

# THE URBAN CHRONICLE

*reflections on New York City government,  
a project of the Urban Fellows Program.*



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## NYU Livability Summit: the Future of New York Amid Unmitigated Climate Change

By: *Bethany Bowyer*

On February 3, 2011, NYU's Rudin Center for Policy and Management hosted an event called "Livability: The Challenge Ahead." Focused on both livability and climate change, as well as how to measure livability, NYU brought in speakers from a wide variety of areas.



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Matthew Kahn, professor at the UCLA Institute of the Environment, spoke about his new book, *Climatopolis: How Our Cities Will Thrive in the Hotter Future*, which focuses on how U.S. cities will adapt to hotter environments. David Bragdon, Director of

the New York City Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability spoke of the updates for PlaNYC 2030 and why these efforts are important for our urban environment.

Andrew Mondschein, Post-Doctoral Fellow at NYU also gave a presentation on how to measure livability considering the depths of this policy topic. The summit also included two panel discussions on these topics, with representatives from the New York metropolitan area, the Environmental Protection Agency's regional

office, the New York State Department of Transportation, the Babylon Project, Code for America, as well as professors from NYU.

Attending this meeting at NYU provided a unique experience for the fellows because it allowed us to be thrown into the mix of professionals from several agencies, as well as representatives from other cities and all levels of governments. Not often are professionals given the opportunity to collaborate from an exclusively academic perspective.

### Summit speakers

#### Matthew Kahn

*Author of **Climatopolis: How Our Cities Will Thrive in the Hotter Future.***

Kahn explained how political climate change policy has become.

He rebuked claims that that climate change is a myth but argued that free market capitalism will allow our economy to reinvent itself in the face of the climate challenge.

He suggested that a **.5 cent tax on water could solve the entire issue of water scarcity** in areas such as Los Angeles.

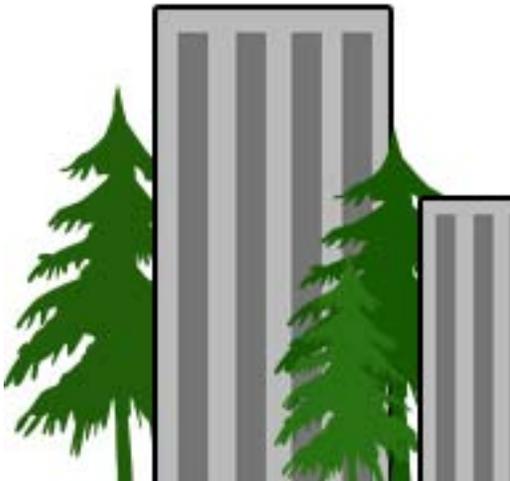
#### David Bragdon

*Director of NYC Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability*

The city will release updates to its sustainability master plan, PlaNYC 2030 on August 22nd, 2011.

Bragdon seeks to change solid-waste treatment, minimizing contaminated stormwater runoff, while reducing costs.

Bragdon is ensuring that NYC is on pace to meet its **goal of reducing municipal green house gas emissions by 30% by 2017.**





Pictured left to right: Jihan Jude, Justine Johnson, Hiram Lopez, Jennifer Kanyamibwa on a visit to the SEED school in DC.

## Fellows Descend on the Nation's Capitol in December

By: Raquel Vazquez

A few weeks before one of the most extreme blizzards in New York City's recent history, the Urban Fellows traveled to Washington, D.C. for an annual symposium. Our



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three-day-long Washington Symposium in December was packed with seminars at which speakers from various sectors commented on their careers and current positions. After our four-hour bus ride southbound, we went to our first seminar meeting Charles Barrett Adams, who is the head of the SEED School in Washington, D.C. The SEED School is the high-performing charter school featured in the documentary "Waiting for Superman." 96% of 2004-2010 graduates were accepted to four-year colleges and universities. We were impressed by the school's standards and expectations of student excellence and welcomed the chance to ask several students about their academic experiences and

plans for the future.

From there, we went on to the law firm where Urban Fellow alumnus James Lowe worked, then visited the Brookings Institute, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and met several other representatives from various private corporations and city and federal government offices. We met with several representatives of the New York City Washington Office, who shared their outlook on city-federal collaborations. By the end of the symposium, we acquired a comprehensive taste of the varied positions and responsibilities that the speakers held and learned about the unique career trajectories they pursued to get there. The symposium offered each of us a great opportunity to put ourselves into perspective and envision our own unique career paths after the fellowship. It came at our three-month mark into the fellowship and was definitely the perfect time to reflect on what exciting things are to come.





# Fighting Subway Blight for Your Right to Ride

## Alumnus Gene Russianoff and the Straphangers Campaign

By: *Laura Miller*

On December 14th, Attorney Gene Russianoff attended the weekly Urban Fel-



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lows seminar to share expertise and career advice with the current class. Russianoff began his career serving as a speechwriter at the Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC) during his

fellowship year. He left City government shortly thereafter to pursue a law degree that would later guide him to his life's pas-

sion: advocating for New York City's transit riders. Gene Russianoff is now the Staff Attorney and Chief Spokesman for New York Public Interest Research Group's (NYPIRG) Straphangers Campaign. The Campaign was founded in 1979 when the number of subway riders was at its lowest since 1917. Rampant crime and decaying infrastructure plagued the City's subway system and riders had had enough. The Straphangers, a fast-growing coalition of public, private, and non-governmental organizations, held its first large rally in 1980. One thousand supporters of mass transit filled a meeting with the head of the Metropolitan Transit Author-

ity (MTA) on the Upper West Side. The Campaign won major victories that day including a promise from the MTA to report its performance statistics and a great deal of media coverage for their issues.

Today, the MTA is 31 billion dollars in debt, making it the fifth largest government borrower in the United States. Budget cuts each of the last three years slashed funding for the MTA translating into major bus and subway service cuts. Simultaneous fare hikes left straphangers in New York City strapped for cash. None of this passed without a fight.

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### Straphangers' State of the Subways Report Card 2010

The Straphangers Campaign, founded to improve decrepid rail service in the 1970s, conducts independent analysis of New York City Subways every year a report it's conducted since 1997. For methodology and the complete report, visit <http://www.straphangers.org/statesub10/>

Best Train Overall

7

Most Scheduled Service

6

Best Odds for a Seat

D

Worst Train Overall

C

Least Scheduled Service

M

Worst Odds for a Seat

2



# Fellows Meet NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly

by Adam Amir

Work ID flashed, name tag printed. Security was understandably tight at One Police Plaza. While the building may have been impenetrable, the opinions of Police Commissioner Ray Kelly were certainly accessible to us. Urban Fellows fired off questions about police policy both controversial and mundane: accidental shootings, Sean Bell, stop and frisk, hot spot policing, and what the Commissioner does in his free time.



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We discussed stop and frisk and talked about conditions police officers find in the streets. He explained that over the past decade, the number of

police officers has declined, while more and more people move to New York.

He explained that a declining police force justifies the higher number of “contacts,” a police term used for any time a police officer questions or arrests suspects.

While we spoke, I was distracted easily. The Commissioner’s office was a legitimate control room, filled with television screens monitoring various spots throughout the city.

Tickers scrolled crime-related information across a wall of these flat screen televisions, while LEDs updated themselves in real time. Overall, Commissioner Kelly really impressed me by his general hospitality and candor.

## Fellows meet transport advocate

CONTINUED FROM P. 3  
Russianoff and his coalition mounted a strong campaign, lobbying law makers in City Council and in Albany. Fellows enjoyed hearing Mr. Russianoff’s tales from the tracks. Especially inspiring was the palpable passion Russianoff brings to the job. He encouraged us Fellows to also consider pursuing careers in the public realm that impact ordinary people and their quality of life. Given increasingly severe financial constraints, we can expect the fight for affordable, efficient public transit to remain on center stage for the foreseeable future. And who best to represent the voices of New York City transit riders? Gene Russianoff, our very own Urban Fellow alum and his team from the Straphangers Campaign.

## THE URBAN CHRONICLE

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Left to right: Mike DelBene, Bethany Bowyer, Albert Kramer, and Patrick Malloy