

Bilingual Signage in the Bronx River Greenway

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Introduction

The Bronx River Greenway is a 23-mile stretch of green with a multi-use path that will extend along the full length of the Bronx River. Much of this path goes through the Bronx, and will be used primarily by residents of the Bronx, a Borough in which 51% of the population speaks a language other than English at home (2000 US Census). In the area of the Bronx River Watershed, 54% of the population speaks a language other than English at home (2000 US Census). Most of these people speak Spanish, and many do not speak English well or at all.

The plans for the Bronx River Greenway are tremendous and its completion will be an enormous boon to the Bronx. However, if it, as the Bronx River Alliance website promises, "will reclaim the waterfront and improve the quality of life for Bronx residents" (bronxriver.org) it is imperative that all residents of the Bronx have full and unfettered access to the Greenway, which includes bilingual signage.

Bilingual signage will make wayfinding along the Greenway possible for a great many Bronx resident. Beyond that, though, it will show that the Greenway is indeed for everyone. Spanish signs will signal to Spanish-speaking Bronx residents that they are among the intended users of the space.

This report presents the need for Bilingual signage along the Greenway. It first considers the extent to which languages other than English are spoken in the Bronx River Watershed. It then looks more closely at the amount of Spanish spoken in the Watershed. Finally, it looks at the areas with the highest percentage of Spanish speakers and assesses the English proficiency of the people there.

Taken together, all of this shows that English and Spanish bilingual signs are required along the Bronx River Greenway.

Languages other than English

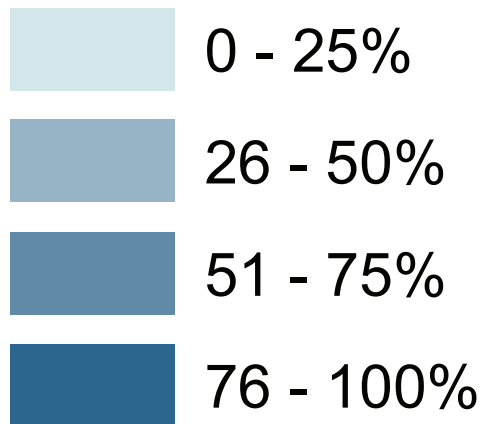
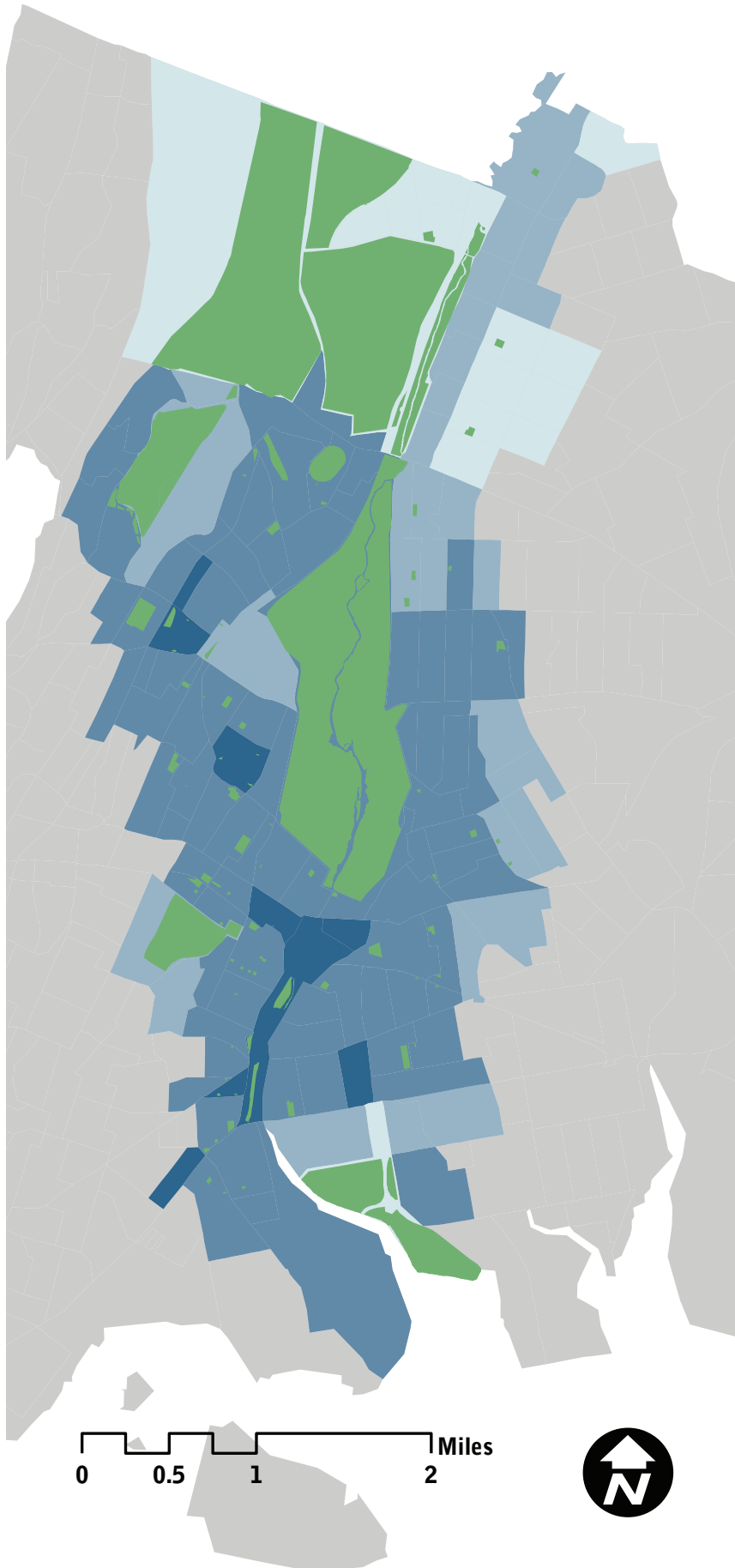
Map one, on page 3, shows the percentage of people over the age of 5 who speak a language other than English at home. This data is displayed by census tract. The map shows that the percentage of people for whom this is true is high—most areas in the Bronx River Watershed have over 50% of the population that speak a language other than English. Only a few small areas at the north of the Watershed have fewer than 25% of their population speak a language other than English—these are the light blue areas at the top of the map.

Furthermore, there are pockets where non-English languages are spoken by a very large percentage of the of the population, these are the dark blue patches to the south and the east of Bronx Park.

As mentioned above, 54% of the population of the Bronx River Watershed speaks a language other than English at home. This map shows that this percentage is not entirely evenly spread across the area—the areas with a high percentage of English speakers are concentrated in the north end, and the areas with the highest percentage of non-English speakers are in the south and the east.

Map One

Percentage of People Over 5 Years Old in the Bronx River Watershed Who Speak a Language Other Than English At Home



Data is by census tract from the 2000 US Census

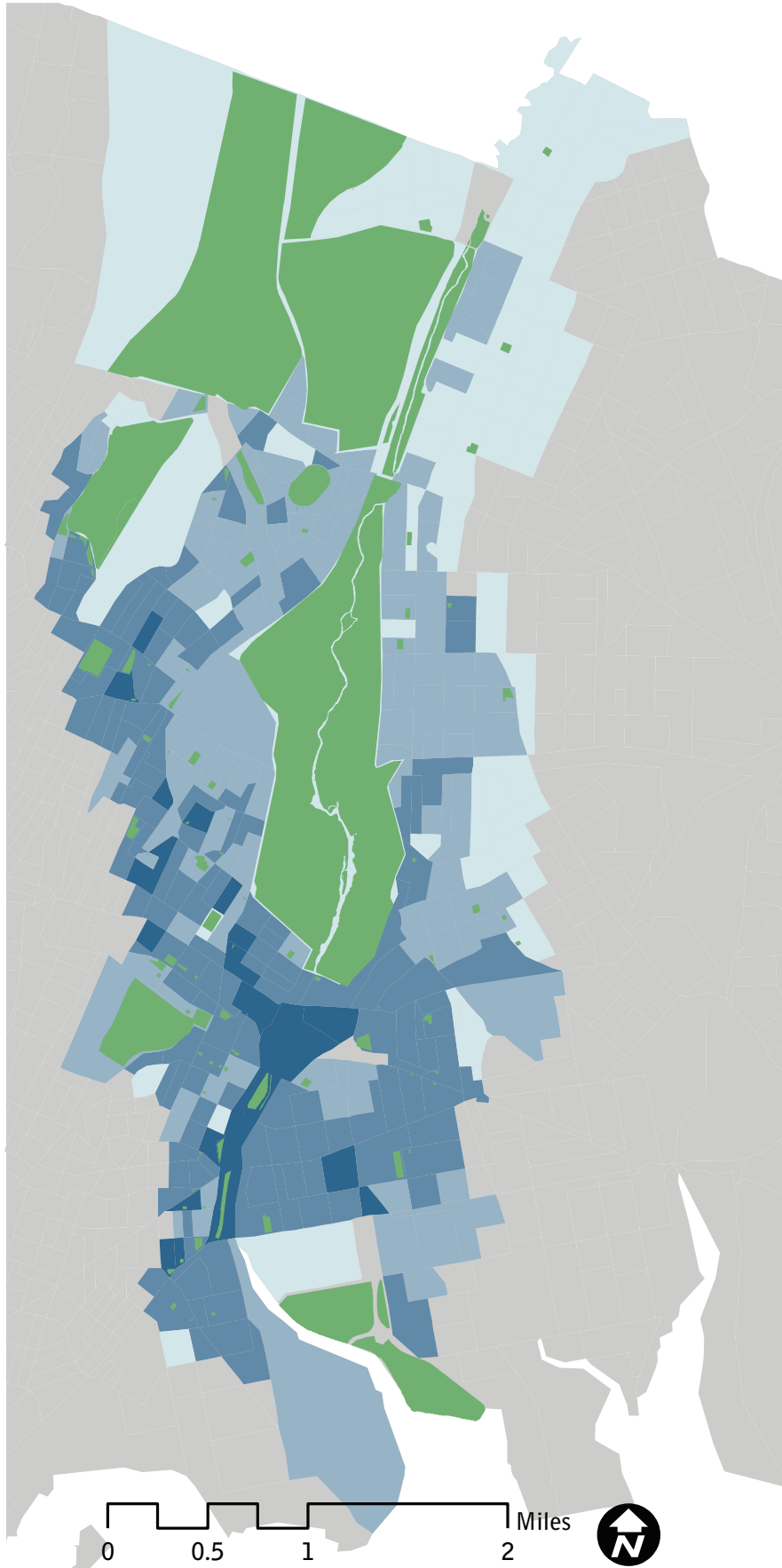
Census tracts represented are those that intersect with the Bronx River Watershed, as shown below



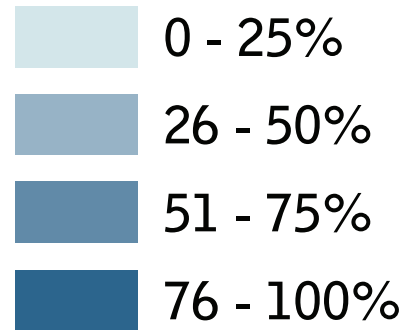
Spanish Speaking Population

Of the 449,367 people who live in the Bronx River Watershed, 205,021 of them speak Spanish—46% of the population. This is by far the largest non-English language group represented in the Area. Map two, on page 5, shows the distribution of Spanish speakers in the Watershed, by block group. The majority live to the east and south of Bronx Park, with some of the areas of highest Spanish-speaking density along the river south of Bronx Park. These are the people who will interact with the Greenway on the most regular basis—having signage in Spanish as well as English will be quite necessary.

Map Two



Percentage of Spanish Speakers in the Bronx River Watershed



Data is by Block Group from the 2000 US Census.

Percentage of Spanish Speakers are over 5 years of age.

Block Groups represented are those that intersect the Bronx River Watershed, as shown on the map below.



Highest Percentage of Spanish Speakers

Let us now look closer at these high concentrations of Spanish speakers. Map 3, on page 7, highlights the ten block groups with the highest percentage of Spanish speakers. Each block group is depicted in a different colour. These 10 block groups are all in the area east and south of Bronx Park. The graph in the bottom right-hand corner of the page shows how well the people in each block group speaks English.

In half of those block groups, fewer than 40% of the people speak English very well. In all of them, fewer than 60% do. In two of the block groups (pink and orange) none of the residents speak English very well. In fact, in those two block groups, 100% of the people say that they do not speak English well or do not speak English at all.

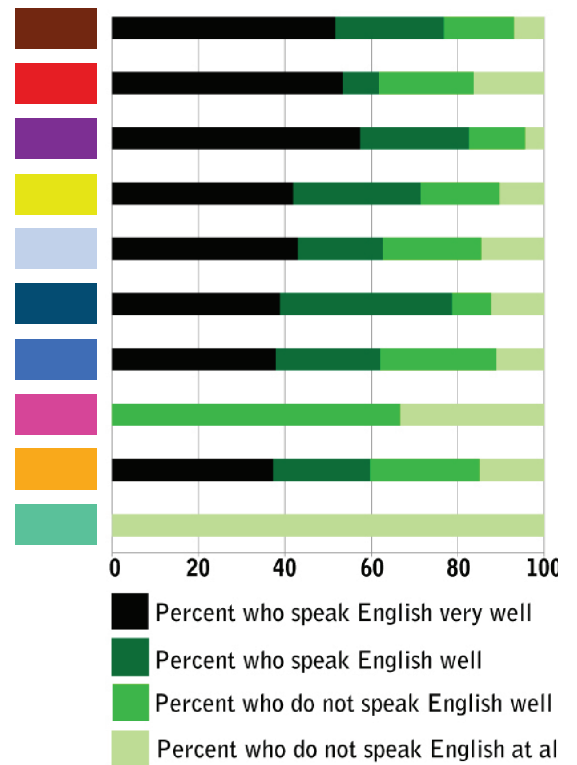
Map Three



Ten Block Groups within the Bronx River Watershed with the Highest Percentag of Spanish Speakers



How well do the people in these Block Groups Speak English?



Data is from the 2000 US Census

Conclusion

The Bronx River Watershed Alliance, in working to complete the Greenway, puts rhetorical emphasis on improving the lives of residents of the area, generally referred to as the South Bronx. This area suffered considerable disinvestment in the 1970s and 80s and is in need of revitalization. A New York Times article about photographer Ray Morten's photographs of the South Bronx writes of how, when exploring the South Bronx in the 80s, always took the 5 train because "the No. 5 line led through a handful of neighborhoods — East Tremont, Mott Haven, Morrisania — that had been so gutted and burned out during the 1970s that whole blocks were almost completely abandoned, meaning fewer chances of stumbling into a mugger or drug deal." (Kennedy, 2008). Currently, as Sustainable South Bronx so succinctly declares, "South Bronx residents have far less open space and waterfront access than other part of NYC." (ssbx.org).

The Bronx River Watershed Alliance states: "In the South Bronx, completion of the greenway involves the development of new open space and parkland at sites which include an abandoned concrete plant, a reclaimed street end, and a long-neglected stretch of land across the river from Starlight Park." (bronxriver.org). If this mission is to be realized, it is important that the greenway not just be completed, but that it be clearly open and welcoming to the community that it serves. Bilingual English-Spanish signage will be an important step towards improving the health and well being of the large Spanish-speaking population of the Bronx River Watershed.

Bronx River Alliance Website. "Greenway". <http://www.bronxriver.org/index.php?pg=content&p=aboutus&m1=1&m2=3>. accessed February 24, 2009.

United States Bureau of the Census. "Speak a language other than English at home (population 5 years and over)" 2000. <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

Kenedy, Randy. "Crumbling South Bronx as a Muse" *New York Times*. November 30, 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/01/arts/design/01brok.html?ref=nyregion>. Accessed Feb 24, 2009.

Sustainable South Bronx Website. "Greenway". <http://www.ssbx.org/greenway.html>. Accessed Feb 24, 2009.