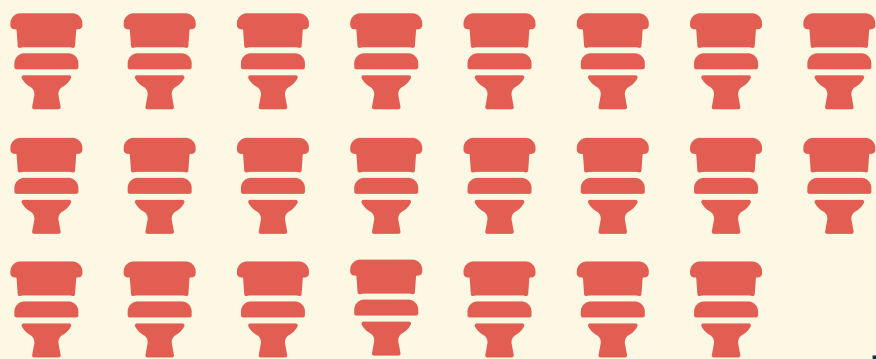
### The United States

8 

### The United Kingdom

15 

### France

23 

Public Restrooms per 100,000 people (QS Supplies)<sup>52</sup>

**Bryant Park public restroom, New York City**  
(Rhododendrites, Bryant Park bathroom (90660), CC BY-SA 4.0)



# Brasilia, Brazil

## Context and history

Brazil's capital city, Brasília is the country's third most populous and economically impactful city, behind Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. A sprawling and very car dependent city, Brasília has very few public bathrooms. Those that do exist are purportedly in poor condition.<sup>53</sup> As of 2018, there were only six public bathrooms in Brasília's city core,<sup>54</sup> and there is little public information about efforts on the part of the city to improve or expand these facilities.<sup>55</sup>

Brasilia-based rideshare drivers engaged for this report expressed that lack of restroom access is a challenge that requires considerable thought and planning. Many expressed concern about poor restroom quality and cleanliness, feeling unwelcome or poorly received at businesses (especially gas stations), and fears of getting parking tickets while parking to use a restroom.<sup>56</sup>

In 2021, Brasilia instituted a COVID-era "support points" policy designed to improve the working conditions for rideshare and delivery drivers by creating designated areas for them to rest and access essential services.<sup>57</sup> The policy mandates that delivery and ridesharing platforms provide one support point in each of the city's 35 administrative districts. The city has struggled to enforce the policy, and platforms and public officials alike have expressed concern about the policy's feasibility, including high costs of operation, challenges to scalability, and the extensive range of amenities required at each support point.

In response to these challenges, in partnership with other sector leaders including Didi and iFood, Uber led negotiations with Brasilia's Secretary of Mobility to propose a solution for complying with the local regulations on support points. Uber's plan, which involves cost-sharing between the three major companies, proposes the strategic establishment

of new support points in five high-traffic areas, and was well-received by the authorities and some drivers associations.

## Policy and legal landscape

- **Adopt Your Place (Adote uma Praça) (2019):** an initiative launched by the Federal District Government (GDF) that aims to enhance public spaces in the city through collaborations with local businesses and residents. Since its launch, it has received 370 adoption requests. This program could lead to the development of restrooms or other public amenities that serve mobile workers if such a proposal is approved by local authorities.<sup>58</sup>
- **Support Points Policy (2021):** Passed by the Legislative Chamber of the Federal District (CLDF), the policy mandates Support points must contain a range of amenities including male and female toilets, locker rooms, a rest area with internet access and free phone charging stations, a dining area, and parking for bicycles, motorcycles, and cars in all 35 required locations. The support points must be open from 6 am to midnight.<sup>59</sup>

5,802

Area (sq km)

489

Population density  
(People per sq km)<sup>65</sup>

**Brasilia's Monumental Axis, the city's central and main avenue** (Governor do Brasil, Brasília aerea eixo monumental, CC BY 3.0 BR)



- **Law 6.836 (2021):** The CLDF passed a law mandating businesses such as restaurants and shops to provide free bathroom access to public sanitation workers.<sup>60</sup>

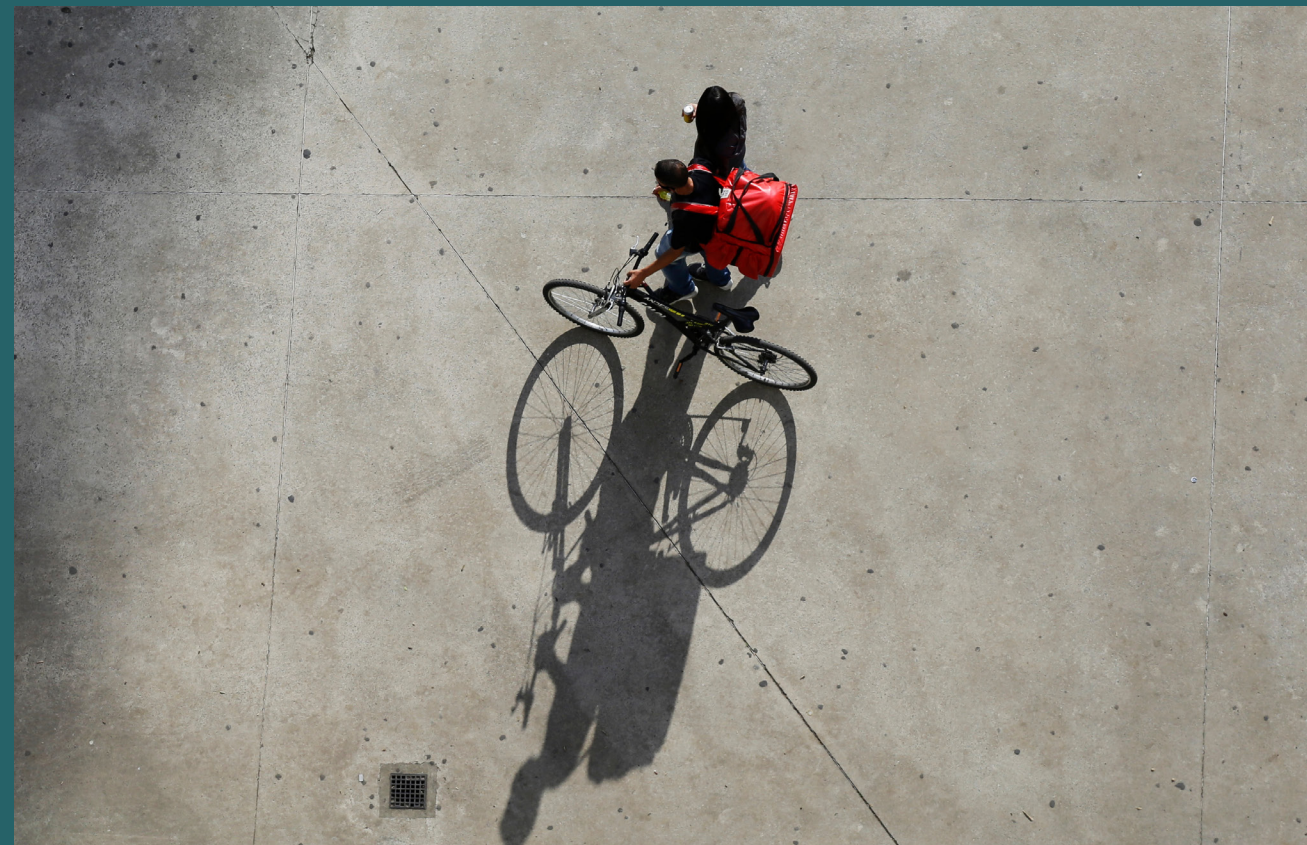
## Recent efforts

- **iFood support points:** iFood, Brazil's largest food delivery platform, currently operates two support points in Brasilia.<sup>61</sup> Some of their support points across the country are new constructions in collaboration with local governments, while others are managed through partnerships with restaurants. The support points can be easily located by workers on the iFood app.<sup>62</sup>
- **Casa99 support points:** Rideshare service 99 has been expanding out their "Casa99" array of support points as far back as 2018.<sup>63</sup> Their method involved transforming already existing service/training centers into support points with various amenities.

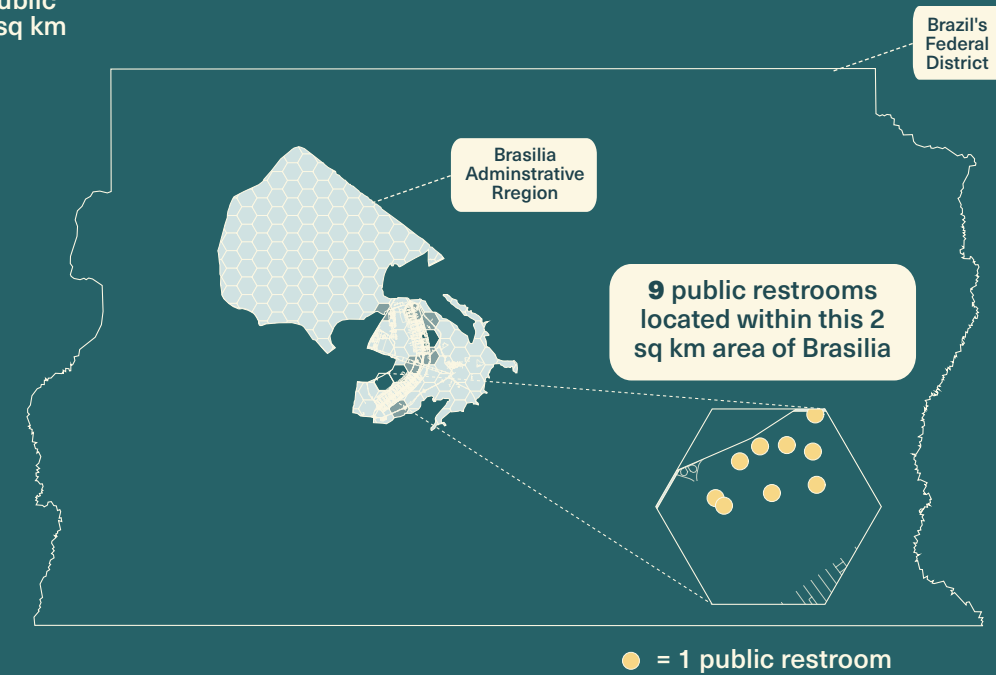
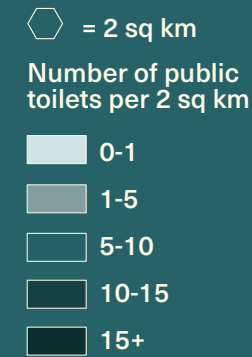
- **South Commercial Sector public restroom:** During the pandemic, the government of Brasilia performed a comprehensive renovation of a bathroom in the South Commercial Sector in collaboration with the No Setor Initiative, which included a shower, mirror, and drinking water filter.<sup>64</sup>
- **Uber grocery partnerships:** Uber partnered with grocery retailers to provide drivers and couriers access to their facilities. Retailers including Atacadão, Carrefour, and Super Adegas have agreed to give workers access to restrooms and water fountains at 16 commercial locations. Participating locations are visible in the worker-facing app.

## Key Lessons

While well-intended, Brasilia's Support Points policy highlights the need for regulators to conduct feasibility assessment and consult with



Delivery cyclist in Sao Paulo, Brazil (© Nelson Antoine / Adobe Stock)



### Brazil Federal District Public Restroom Density (Open Street Map<sup>66</sup>)

stakeholders when developing policies to expand restroom access for platform workers.

Cooperation is needed between public and private sectors to manage data and inform strategic policies. Policies to expand restroom access should carefully consider existing context, including an analysis of need and demand. In the case of Brasilia, the requirement of one support point per administrative district does not reflect an analysis of the actual distribution of need across the city.

Policies for platform workers should address the distinct needs of different workers and their modes of transportation. Rideshare drivers work differently from delivery couriers, yet Brasilia's Support Points law applies uniformly to both groups, overlooking key differences.

Partnerships between city governments, platforms, and local businesses are necessary to improve restroom access for mobile workers. Support points/worker hubs and other programs

should prioritize existing infrastructure, such as partnerships with local businesses to increase bathroom access, or collaborations with cities to repurpose underutilized public land (as Brasilia has piloted with iFood in some locations).

# New York City, USA

## Context and history

While American funding for public restrooms was strong in the early 20th Century, most of this infrastructure has fallen by the wayside since the 1970s,<sup>67</sup> with pay toilets being banned in most states, without free alternatives.<sup>68</sup> Thus, New York City, despite its massive population and GDP, ranks quite poorly in terms of public restroom access per capita.<sup>69</sup> Advocates have long criticized the lack of restrooms in the city, arguing it is not meeting the needs of residents and tourists alike.<sup>70</sup> Mobile workers are among the groups impacted by this issue, especially with the sharp rise in delivery service usage since the COVID-19 pandemic. Combined sales for major meal delivery services in the United States grew 162% year-over-year in April 2020 and have only continued to expand.<sup>71</sup>

However, some advances have been made. In 2021, a law passed after much advocacy requires that businesses make restrooms available to workers delivering their food.<sup>72</sup> While reports on compliance with the policy are mixed, it is one of the first of its kind in the US and was seen as a victory for courier advocacy groups.<sup>73</sup>

In June 2024, New York City launched the “Ur in Luck” initiative which promises to build 46 new public restrooms and renovate 36 existing ones, in addition to launching an online public toilet map.<sup>74</sup>

## Policy and legal landscape

- **Local Law 117** (2021): this law requires that restaurants provide restroom access to workers delivering their food.<sup>75</sup>
- **Laws 114 and 144** (2022 and 2023, respectively): advance a long process of public bathroom improvement and expansion, reporting on current bathroom locations and conditions, as well as identifying suitable

locations for new construction.<sup>76</sup> This expansion plan is continuing to receive support, but the costs of building and maintaining these bathrooms are high, and the pace of the city's bureaucracy is slow.<sup>77</sup>

- **Int 0267** (2024): a proposed policy that would mandate public municipal buildings to open their bathrooms to the public.<sup>78</sup>
- **Int 0694** (2024): a proposed policy that would establish a permanent, long-term public restroom strategic planning process. The policy would require the city to produce a strategic report, to be updated every four years, with a goal of providing one toilet per 2,000 residents by 2035; a report from the Urban Design Forum found that this would equate to the addition of roughly 3,300 public toilets over the next 11 years.<sup>79</sup>

790

Area (sq km)

11.3k

Population density  
(People per sq km)<sup>86</sup>

0.28

Public restrooms  
(Per sq km)<sup>87</sup>

New York City  
streetscape  
(© Juli M. / Adobe Stock)



## Recent efforts

- **JFK portable toilets** (2016): the Independent Drivers Guild, a Machinists Union affiliate, launched a telephone campaign resulting in the installation of portable toilets in JFK airport.<sup>80</sup>
- **Newsstand delivery hubs** (2022): New York City government announced a pilot project with Los Deliveristas Unidos to convert vacant, non-landmarked news stands into rest hubs for food delivery workers.<sup>81</sup> It should be noted that while newsstand sites offer several amenities such as phone and ebike charging, they are too small to provide bathrooms. Concerns over increased traffic, loitering, noise, and safety have led residents and community boards to reject these proposals.<sup>82</sup> Despite securing a federal grant of \$1 million, no hubs have been established to date.
- **The Brake Room** (2023): Chick-fil-A launched a pilot comfort station for delivery workers called the Brake Room, which provided bathrooms, free WiFi, phone charging, spaces to rest, and complimentary drinks.<sup>83</sup>
- **Ur in Luck** (2024): New York City's initiative to build 46 new bathrooms and renovate 36 existing ones across the city over the next five years. Additionally, the city added a new [Google Maps layer](#) that includes publicly accessible toilets, and is to be updated biannually.<sup>84</sup>
- **BID restrooms:** Two Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), in Bryant Park and Herald Square respectively, have funded public restroom renovation and maintenance, setting a precedent for privately-funded public restrooms. The Herald Square BID replaced a previously automated bathroom with a manually attended one, reporting that the latter cost no more to maintain.<sup>85</sup>



**New York City newsstand**  
(Ray Dehler, 2008 newsstand NYC USA 2453239739, CC BY 2.0)

⬡ = 2 sq km

Number of public toilets per 2 sq km

0-1

1-5

5-10

10-15

15+

12 public restrooms located within this 2 sq km area of Manhattan

● = 1 public restroom

0 7.5 15 km

**New York City Public Restroom Density** (NYC Chief Public Realm Officer<sup>88</sup>)

## Key Lessons

Initiatives like Ur in Luck that make restroom data more accessible through existing channels such as Google Maps should be prioritized, and tied to other concrete actions such as policies and capital improvements to the public restroom network.

Cities may encounter concern from local residents and community boards when establishing physical worker hubs. Engagement with local stakeholders, including businesses and community organizations, is key for building support, in particular for initiatives that utilize public space.

High costs and bureaucratic barriers associated with restroom maintenance and construction can be tackled in part through public-private partnerships and alternative funding models (as seen in NYC restrooms developed through partnerships with BID's).

There is a need for greater enforcement of existing laws that protect restroom access, such as Local

Law 117, in addition to further exploration of other legislative opportunities. It is important to work directly with merchants and other stakeholders to raise awareness and encourage uptake of such policies.

# Paris, France

## Context and history

Paris is known for its historic network of “pissoirs,” standalone public urinals pioneered in the 1830’s, which became ubiquitous in the capital city. Between 1981-1986, Paris installed a fleet of 400 “sanisettes,” a style of self-standing, unisex, self-cleaning toilet innovated by the French advertising company JCDecaux.<sup>89</sup> These toilets had an entrance fee of 1 franc until they were made free of charge in 2006. JCDecaux—which specializes in advertising street furniture, billboards, advertising on public transport, among other products—has installed automated public toilets in cities across the world, often as part of contracts that include other advertisement opportunities or outdoor furniture installments in the host city. This has led to mutually beneficial public-private partnerships that have helped disseminate Paris’ automated public toilet technology internationally.<sup>90</sup>

JCDecaux’s 435 sanisettes in operation today comprise the world’s largest network of public, self-cleaning toilets.<sup>91</sup> Despite this, the toilets are perceived as unclean by many Parisians.<sup>92</sup> The city and JCDecaux are in the process of updating to a next generation of automated public toilets, which they claim will improve accessibility and hygiene.<sup>93</sup> The 2024 Olympics may have had a hand in spurring this initiative, as such events have historically been a catalyst for cities to upgrade their public toilets.<sup>94</sup>

While some stakeholders in Paris believe that the city’s strong public restroom network adequately serves mobile workers and local couriers traveling by foot, bicycle, or motorized two-wheelers, parking is a considerable barrier to access this network for PHV drivers traveling by car.

## Policy and legal landscape

- **Make public restrooms free of charge:** While Paris’ sanisettes are free to use, others across

France, notably those in train stations, are not. In 2023, left wing political party La France Insoumise presented a bill to the National Assembly that would make all public toilets free to use, and establish a minimum ratio of one free public toilet per 2,500 inhabitants.<sup>95</sup>

## Recent efforts

- **ICI Toilettes:** Launched in Nantes in 2021, ICI Toilettes presents an alternative solution to bathroom inaccessibility, using a partnership model in which collaborating businesses open their bathroom doors in exchange for a monthly stipend from the local government and inclusion in a mobile app.<sup>96</sup> *Note: ICI Toilettes is discussed at length in the Recommendations section (starting on page 48).*

105

Area (sq km)

20k

Population density  
(People per sq km)

6.72

Public restrooms  
(Per sq km)  
Highest in the world.<sup>100</sup>

**A Parisian Sanisette**  
(© @UlyssePixel / Adobe Stock)



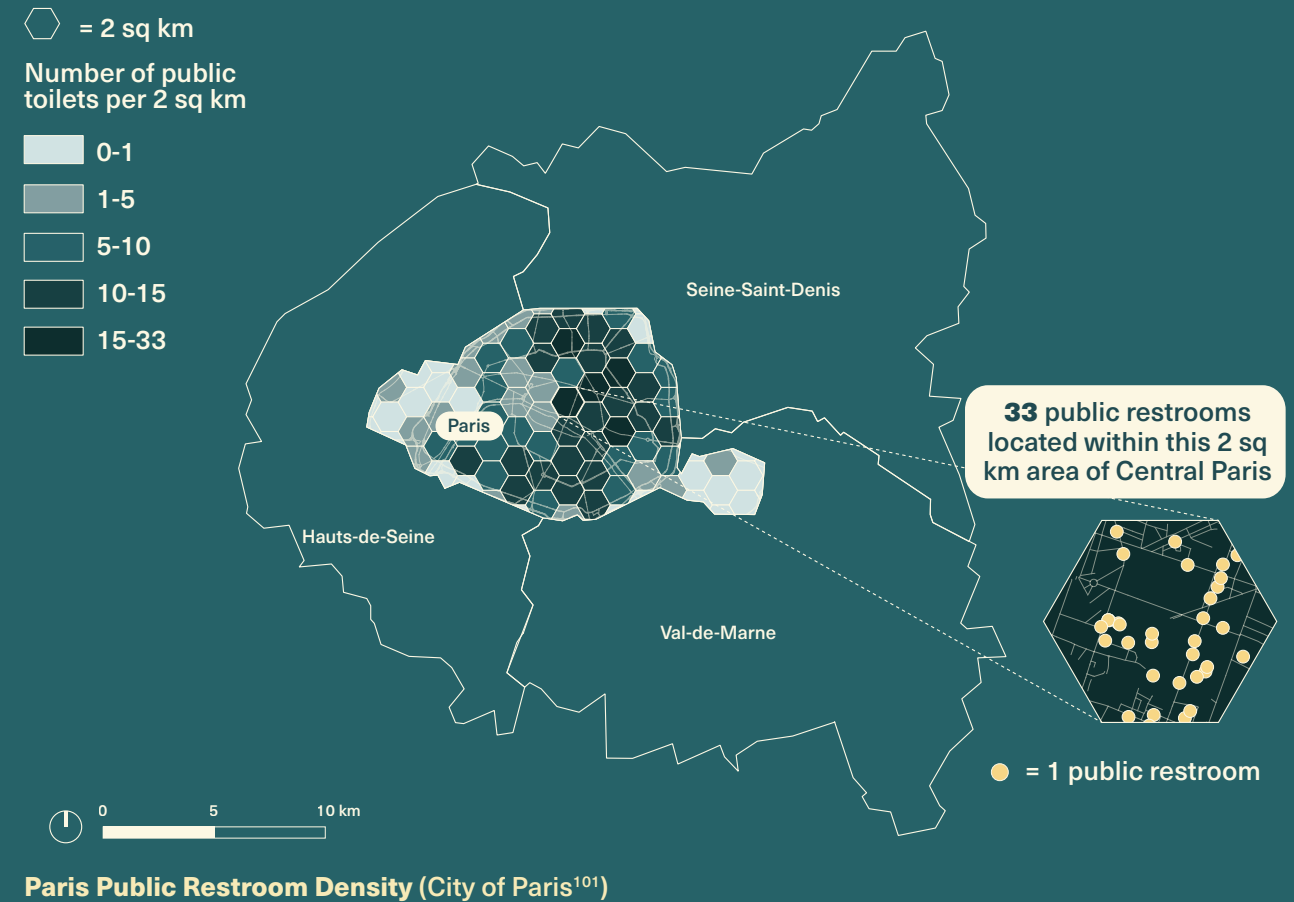
- [Toilettespubliques.com](#): uses data from OpenStreetMaps to provide a public toilet map covering all major cities in France, including their accessibility and hours of operation.<sup>97</sup> This map contains over 20,000 toilets, and relies on public input to update information.
- [City of Paris web map](#): The City of Paris has also released its own publicly accessible web map. This map also provides hours of operation and accessibility info, and does not use crowd-sourced data.<sup>98</sup>
- **Paris and JCDecaux's initiative (2024-25)**: This initiative promises to update the sanisette network with a next-generation fleet. These newer models will be more spacious, contain a urinal cabinet, and self-clean in just 30 seconds. They will also run on fully renewable energy, and reduce electricity usage by one third and water usage by two-thirds compared to the old model.<sup>99</sup>

## Key Lessons

Funding for the modernization of public restroom infrastructure should be prioritized to enhance hygiene, accessibility, and sustainability, not just for mobile workers but for the broader public. Stakeholders should look to Paris's sanisettes as a model for promoting free public restroom access using technology that preserves a sense of cleanliness and safety.

A strong network of public restrooms in densely developed cities benefits delivery workers and other mobile workers who often travel by bike or motorized and e-bikes, while those workers traveling by car face barriers to access (such as parking).

Continue to explore partnerships between innovators in restroom technology and data and the public sector (such as ICI Toilettes), and the impacts such initiatives may have for mobile workforces in particular.



JCDecaux sanisette maintenance (Coyau / Wikimedia Commons / CC BY-SA 3.0, Boulevard Richard-Lenoir (Paris), entretien d'une sanisette 02, CC BY-SA 3.0)

# London, UK

## Context and history

London claims to be home to the first ever public toilet, however the city has had a rich history of inadequate and unequal public restroom access.<sup>102</sup> Since 2000, public toilet infrastructure has lost funding and degraded across the UK, with some councils closing as many as 94% of their public toilets between 2010 and 2018.<sup>103</sup> From 2000 to 2011, London's provision dropped from 486 down to 393, and as of 2016, over 1,700 toilets had closed in the UK.<sup>104</sup> A recent report by the London Assembly Health Committee brought this data to the forefront, highlighting the population's dissatisfaction with the declining situation as well as the lack of a centralized public toilet database.<sup>105</sup>

The city has taken some measures to address the diminished supply of public toilets, including launching several Community Toilet Scheme (CTS) programs managed at the borough level in many boroughs across the city (also seen across other jurisdictions in the UK). Such programs pay restaurants and other private businesses to make their restrooms public, thereby expanding the network of available restrooms in the city. The web-accessible [Great British Public Toilet Map](#) is a notable effort from the private sector to make comprehensive restroom data available to the public, powered by user submissions.<sup>106</sup>

In 2024, the manifesto of incumbent mayor Sadiq Khan outlined plans to create a task force to explore improvements for private hire drivers, including how operators can be supported to provide rest hubs with toilets.<sup>107</sup> Transport for London has plans to publish an updated Taxi and Private Hire Action Plan in early 2025, intended to update the plan last published in 2016 to reflect changes in the industry and recent engagement with a range of stakeholders.<sup>108</sup>

In October of 2024, Transport for London announced plans for an ambitious expansion of

their public toilet network, including commitments to convert facilities for accessibility, reopen closed facilities, and install new ones.<sup>109</sup>

## Policy and legal landscape

- **Department for Transport and Health and Safety Executive guideline (2017):** The agency enacted a guideline that requires restaurants to allow delivery workers to use their bathrooms. The efficacy of this guideline is unclear as there is limited public information and low awareness.<sup>110</sup>
- **The London Plan (2021):** Policy S6 requires that large-scale developments open to the public provide free, accessible public restrooms. Large developments are defined based on floorspace in square meters (i.e., a floorspace of greater than 100,000 square meters in Central London).<sup>111</sup>

1,572  
Area (sq km)

5.5k  
Population density  
(People per sq km)<sup>122</sup>

0.39  
Public restrooms  
(Per sq km)<sup>123</sup>

**London buses are used more than its underground metro, seeing 1.5 billion passengers per year (Andras Stefuca)**



- **Mayor Sadiq Khan re-election campaign (2024):** As a part of his re-election campaign, London's incumbent mayor pledged to establish a task force consisting of rideshare/PHV drivers, major industry operators, and advocates aiming to make life easier for workers across the sector.<sup>112</sup> Chief among these goals is working the operators to explore how they can be supported to provide rest hubs including toilets.<sup>113</sup>

## Recent efforts

- **Tube station restroom pilot (2016):** Transport for London and the Mayor of London published the [Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Action Plan](#), which includes an initiative to open up restroom facilities in tube stations for taxi drivers.<sup>114</sup> As of 2018, a pilot program had been discontinued at one of the two stations participating due to a lack of use by drivers. The city said it was continuing to explore opportunities for such partnerships, including at bus stations.<sup>115</sup>
- **The Community Toilet Scheme (CTS):** an initiative to expand the public restroom network through a fee-based partnership with a variety of publicly accessible businesses. The program offers payment to businesses to enter a contract in which they open restrooms to the public and are placed on the CTS toilet map. As of 2022, 15 of London's boroughs list a CTS on their websites, though a report found only eleven of them are active.<sup>116</sup> Participating venues receive

payments ranging between £500 and £1,200 per year. Some boroughs operate their own online toilet maps and apps, while others refer users to the Great British Public Toilet Map.

- **The Great British Public Toilet Map:** an online database providing information on public toilets across the United Kingdom. The data is publicly sourced: any individual who encounters a new toilet may add it to the map, along with information such as gender accessibility, opening hours, handicap provision, and baby changing stations.<sup>117</sup> The map also draws on data from open datasets, data requests to public agencies, [OpenStreetMap](#), and private companies and organizations.<sup>118</sup> The dataset contains 17,672 toilets as of May 2024.<sup>119</sup>
- **Equity in Motion toilet programme (2024):** After an historic investment in toilet provision of £3million per year over five years, Transport for London announced an ambitious [plan](#) to expand and improve the network of toilets at public transit stations, including reopening closed restrooms, installing new ones, and converting select facilities to accessible toilets.<sup>120</sup>

## Key Lessons

Community Toilet Schemes can be an effective strategy for cities to complement and expand public toilet networks by partnering with private businesses. Given the highly localized management of these programs in London, stakeholders here and elsewhere may consider shared standards or best practices for these programs to ensure adequate coverage and quality throughout the city or region.

Cities and private sector stakeholders should work toward developing centralized public toilet databases, such as the Great London Toilet Map. These databases improve awareness and accessibility of restroom facilities across the city.

Cities should explore making existing public facilities available to mobile workers, as London

⬡ = 2 sq km

Number of public toilets per 2 sq km

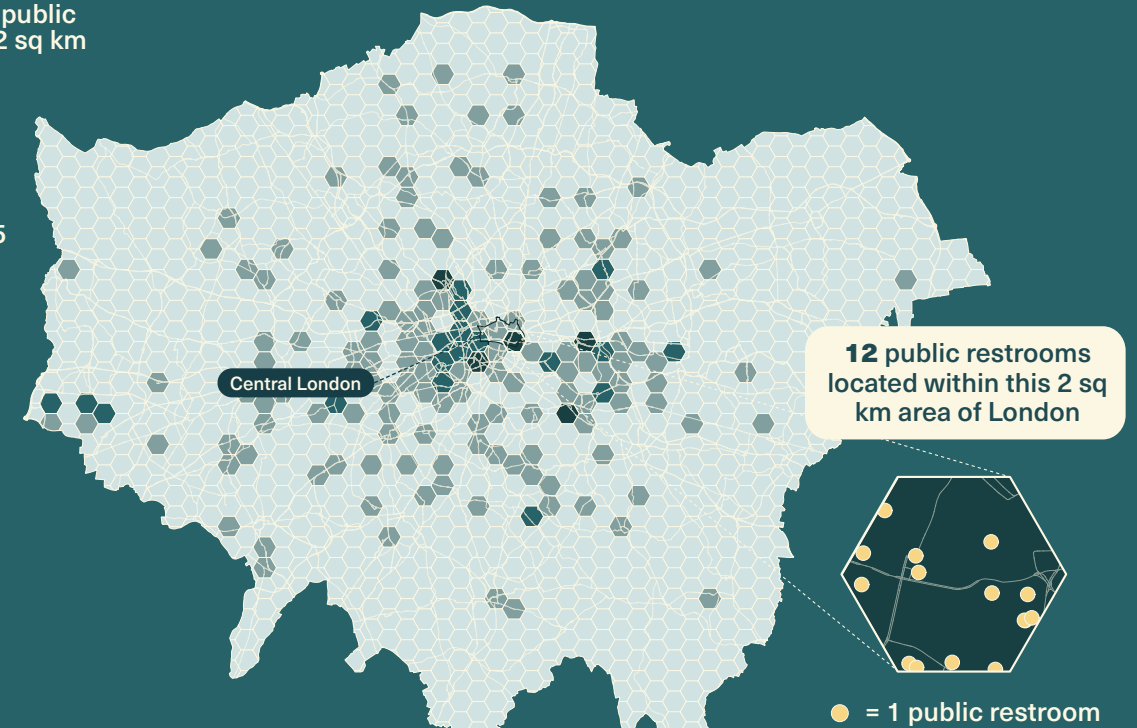
0-1

1-5

5-10

10-15

15+



0 7.5 15 km

### Greater London Authority Public Restroom Density (Open Street Map<sup>124</sup>)

piloted in 2016 with tube station restrooms. Where feasible, such initiatives should be inclusive of a range of mobile workers, rather than exclusive to one sector, to ensure greater impact and equity.

Stakeholders should leverage programs like London's Equity in Motion plan to ensure mobile workers and other key user groups can benefit; this includes considering making restrooms available for non-passengers, as can be seen in cities like Tokyo where many metro stations have accessible restrooms outside the pay gate.<sup>121</sup>



**Automated Public Toilet in London**  
(© @Tony Baggett / Adobe Stock)

# Recommendations



## Recommendations Through Guiding Principles

The recommendations in this report are organized around key guiding principles aimed at fostering collaboration and addressing the social, cultural, physical, and legal challenges to reliable restroom access that mobile workers face. The recommendations are not exhaustive, and are intended to offer a flexible framework that can be adapted to specific contexts and stakeholder needs, as well as to mobile workforces beyond the delivery and rideshare sectors. Successful implementation will require cooperation among businesses, platforms, sanitation and public health innovators, local governments, and advocates. By prioritizing these principles and working collaboratively, these stakeholders can create actionable pathways to improve the well-being of mobile workers while supporting broader planning and public health goals that benefit all.



### Understand Specific Context

Restroom access is highly contextual, shaped by the culture, politics, economy, and geography of a specific area. To ensure effective strategies, efforts must be responsive to the real experiences of those most affected, particularly platform and mobile workers. This requires city- and region-specific research, including comprehensive surveys of platform workers to understand their restroom access challenges, analyzing the geographic distribution of existing facilities near high-activity areas, and identifying the regulatory and cultural factors affecting access in different neighborhoods.

Several cities have implemented public toilet strategies informed by such research. For example, [Sydney's Public Toilet Strategy](#) (2014) was based on a thorough review of facilities and user surveys, enabling Sydney to tailor its recommendations and

identify areas for improvement.<sup>125</sup> [Portland, Oregon's Going Public report](#) (2006), developed in partnership with a local university, analyzed restroom availability and community needs, establishing new standards for service.<sup>126</sup> South Korea, a leader in public toilet planning, has conducted comprehensive audits of existing toilets, while cities like Seoul and Busan have mapped facilities to better understand where new restrooms are most needed.<sup>127</sup>

Engagement is critical to develop an understanding of local context. Stakeholders should collaborate with advocacy groups, such as labor organizations and platform companies that work closely with mobile workers, to ensure restroom strategies address their specific challenges. Direct engagement with platform workers across cities helps uncover localized issues, such as restroom availability, go-to locations, and barriers like parking or business restroom practices. Discussions with Uber Crew members for this report revealed highly varied experiences depending on their locale, underscoring the need for localized insights.

Additionally, it is essential to engage businesses already offering restroom access—or those that could be potential partners. This engagement will be key to develop effective partnership and incentive programs that encourage businesses to open their restrooms to mobile workforces, and adequately support them as needed.



### Optimize Existing Infrastructure

Addressing restroom access for platform workers requires both short-term improvements and long-term investments in infrastructure. Given the high costs and logistical challenges of constructing new public restrooms, a more immediate, cost-effective solution is to improve the quality and accessibility of existing facilities. To do so, governments should

## Case Study: Throne Labs

[Throne Labs](#) is a startup addressing the public restroom crisis by creating smart prefabricated toilets designed for both public use and workforce-specific needs, including mobile and delivery workers. Throne units are self-contained, requiring no sewage or water connections, and are solar-powered with the option to plug in when needed, making them flexible and scalable. Their restrooms can be accessed using a text message, mobile app, or tap card, allowing for easy and secure entry. Throne units are movable and can be deployed rapidly compared to traditional infrastructure.

Throne designed and built their smart solution in 2020 in and around Washington, DC, serving both suburban parks, downtowns and more urban areas. The startup's roots in DC have proven advantageous for more recent citywide policy efforts aimed at addressing restroom access, including a policy that requires restaurants to make their restrooms available to delivery drivers.<sup>136</sup>



Throne exterior (Throne Labs)

In 2023, Throne conducted a pilot with LA Metro that included both public and operator-only units. The operator-only Throne at Sylmar-San Fernando Metrolink station was highly utilized, and 95% of surveyed operators reported being happier at work after gaining access to a Throne bathroom. In Ann Arbor, Michigan, where Throne installed nine public restrooms in 2024, rideshare drivers and food delivery workers have been among the restrooms' most frequent users.

Throne Labs uses data analysis from 21 smart sensors and real-time user feedback to inform operations, optimize cleaning schedules, and respond to service needs. They work with cities to identify effective placements for their units, considering factors like visibility, lighting, and avoiding areas prone to loitering or other issues to arrive at a tailored, context specific strategy.



Throne interior (Throne Labs)

develop universal design standards to ensure consistency in cleanliness, accessibility, safety, and user experience across all facilities.

It is critical to ensure that existing restrooms are easily identifiable. Public restrooms need clear, consistent signage. Wayfinding systems, including both physical signage and mobile apps, can help platform workers quickly find nearby restrooms, especially in high-traffic areas.

Another crucial aspect of restroom access is hours of operation. Mobile workers often work outside of traditional business hours, and many experts advise keeping public restrooms open 24/7 as a best practice for equitable access for these workers and other groups (from unhoused residents to nightlife revelers).

Cities should also ensure that facilities in public buildings are easily accessible to the public, and consider removing existing barriers to access wherever feasible. This may include restrooms in libraries, police stations, transit stations, parks, and more. For instance, restrooms in public transit stations can be positioned outside of the pay gates to ensure access for non-riders, as seen in many of Tokyo's metro stations. Regulators should also consider enacting policies that guarantee this right to residents, as proposed in [Int 0267](#) in New York City, which would require readily accessible bathrooms in public-facing municipal buildings be made open to the public during business hours.<sup>128</sup>

Often, existing restrooms are available but not accessible to platform workers. Cities can develop policies to ensure restroom access for mobile workers, taking the lead from recent legislation enacted in [New York City](#), [Washington, DC](#) and [Ontario, Canada](#). Platforms can also work directly with merchants, including formalizing agreements with businesses frequented by workers related to restroom access. Such agreements might also leverage technology already in use by mobile workers, such as using in-app features to allow employees to "check in" or identify themselves to

access facilities typically reserved for customers and/or employees.

Programs like [Community Toilet Schemes \(CTS\)](#), seen throughout the UK, provide a strong example of optimizing existing infrastructure, expanding the network of public toilets through existing facilities in participating businesses. These initiatives are typically paired with digital maps including information such as operating hours and accessibility amenities, and wayfinding signage and distinct branding helping direct users to available facilities.

Public-private partnerships can also play a role in expanding restroom access. Businesses and institutions with privately owned public spaces (POPS) could supplement public restrooms, particularly in areas with insufficient access. A recent [report published by Urban Design Forum](#) proposes that public restrooms be required in all POP's larger than 10,000 square feet in New York City, and suggests that developers could be offered further incentives for providing them.<sup>129</sup> Other cities with POP's programs throughout North America and East Asia should consider such measures to optimize an existing program and form of infrastructure.

High-traffic locations such as airports, taxi stands, and transit terminals are critical for platform workers but often lack adequate restroom options. Improving the maintenance and oversight of these facilities should be prioritized.

Finally, it is essential that existing restroom facilities be properly maintained, ensuring cleanliness, safety, and accessibility. While public restrooms have diminished in many markets, the poor quality of public restrooms is often cited as a deterrent to using the facilities that do exist. Some cities have put forward investments toward the maintenance and renovation of existing facilities, such as London's recent investment as part of Transport for London's [Equity in Motion](#) program.<sup>130</sup>

In some places, including programs in [Singapore](#)



**Community Toilet Scheme signage**  
(Darren Foreman)

and [South Korea](#), governments and NGO's have even introduced rating programs for restroom facilities to incentivize private businesses and/or public agencies to maintain high toilet standards.<sup>131</sup> Improved standards for restroom quality, and investments in the maintenance and improvement of existing facilities, is a critical step in ensuring restroom access for platform workers and the broader public.



## Improve Data Quality and Access

Comprehensive and current restroom data is increasingly critical for effective urban planning, resource allocation, and policy-making aimed at enhancing restroom infrastructure and accessibility for both platform workers and the general public. Public sector stakeholders must develop standardized data collection and maintenance protocols, so as to sustain coordinated shared datasets among agencies and across jurisdictions. Of course, these datasets should also be subject to routine updates and quality checks. Some public officials have already begun to recognize this crucial relationship between data and improved restroom access. In California, legislative [Bill AB 1297](#) would have required municipalities to maintain and publicly disclose data on local public restrooms, however the bill had not been signed into law as of

November 2024.<sup>132</sup>

Other national and local governments have taken measures to improve public restroom data, including [Australia's National Public Toilet Map Initiative](#), which requires local governments to submit data on public toilets for use in a comprehensive, accessible public map. New York City's recently launched "[Ur in Luck](#)" initiative introduced a new [Google Maps layer](#) that locates all public restrooms managed by various agencies and civic institutions throughout the city.

In addition to policies and government-led initiatives, the public sector should engage with private businesses, community organizations, and platforms to address data challenges through cross-sector collaboration. Such collaborations may be effective for developing protocols around "gray area" restrooms (e.g., semi-public facilities in businesses or institutions) and for addressing privacy and security concerns related to open restroom data. They also may be effective for improving investments in facility quality and access in the private sector. For instance, the [Happy Toilet Program](#), developed by non-profit organization Restroom Association of Singapore (RAS), utilizes public feedback as a key component in its effort to enhance restroom quality and cleanliness. By collecting user ratings through surveys and feedback forms at participating restroom facilities, the program can identify trends and common issues, encouraging data-informed improvements

Finally, private sector stakeholders can work with their customers/users to harness data for improved restroom quality and accessibility. More specifically, platforms, non-profits, and private businesses should consider enabling user-generated content to validate, add, or report on restroom access and conditions. [The Great British Toilet Map](#), launched in the UK in 2013, uses crowd-sourced ratings and reviews to assemble information on restroom locations, accessibility, and cleanliness.

As platform workers rely heavily on mobile

## Case Study: ICI Toilettes

[ICI Toilettes](#) is an innovative French mobile application expanding public restroom access by leveraging a network of local businesses. The app connects users to free restrooms in bars, cafes, and restaurants, effectively improving restroom accessibility in urban areas. Participating businesses receive monthly stipends from municipal funding, which helps cover the costs of providing access. In a commitment to gender equity, ICI Toilettes also supplies free sanitary products to all participating businesses.

Launched in Nantes in 2021, ICI Toilettes builds upon established models such as the UK's Community Toilet Schemes and Germany's Nette Toilette. Their work is set apart from these other models in part due to the sophistication of their business- and public-facing mobile apps. Also, while other efforts rely solely on public funding to provide stipends to businesses, ICI Toilettes splits the stipend cost with government partners,

establishing a true public-private partnership. ICI Toilettes proposes a complementary system that aims to supplement rather than replace traditional public restrooms by optimizing access to existing facilities—thus presenting governments with a more affordable alternative to constructing new public toilets.

The app has quickly gained traction, with a presence in five partner cities and counting, including Paris, where it established operations ahead of the 2024 Olympics. With about 100,000 users and 150 merchant partners, ICI Toilettes is in the process of expanding its network through partnerships with additional cities.



**ICI Toilettes app user experience** (ICI Toilettes)

## Case Study: Sydney's Public Toilets

The City of Sydney's 2014 [Public Toilet Strategy](#) serves as a comprehensive framework for improving restroom access across the city. The strategy sets an ambitious goal to ensure that public toilets are available within 400 meters of any point in central Sydney (an approximately 5-10 minute walk), as well as in all village centers and major neighborhood parks. This focus on equitable distribution aims to make restrooms more accessible to both residents and visitors.

The plan involved extensive user surveys and an in-depth audit of existing facilities, ensuring that improvements were tailored to actual user needs. Sydney's strategy emphasizes accessibility and sustainability, and the city has successfully addressed gaps in restroom distribution, with a focus on creating an inclusive, community-oriented public restroom network. Its comprehensive approach—engaging with users to shape strategic

goals and design standards—has set a high bar for cities that aim to balance community input with practical urban planning.

The strategy's recommendations reflect many of those stressed in this report, from extending operating hours of facilities, to investing in quality, safety, and accessibility enhancements, to partnering with businesses to expand the network of available restrooms. Sydney's strategy is a model for cities looking to blend data-driven infrastructure planning with community engagement, focusing on accessibility, quality, and collaboration across sectors to ensure comprehensive restroom coverage.



A public restroom in Sydney, Australia (Cromo Digital/Shutterstock.com )

applications to carry out their work, it is recommended that platforms embed the most accurate and up-to-date restroom data into worker-facing apps. Collaborating with public and private sector stakeholders can ensure that data is seamlessly available within the applications that workers already use daily. Moreover, platforms should consider partnering with data owners to incorporate features that allow workers to give feedback or flag issues, further enhancing data reliability. Given their frontline experience with restroom access challenges, mobile workers are uniquely positioned to contribute to improving data quality and should be recognized as valuable partners in this endeavor.

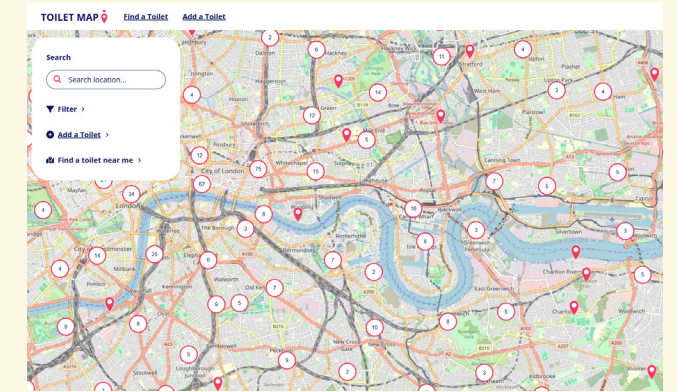


## Forge Strategic Partnerships

Expanding urban restroom access for mobile workers and the general public is highly complex, and the issue demands a multi-sector approach, driven by strategic partnerships among public agencies, platforms, private sector innovators, and a range of other stakeholders.

Some existing models have harnessed strategic partnerships between governments, local merchants, and private sector innovators to expand access. [ICI Toilettes](#), a French mobile application, works with local businesses willing to open up their restrooms to app users in exchange for a monthly stipend. Community Toilet Schemes and [Nette Toilette](#), based in the UK and Germany respectively, take on a similar model, but with greater support and involvement from local municipalities.

Start-up [Throne Labs](#) has also forged partnerships with city governments aimed specifically at improving restroom access for transport workers. These included a 2022 pilot serving bus operators in Mt. Rainier, MD, as well as a 2023 pilot with LA Metro involving the installation of operator-only



Great British Toilet Map web interface

units at the Sylmar-San Fernando Metrolink station. Both programs proved popular with transit workers, indicating the potential effectiveness of such efforts for mobile workforces more broadly.

In other cases, efforts may be driven by partnerships between the public sector and advocacy partners. In summer of 2024, the City of Grenoble, France announced their collaboration with advocacy group l'Association pour les Droits et l'Accompagnement des Livreurs Indépendants (ADALI) to establish rest stations for couriers.<sup>133</sup> The city has requested support from platforms, but the public sector has remained the primary catalyst, pledging to house support points within public facilities.

In New York City, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) serve as unique hosts for public restrooms managed through public-private partnerships. In Bryant Park and Herald Square, both high-traffic tourist sites, BIDs fund public restrooms that are widely regarded as clean, safe, and generally well-maintained. Maintenance costs are exorbitant as demand rises, however, and experts have recommended that BIDs like these partner with city agencies to open and manage new restrooms.<sup>134</sup>

In addition to public sector-led initiatives, there is opportunity for platforms themselves to activate joint ventures aimed at improving restroom access for their workers. For example, [Uber's partnership with GasBuddy](#), which enabled drivers and couriers to locate 83,000 gas station restrooms across the US, directly in the Uber drivers' app, laying critical groundwork for more comprehensive partnerships

moving forward. iFood's partnership with the City of Brasilia to establish support points for its food delivery workers at certain publicly owned sites is yet another example of an initiative driven by direct collaboration between a mobile work platform and local government.



## Harness Technological Innovation

The poor conditions common among public restrooms, paired with high costs of maintenance and installation, often pose serious barriers to restroom accessibility and safety. By investing in modern designs and smart technologies, however, cities can significantly enhance the quality, cleanliness and availability of restrooms for mobile workers and the broader public.

Restroom infrastructure has advanced significantly, now incorporating features that prioritize user comfort, safety, and hygiene. Many newer models include self-cleaning mechanisms, touchless fixtures, and antimicrobial surfaces, which not only improve the user experience but also simplify maintenance and reduce operational costs. Furthermore, the implementation of controlled access management systems, utilizing time-based or user-specific protocols, allows for better regulation of these facilities, enhancing security and

preventing misuse.

Stakeholders focused on the issue of mobile worker access should invest in modular, portable, and flexible designs that can respond to the shifting needs of users. Companies like [Throne Labs](#) are pioneering this approach, offering rapidly deployable units that can be easily relocated as urban needs shift. JCDecaux's sanisettes and public toilets, deployed widely throughout France, the U.S. (most extensively in San Francisco), and elsewhere, have similarly adopted a modular design approach for greater flexibility and access.<sup>135</sup> To facilitate continued advancement in restroom technology and design, cities should invest in pilot testing of new restroom models, allowing for further evaluation prior to implementation.

Additionally, the integration of digital solutions, such as QR code systems for verified access to partner merchant restrooms, can expand the network of available facilities while ensuring controlled usage. Apps can also incorporate user verification systems, provide real-time information on restroom availability, and even include rating and feedback mechanisms. These types of approaches will not only address immediate restroom needs, but also build a framework for sustainable, adaptable solutions as urban and public health challenges shift.



## Leverage Synergies and Co-Benefits

While mobile workers have a vested interest in this issue, improving restroom access and conditions is a core priority for a diverse cross-section of user groups. In formulating potential solutions, cities and platforms should keep this in mind, seeking to strategically maximize benefits across groups. Parents with young children, people with

health conditions, unhoused individuals, pregnant individuals, and tourists and visitors, among other groups, routinely face challenges related to insufficient restroom access.

There are several ways in which potential solutions may simultaneously address the needs of each of these aforementioned groups. Cities should partner with advocacy groups and prioritize programs that are optimized to serve multiple groups. Such advocacy efforts have already proven incidentally useful for mobile workers. For example, the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation's mobile app, [We Can't Wait](#), is intended to aid its members in need of urgent restroom access, but has also helped tourists and mobile workers locate restrooms. Stakeholders should investigate whether this type of co-benefit could be codified and expanded through intentional partnerships between cities, platforms, and advocacy organizations.

Additionally, strategic placement of public restrooms can help ensure that facilities serve as many groups as possible. Positioning restrooms in areas that are active at night time hours can ensure that night-shift platform workers as well as nightlife patrons can benefit from them. Likewise, restrooms located at transportation hubs effectively support the needs of both rideshare drivers and transit workers. Across all potential solutions, stakeholders should stress the shared advantages of restroom access initiatives both for mobile workers and a host of other communities for whom restroom access is a priority.

## Strategy Types

Restroom access for mobile workers is a complex issue that demands a multifaceted response. As stakeholders work together to put these guiding principles into action, they should employ a wide range of strategies, which taken together, can comprehensively tackle this challenge. As reflected in the range of case studies shared in this report, strategies may include:

- **Policies and legislation:** including policies that enhance or expand public restrooms; require publicly available data; or require restroom access for mobile workers in select places of business; and more.
- **Infrastructure and design:** including high-tech and/or replicable and scalable toilet designs; design elements that enhance quality, accessibility, and visibility of restrooms; support points or worker hubs; and more.
- **Web and mobile applications:** including user-generated restroom maps; improvements to worker-facing mobile apps; and more.
- **Partnerships and programs:** including public-private partnerships to improve or create restrooms; partnerships with advocacy/non-profit groups to promote access for workers (potentially along with other vulnerable groups); and more.



**Nette Toilette signage**  
(BlueBreezeWiki, 100905-Freudenstadt-Nette Toilette, CC BY-SA 3.0)

## Conclusion

While the challenge of restroom access for mobile workforces is not new, there is a notable lack of established best practices aimed at addressing it. Because of this, it is critical to acknowledge the challenges and uncertainties associated with any proposed solutions. At the same time, as mobile work continues to grow, the need for innovative and effective restroom access strategies becomes increasingly urgent. To fully assess the costs and benefits of potential solutions, further research and pilot programs are essential. The strategies outlined in this report should be further tested and studied, in addition to further engagement with key groups.

Expanding public restroom access for mobile workers presents a unique opportunity for various stakeholders—city officials, planners, rideshare and delivery platforms, and more—to tackle a pressing need while yielding substantial benefits for both the mobile workforce and other affected communities. The recommendations delineated here vary in scope and complexity, and must be implemented with sensitivity to local socioeconomic and political landscapes.

Regardless of context or geography, it is clear that the advantages of increased restroom access in cities would extend beyond mobile workers. A strong network of safe, well-maintained, and accessible restrooms has the potential to improve quality of life and fulfill a basic need for a range of vulnerable groups and the broader public. Increased restroom access would help dissolve a significant obstacle to delivery, rideshare, and other mobile professions, while contributing to a more equitable and inclusive urban environment that supports the needs of residents, workers, and visitors alike.

**Delivery cyclist**  
(Gerry Popplestone, The new delivery biker, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)



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A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of rounded rectangles. A thick white line starts at the top left, goes right, then down, then right again, ending with a white circle. Another thick white line starts from the right edge, goes left, then down, then left again, ending with a white circle. The background is a dark teal color.

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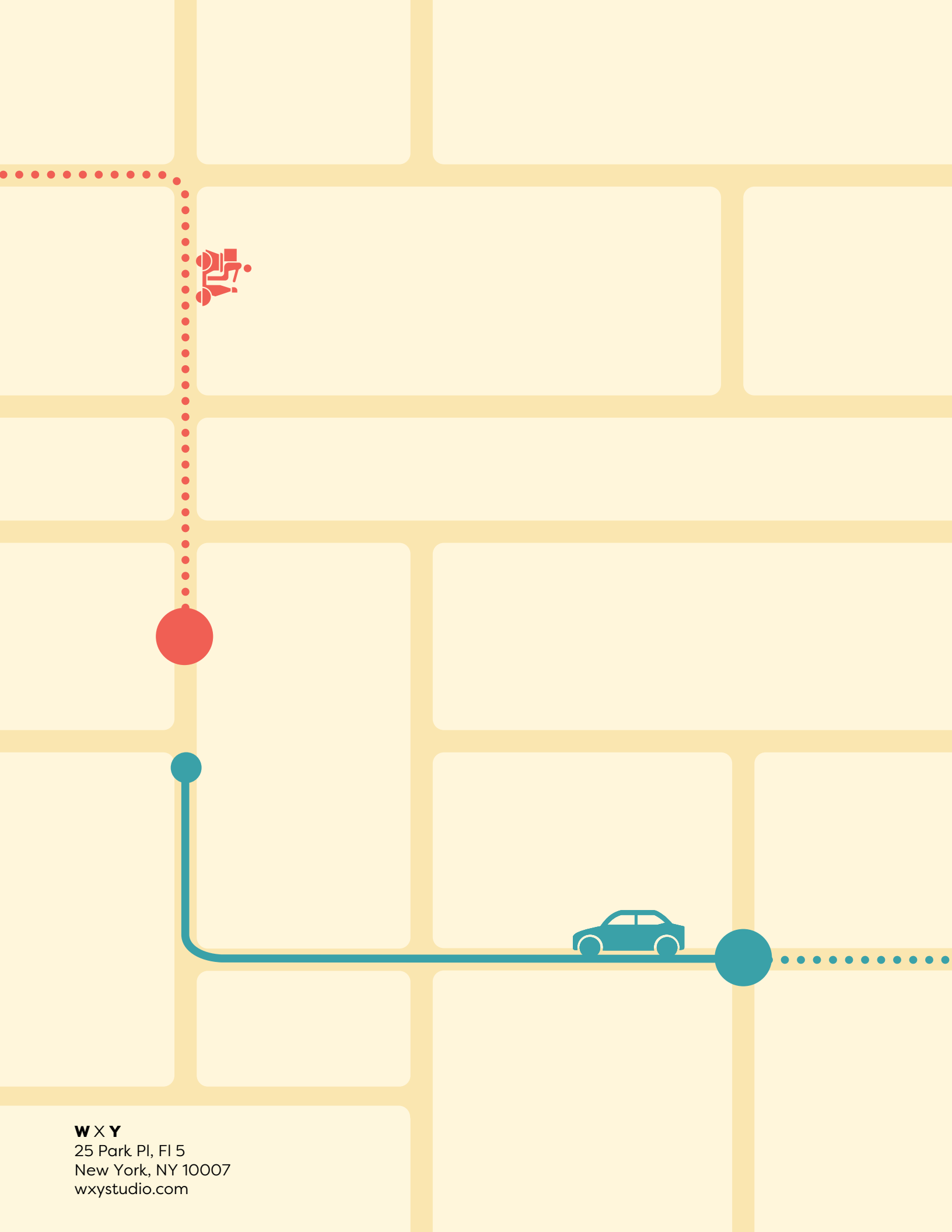
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