



## The City of San Diego

### Staff Report

DATE ISSUED: August 26, 2024

TO: City Council

FROM: City Planning Department

SUBJECT: San Diego Grand Jury Report – "Downtown Area Public Restrooms in the City of San Diego: Stop Kicking the Can Down the Road" Recommendation 23-35 - Public Restroom Study

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Council District(s): City-wide

#### OVERVIEW:

On May 24, 2023, the San Diego County Grand Jury filed a report titled *Downtown Area Public Restrooms in the City of San Diego: Stop Kicking the Can Down the Road*, see Attachment A. This report focuses on issues concerning the lack of available public restrooms in Downtown San Diego. The Grand Jury report included eight findings and eight recommendations. The focus of this staff report will be recommendation 23-35.

Recommendation 23-35 directs the City of San Diego to *Study public restroom programs in other U.S. cities, and in other countries, to provide best practices and lessons learned for San Diego planning and implementation including adoption of new restroom design and innovative technologies.*

City Planning Department staff have analyzed the public restroom programs and policies of several U.S. and international cities. This report provides a summary of the information collected and presents possible options for expanding access to public restrooms, which could be included in future City initiatives.

#### PROPOSED ACTIONS:

This item is for information only.

#### DISCUSSION OF ITEM:

In many major cities worldwide, public restroom access struggles to match the demand for facilities. In the 1970s, there was a large uproar against pay toilets throughout the United States. Before 1970, public restrooms commonly required payment to recover maintenance and upkeep costs. However, the idea became contentious due to price and gender inequity – toilets were chargeable, and urinals were free.

Those seeking access to free public toilets successfully lobbied lawmakers in many states including California to ban pay toilets, which meant that cities could no longer charge for access to a public restroom. The goal was that free facilities would replace the payable options; however, this never came to pass as most cities closed or delayed replacing facilities, citing the difficulty of keeping bathrooms safe and clean. As a result, many cities today still struggle with restroom access, especially due to past stigmas of these facilities.

The City of San Diego faces obstacles when it comes to providing public restrooms, including limited restroom availability and adequate resources for proper maintenance. Efforts have been and will continue to be made to enhance policy strategies, implement regulatory requirements and incentives, and improve infrastructure maintenance practices to provide community members and visitors with increased access to public restrooms, and in doing so improve the overall quality of life and public health and safety.

On May 24, 2023, a San Diego County Grand Jury issued a report titled “Downtown Area Public Restrooms in the City of San Diego: Stop Kicking the Can Down the Road.” The report highlighted the shortage of public restrooms in Downtown San Diego and offered eight recommendations. Among them is Recommendation 23-35, urging the City to study how other cities in the United States and abroad manage their public restrooms.

The City Planning Department has since examined restroom programs in various domestic and international cities. The following cities were included in the study: Los Angeles, Santa Monica, San Francisco and New York domestically, and Paris, France internationally. This report describes the general city and facility statistics along with additional policies that distinguish them from the standard level of public restroom access. Domestically, staff selected cities with similar populations, regional areas, or those recognized as leaders in public restroom accessibility. Internationally, Paris has ranked as one of the cities with the highest restroom accessibility worldwide, which provides a strong benchmark to understand where the City of San Diego sits against a strong leader in public restroom access. In addition to the general statistics of these cities, some cities have developed policies and programs to address access to public restrooms in finer detail. The following section examines each case study city, including the number

of public restrooms per 100,000 people and current policies aimed at addressing the ongoing demand for public restrooms.

The table below summarizes the number of restrooms in the cities that were studied. The total restrooms include permanent, semi-permanent, and portable options, with varying hours of access, including 24-hour and park/facility-specific hours.

City	Population	Total Number of Public Restrooms	Number of Public Restrooms per 100K People
Santa Monica, CA	92,676	5	5
San Francisco, CA	808,437	228	28
San Diego, CA	1,381,000	350	25
Paris, France	2,161,000	750	35
Los Angeles, CA	3,822,000	189*	5
New York City, NY	8,258,000	1,224	15

\* The total number of public restrooms for the City of Los Angeles is based off a 2021 Public Toilet Index as the City of Los Angeles currently does not have a public-facing inventory of public restrooms.

### City of Los Angeles

The City of Los Angeles has historically struggled with public restrooms, and Councilmembers in the 1970s were integral in certain protests and lobbying efforts to ban pay toilets nationwide. With a population just shy of three times that of San Diego, Los Angeles currently only owns and maintains 14 permanent standalone public restrooms among a total count of 189 facilities to serve its 3.8 million population, not including its 46.2 million annual visitors. This equates to roughly 5 restrooms per 100,000 people. The total 189 public restroom facilities can be found throughout public parks and City of Los Angeles-owned public spaces, civic resources such as libraries, recreational centers, and aquatic complexes, and some privately-owned spaces under agreement with the City of Los Angeles. These total facilities include permanent (standalone) public restrooms, semi-permanent, portable, and civic-supplied amenities. The City of Los Angeles has had multiple campaigns to install cost-effective prefabricated public restrooms near public transit stops; however, through prolonged applications and permitting processes, many of these fell short of their initial goals of creating hundreds of new public facilities.

Outside of adopted policies and regulations, the City of Los Angeles continues to pursue other efforts to expand access to public restrooms. In October 2023, the LA Metro launched a 6-month pilot program with Throne, a private start-up that provides portable, ADA-compliant restrooms. The pilot program not only provided the facilities, but also required Throne to maintain the toilets at no cost to Los Angeles. The pilot program also encouraged users to log any maintenance needs through an app that was made publicly available thus creating a transparent platform to track the availability and quality of the restrooms. The LA Metro in return of the pilot expedited approval processes for Throne for a key case study to serve in future partnerships for the startup. This all-inclusive approach alleviated the responsibility on the City of Los Angeles to find funding and resources towards setting up and maintaining public restrooms during the term of the pilot for six months. In addition, in February of 2024, the Los Angeles City Council approved a \$1 million dollar project in the neighborhood of Hollywood that will include public restrooms and a visitors' center. The restrooms will be accessible from a parking structure owned by the Los Angeles Department of Transportation, and with the support of the Hollywood Partnership Community Trust (a non-profit associated with the Hollywood Partnership

Business Improvement District) will support funding for maintenance. With the 2028 Summer Olympics being hosted in Los Angeles, it aims to allocate resources to expand its limited access to public restrooms.

#### City and County of San Francisco

San Francisco stands out as one of the cities in the United States with the best policies and programs to maintain and increase access to safe and clean public restroom facilities. Today, the City of San Francisco has 228 public restrooms (116 of which operate 24 hours a day) serving a population of just over 800,000 people, averaging roughly 28 facilities per 100,000 people. The City of San Francisco also requires new and existing buildings to provide at least one all-gender toilet facility per floor on buildings constructed on city-owned land, built by San Francisco, or for the City of San Francisco where restrooms are required or provided. In addition, San Francisco's Public Works Department runs a program called Pit Stop that increases safe and clean public restroom facilities, along with dog facilities and used-needle disposal. The program currently operates 33 facilities across 13 neighborhoods in San Francisco. Funding for the Pit Stop program comes from the City of San Francisco's General Fund and a Bay Area Rapid Transit grant, with an initial assumption that some of the cost would be reimbursed by federal and State sources.

As a companion piece to the Pit Stop Program, the Public Works Department also manages an Automatic Public Toilet Program, featuring self-cleaning public toilets managed by private entities. The City of San Francisco encourages private entities to repurpose kiosks that were previously used for advertising to create self-cleaning public toilets as part of this program. As part of the Automatic Public Toilet Program, in exchange for the toilets, the City of San Francisco allows the contractor to install public service/advertising kiosks and newspaper kiosk stands on city sidewalks. There are currently 70 such kiosks throughout San Francisco. This effort serves a dual purpose: providing access to public restrooms at no cost and preserving San Francisco's street identity through either retrofitting old kiosks or adding new kiosks that provide advertisement space to private entities. The Public Works Department updates of location lists on their Department website where restrooms and public facilities can be found as well as videos that educate the public and provide detailed information about the initiative.

Both the Pit Stop Program and Automatic Public Toilet Program come from the SF Better Streets Plan, adopted in December 2010. This citywide plan aims to balance the needs of all street users, with a particular focus on the pedestrian environment and how streets can be used as public space. Since San Francisco is one of the most expensive cities in the United States for construction, San Francisco has worked to find innovative opportunities to improve access with as little city funds as possible, such as private company donations and involvement.

#### City of Santa Monica

With a population of just 92,676, and 5 public restrooms (with a rate of 5 public restrooms per 100,000 people) the City of Santa Monica is the smallest jurisdiction staff reviewed as part of this analysis. The facility count is based on the City of Santa Monica's website for standalone public restrooms but does not reflect the publicly accessible restrooms within their civic centers, street shopping areas, and neighborhood park facilities. The City of Santa Monica requires that all newly constructed buildings must provide gender-neutral restrooms. This policy relates to single and multi-user occupancy facilities, and Santa Monica provides example designs and signage. Since a large portion of the need for public restroom access correlates to tourism, no restroom in Santa Monica is available 24 hours; rather, they are typically accessible during daylight hours to accommodate the influx in tourist activity. While the City of

Santa Monica doesn't have a visual map of the locations of each restroom, Santa Monica's website provides addresses for where public restrooms can be found.

The City of Santa Monica continues to promote gender-neutral facilities by retrofitting certain locations, particularly in highly trafficked areas like those along the beach. In 2022, Santa Monica co-sponsored with West Hollywood on [Senate Bill 1194](#), which authorizes local agencies to require the construction of gender-neutral facilities. This bill was formally approved by the California Governor in the Fall of 2022; the Bill also states that it will be repealed once the California Building Standards Commission addresses all-gender multiuser facility requirements in coming building code updates.

#### New York City (all boroughs)

New York City, similar to other global cities, struggles with the growing need for public restroom access. In the 1930s, New York City prioritized the development of public restroom infrastructure, building and renovating comfort stations within its parks and New York City's open spaces. Like most cities in the 1970s, New York City experienced a downturn due to the banning of pay toilets and the heavy reliance on public-private partnerships to fund public restroom access. New York City currently has a total of 1,224 facilities for its population of 8.3 million people and 56.7 million annual visitors. This translates to 16 restrooms per 100,000 people.

In an effort to improve access to restrooms, the New York City Council in the Fall of 2022 approved the New York City Restroom Bill. The New York City Restroom Bill includes regulations aimed at addressing New York City's severe lack of public restrooms. This bill mandates New York City's Department of Transportation and Department of Parks and Recreation to identify at least one feasible location for a new public restroom in every ZIP code with the collaboration of community boards and community members. In addition, legislation was adopted in 2023 requiring New York City to inspect existing public restrooms and report on their conditions, making this information available to the public through an open data portal. The findings and materials in response to the bills were published in 2024 to increase transparency around public restroom issues and identify opportunities for improvement. New bills are also currently under review that would mandate New York City departments to identify and create new facilities for their growing needs, such as creating ADA-accessible restrooms in publicly owned buildings and developing a capital funding plan for accessible public restrooms.

In response to the bills passed, the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation created multiple tools and [maps](#) showing public restroom locations throughout all five boroughs of New York City. In addition to the map showing restroom locations, the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation's Parks Inspection Program provides amenity details on each public restroom in a dataset that is updated quarterly. These tools allow community members and tourists alike easy access to information about the availability of public restrooms.

#### Metropolitan Paris (France):

Paris is known for its excellent public restroom access, but despite this, it has faced ongoing challenges with public urination. As Paris has grown and expanded, this issue has persisted, prompting Parisian leaders to enhance efforts to maximize public restroom availability. Paris has a consistent funding source to ensure cleanliness across Paris which includes constructing and maintaining bathrooms. During the rise

of Covid-19, Paris increased funding to public restrooms to address public health concerns and continued to channel funding within its budget.

With a little less than twice the population and about three times as much public restroom access as the City of San Diego, most facilities are free with self-cleaning features and are distributed throughout Paris. Community members and visitors in Paris can access public restrooms in various locations, including parks, community centers, train stations, freestanding permanent structures, and private institutions that offer free access to their facilities. Paris currently has 750 public restrooms to support its population of around 2.2 million. Two-hundred twenty-five of these are self-cleaning kiosks scattered throughout Paris, and with 35 facilities per 100,000 people, Paris has consistently ranked highly for its well-established access to public restrooms.

Paris has also recently committed to revamping their public restroom facilities to be more environmentally friendly. This initiative includes using less water and ensuring restrooms run on 100% renewable electricity. They have also partnered with a Parisian-based design group to design the restroom stalls to be aesthetically pleasing. In preparation for the 2024 Summer Olympics and heightened tourism, Paris provided 435 new cost-effective, prefabricated permanent facilities throughout Paris to accommodate tourism, installing roughly 10 kiosks a week from early 2024 through May 2025.

There have also been private start-ups created to encourage businesses to open their restrooms for public use. An app called Ici Toilettes features both business and user profiles to facilitate the effective search for restrooms and compensate businesses for providing access. This incentivizes and compensates businesses when they open their restrooms to the public. However, a downside to this application is that businesses already inundated with foot traffic or located in city centers may not have the capacity to take on additional users, thus limiting the pool of eligible partners.

### City of San Diego

According to the [City of San Diego's publicly accessible map](#) indicating locations of washing stations, restrooms and public libraries, the city has a total of 350 available public restrooms within the entire city limit, 188 of which are open 24 hours. The total restroom count includes stand-alone buildings within civic amenities such as golf courses, parks, recreational centers, and aquatic complexes, and portable units. This averages to a total of 25 restrooms per 100,000 people.

The public restrooms within the City of San Diego include facilities that are managed either by the City of San Diego, Port of San Diego or County of San Diego as well as private entities for publicly accessible restrooms within apartment buildings or privately-owned places of recreation and gathering. Civic facilities such as recreational centers, aquatic complexes, libraries, and public parks provide the largest number of publicly accessible restrooms within the City. The City of San Diego maintains a public online resource logging all facilities, including those closed or removed.

In March of 2022, The Project for Sanitation Justice, supported by multiple San Diego State University grant programs, released a regional report of San Diego County, looking at public restroom access. The audit of the infrastructure of permanent public restrooms (no portable toilets) reported 294 facilities within the City of San Diego, and stated that out of all the zip codes in San Diego County, the City of San Diego ranks highest in public restroom availability. This report acknowledges that although the City

carries the highest concentration of public restroom facilities, quality and maintenance still serves as a hindrance to realistic usability and still poses health and safety risks.

In 2023, San Diego City leaders advocated to lift the State's nearly 50-year-old ban on pay toilets, which aimed to alleviate the shortages of public restroom access, particularly downtown. The benefit of lifting the ban could lead to safer and well-maintained public restrooms; however, charging for usage may limit availability to people, especially the unhoused population. While the effort to lift the ban is still in process, the City of San Diego continues to look for alternatives to provide additional, clean, and safe facilities.

In March of 2023, the City adopted new regulations as a part of the 2022 Land Development Code Update to incentivize private developments to include public restroom facilities within the Downtown Community Planning Area. This incentive provides developers with a Density Bonus consisting of an additional 6.0 Floor Area Ratio if they include a public restroom building with a minimum of two stalls. This incentive, which speaks more directly to the Grand Jury Report's Recommendation 23-38, is intended to increase access to public restrooms throughout the Downtown area. The City will continue to monitor implementation and use of this development incentive to gauge its effectiveness and identify the need for amendments that might further encourage projects to provide privately maintained, publicly accessible restrooms within the Downtown Community Planning Area.

Adopted by the City Council in July 2024, the recent comprehensive refresh to the City's General Plan, known as Blueprint SD, includes policies to facilitate the creation of a city with public spaces that are accessible, enjoyable, meaningful, and inclusive to community members of all age groups and abilities.

The following underlined policies were added to the City's General Plan's Urban Design element as part of Blueprint SD:

***UD-B.1.*** *In villages and transit corridors identified in community plans, provide a mix of uses that create vibrant, active places in villages.*

***d.*** *Encourage the provision of safe and enjoyable public spaces.*

***3.*** *Provide public restrooms as part of the public space, wherever feasible.*

***UD-E.1.*** *Include public plazas, squares, promenades, paseos, transit stations or other gathering spaces in each neighborhood and village center.*

***k.*** *Promote the inclusion of public restrooms in non-residential development to enhance community convenience, comfort, and enjoyment, wherever feasible.*

These newly introduced policies aim to encourage public restroom access in various public spaces, such as plazas, promenades, transit stations, and other gathering places throughout the city. The proposed policies seek to enhance the usability and enjoyment of public spaces, making them more convenient and accommodating for community members and visitors. This approach not only addresses the practical need for restroom facilities but also supports the overall goal of creating vibrant, active, and inclusive public environments.

#### Key Takeaways and Possible Future Actions

The City of San Diego is continuously exploring opportunities to introduce policies, regulations, incentives, and programs that increase public restroom access citywide. The case studies of the six cities discussed above provide examples of varying approaches to increasing access to public restrooms for community members and visitors of all age groups and abilities. The City may want to consider applying or adapting these strategies through future initiatives to increase access to public restrooms. Possible examples include:

- Partnering with private organizations to assist in exploring cost-effective approaches that may alleviate spending surrounding traditional public restrooms. A partnership or pilot similar to that of the City of Los Angeles could be explored by introducing cost-effective, prefabricated structures. In addition to exploring cost-effective measures, this strategy may also facilitate a test for potential sites for future permanent facilities. These cost-effective, prefabricated structures can cater to events or seasonal needs, providing flexibility while allowing the City to assess the most suitable locations for permanent restrooms. This approach can help the City enhance public restroom access effectively and efficiently.
- Partnering with private organizations to increase funding or alleviate maintenance responsibilities that currently limit the expansion and construction of permanent public restrooms. In looking at cities such as San Francisco and Paris, the City may consider creating standardized kiosks that can become a part of the cultural fabric of the City while increasing public restroom access.
- Adopting additional regulations similar to those of San Francisco that requires new and existing buildings to provide at least one all-gender toilet facility per floor on buildings constructed on City-owned land, built by the City, or for the City where restrooms are required or provided.
- Tasking relevant City Departments responsible for the management of public spaces with identifying possible locations for future public restrooms in each City zip code or Community Planning Area.

As the City continues to implement existing policies, regulations, incentives, and programs addressing access to public restrooms, we must develop measurable goals to increase public restroom access and continue to look for new and innovative opportunities to deliver public restroom infrastructure to community members and visitors alike.

City of San Diego Strategic Plan:

This report was prepared in response to Recommendation 23-35 in the San Diego County Grand Jury report titled "Downtown Area Public Restrooms in the City of San Diego: Stop Kicking the Can Down the Road." The information and analysis included in this report align with the Strategic Plan's Priority Area: Protect and Enrich Every Neighborhood by examining policies, regulations and programs that expand access to public restrooms.

Fiscal Considerations:

N/A

Charter Section 225 Disclosure of Business Interests:

N/A

Environmental Impact:

N/A

Climate Action Plan Implementation:

This report was prepared in response to Recommendation 23-35 in the San Diego County Grand Jury report titled "Downtown Area Public Restrooms in the City of San Diego: Stop Kicking the Can Down the Road." The information and analysis included in this report align with Strategy 3 of the Climate Action Plan by examining policies, regulations and programs that expand access to public restrooms, thereby increasing opportunities for safe, sanitary and enjoyable routes for pedestrians and cyclists.

Equal Opportunity Contracting Information (if applicable):

N/A

Previous Council and/or Committee Actions:

N/A

Planning Commission Action:

N/A

Key Stakeholders and Community Outreach Efforts:

N/A

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Director, City Planning Department

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Deputy Chief Operating Officer

Attachments:

A: Copy of 2023 Grand Jury Report regarding recommendations for public restrooms

City Planning Department

# Public Restroom Facilities City Policies

January 29, 2025

# Grand Jury Report: Public Restrooms

*The grand jury report on public restrooms  
published in May 2023:*

- Recommends a study of public restroom programs in other U.S. cities and other countries



**SD** City Planning  
**Case  
Studies**

**Los Angeles, CA  
San Francisco, CA  
Santa Monica, CA  
New York City, NY  
Paris, France**





Los Angeles, CA

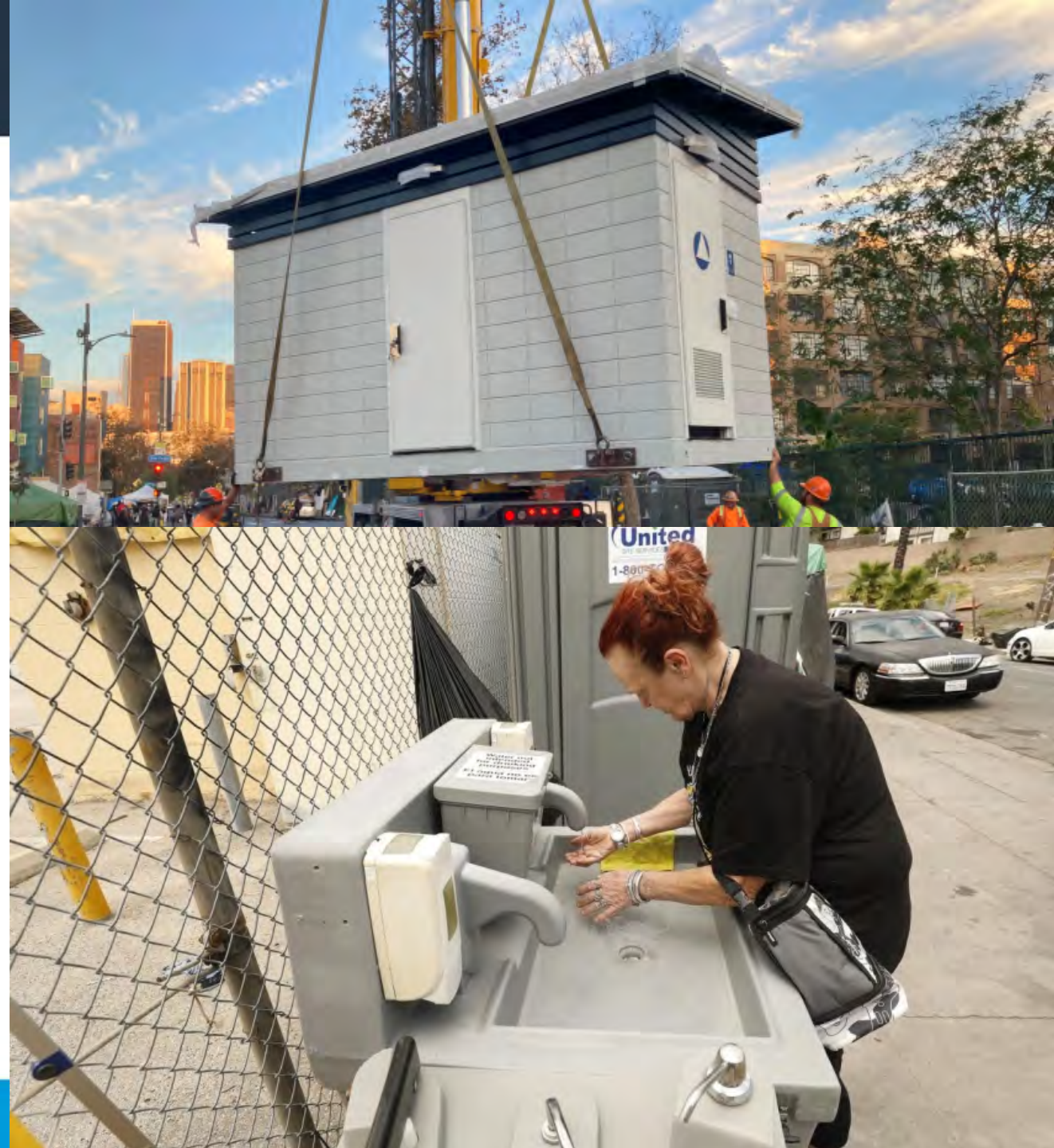


# Los Angeles

Population: **3,822,000**

Total Restrooms: **189**

Public Restrooms per 100,000 People: **5**



# Throne Partnership

- 6-month trial with Throne Labs
- Provided semi-permanent restrooms at LA metro stops
- Included maintenance and cleaning
- Users provided feedback



# San Francisco, CA



# San Francisco

Population: **808,437**

Total Restrooms: **228**

Public Restrooms per 100,000 People: **28**

*Requires at least one all-gender restroom per floor in buildings on city-owned land or built for the City.*



# Pit Stop Program

- San Francisco Public Works Department
- Uses street-cleaning data to locate best locations for semi-permanent or portable toilets
- Trackable on city website
- Sister program to 'Automatic Public Toilet' Program that integrates private funding to retrofit kiosks



# Santa Monica, CA



# Santa Monica

Population: **92,676**

Total Restrooms: **5**

Public Restrooms per 100,000 People: **5**



# Equity & Inclusion

- Restroom efforts focused on equity and inclusion
- Received a grant to renovate bathrooms to increase inclusivity.



# New York City, NY



# New York City

Population: **8,258,000**

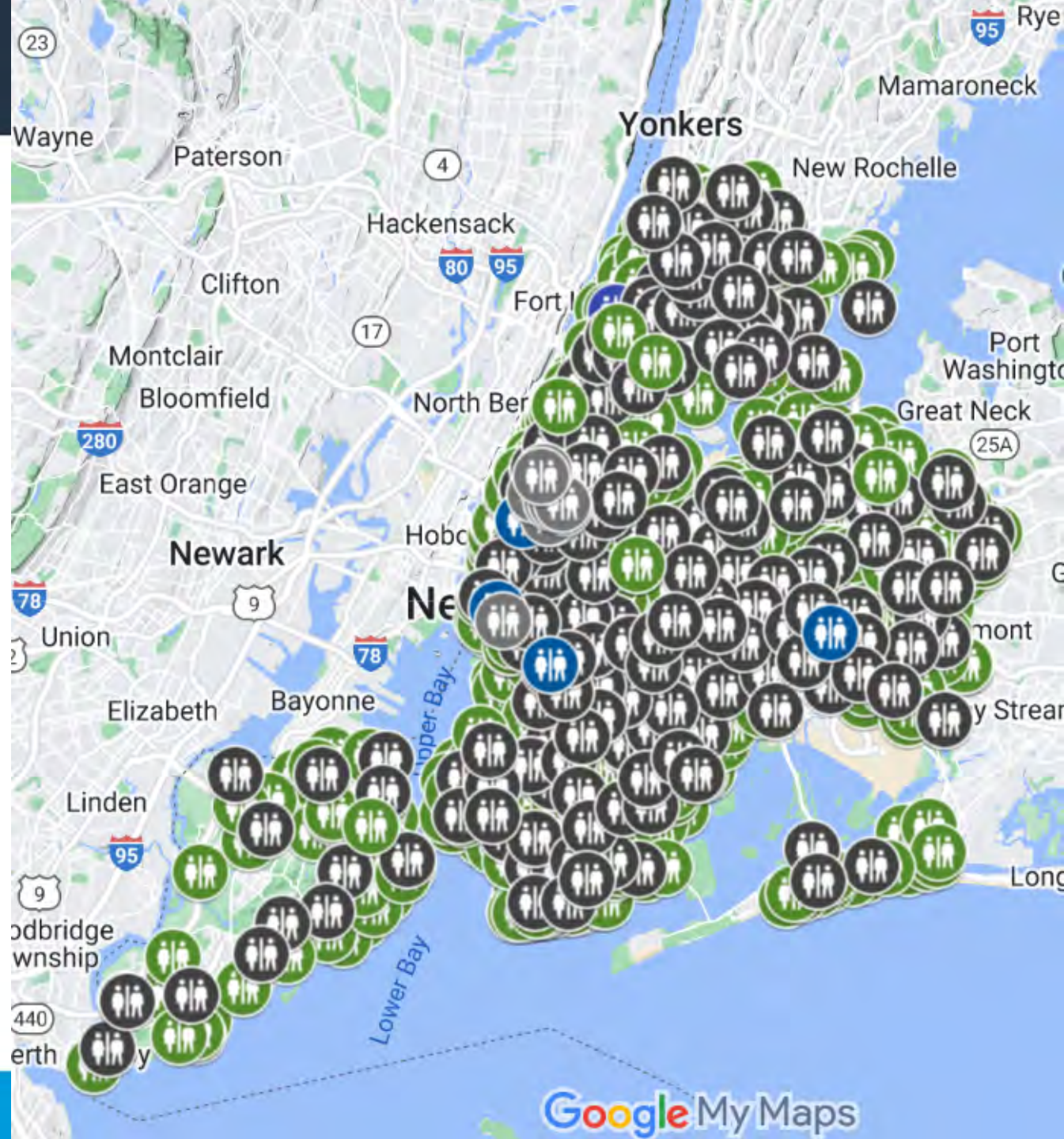
Total Restrooms: **1,224**

Public Restrooms per 100,000 People: **15**



# Bathroom Bill

- Applies to all boroughs of New York City
- Requires NYC departments to locate one new bathroom location per zip code
- Must work with community members on adequate placement
- Other initiatives from this bill include mapping all restrooms within NYC and creating an ongoing, publicly-accessible inspection and maintenance log



# Paris, France



# Paris

Population: **2,161,000**

Total Restrooms: **750**

Public Restrooms per 100,000 People: **35**



# Parisian Approach

- Roughly 10 new toilets per week
- Self-cleaning, 100% renewable energy
- “Ici Toilettes” & private partnerships





# San Diego

Population: **1,381,000**

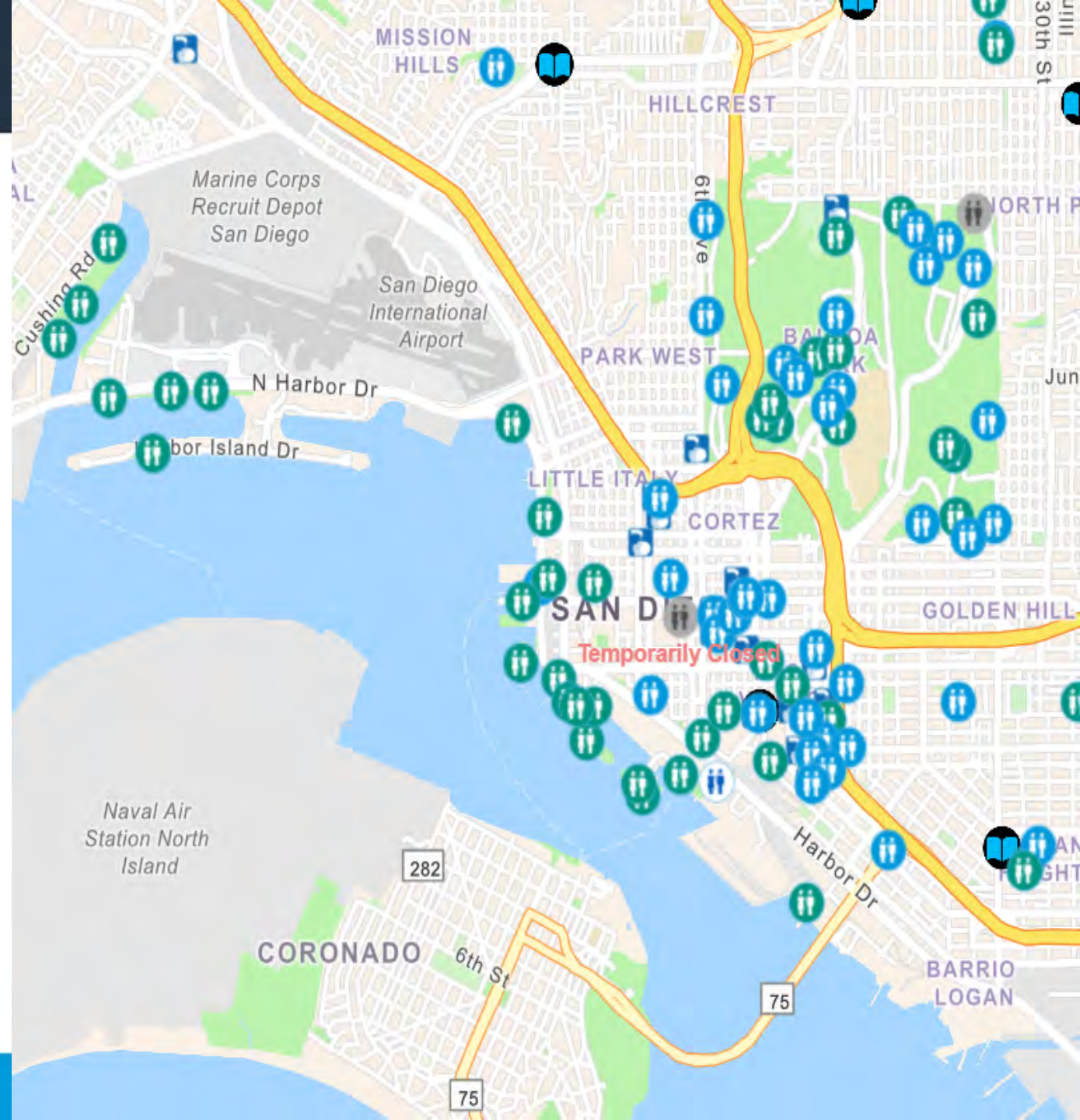
Total Restrooms: **350**

Public Restrooms per 100,000 People: **25**



# San Diego

- Created Public map of all public restroom locations in the City
- 2023: adopted regulations in the Land Development Code to incentivize public restrooms in private Downtown developments.
- 2024: Adopted Blueprint SD (General Plan Update), which included policies that aim to expand public restroom access in key gathering spaces, enhancing convenience and fostering vibrant, inclusive public environments.



# San Diego

- Tested Throne facilities during 2024 December Nights
- Currently exploring a partnership with Throne Labs
- Reviewing feasibility of implementation





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Paris, France	2,161,000	750	35
Los Angeles, CA	3,822,000	189*	5
New York City, NY	8,258,000	1,224	15

## Key Takeaways

- Explore public-private partnerships for funding and maintaining public restrooms
- Continually explore potential locations and opportunities for future public restroom installations



# Questions?