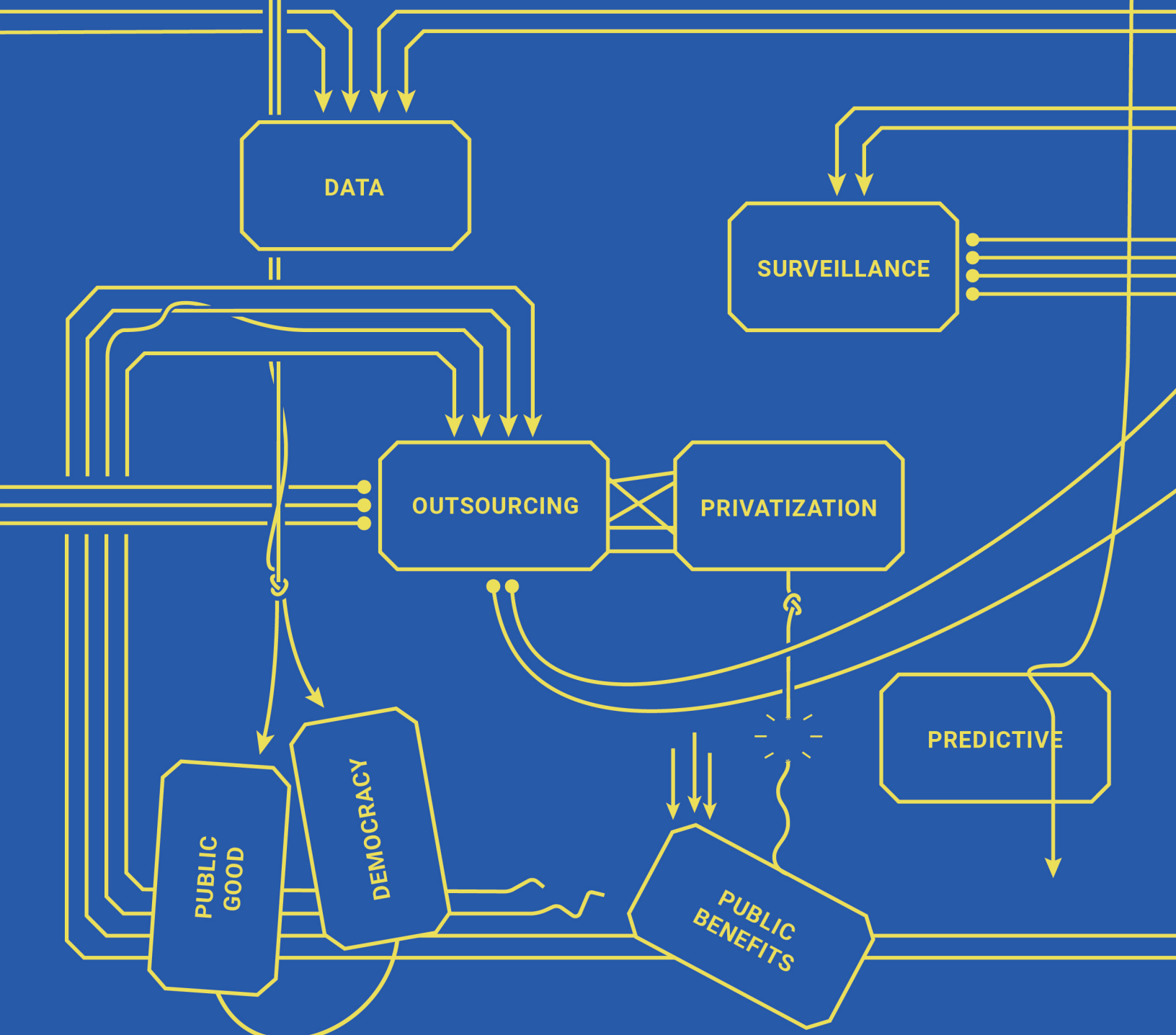




MyCity, INC

A Case Against "CompStat Urbanism"



Acknowledgments

Presidential Penn Compact Professor of Cinema and Media Studies Shannon Mattern warned against “CompStat Urbanism” in her op-ed “The Problems Data Can’t Solve: Eric Adams Puts Too Much Faith in the Power of Statistics and Algorithms.” New York Daily News (blog), June 28, 2021. <https://www.nydailynews.com/2021/06/28/the-problems-data-cant-solve-eric-adams-puts-too-much-faith-in-the-power-of-statistics-and-algorithms/>

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Whose City? A Summary

It is undisputed that New Yorkers need better access to city services. When Mayor Adams promised to build upon the infrastructure started by the AccessNYC redesign in 2017, through the MyCity portal, it was generally welcomed.

According to the MyCity website, it will be “a one-stop shop for New York City services and benefits.”¹

“New Yorkers can use MyCity to check eligibility qualifications, complete applications, track services status, and securely store personal information and documentation for future use.”

Yet MyCity is much more than a streamlined platform for New Yorkers to conveniently access city services. As Adams has often said, MyCity will be “CompStat for the city.”² Just as “CompStat” was a dashboard management tool for police managers, he proposes that MyCity will function as a dashboard for administrators to use data towards a “proactive, and eventually, predictive” approach to City services.³ This is concerning for New Yorkers.

If this vision for MyCity is realized, it will :

- 1. Create an executive “predictive” dashboard that expands policing**
- 2. Embed corporate technology in public infrastructure and,**
- 3. Act as a corporate welfare project that uses taxpayer dollars to profit corporations instead of New Yorkers.**

All of these harm our collective power and democratic governance.

This report raises questions about the potential carceral impact of centralizing agency data. The promise of MyCity resembles the promises of many failed “smart city” projects.⁴ Citing austerity measures, public officials have purchased and promoted these corporate solutions while promising efficiency and modernization (which

often translates to cuts to public welfare spending). In practice, states and corporations collude to implement technologies that extract data and monitor residents—benefiting state control and corporate profiteering. These projects are often implemented with very little, if any, public debate, review, or oversight.⁵

This report begins with a timeline that shows where we've been, it then zeros in on where we are, and finally, considers what future MyCity is leading us toward. The timeline depicts New York City's recent technology and procurement history, starting in 2010 through to the present, followed by a review of MyCity—"How It Started" compared with "How It's Going." We then present the Lab's key concerns about where MyCity is taking us, drawing from New York's experience with CompStat, other cities' data-sharing and predictive efforts, and IT procurement history.

We conclude with key questions that must be asked about MyCity in order to ensure it does not repeat the failures of similar initiatives under past administrations.

While New Yorkers need better access to city services, this digital dashboard and "predictive" political tool is not the way to deliver them.

We invite New Yorkers to demand a role in local governance of the implementation

and use of digital public infrastructures that have the potential to reinforce inequality and imbalanced power relations. Join us in calling for an open debate about MyCity's contracts and commitments on behalf of the public.

The Surveillance Resistance Lab maps how the technology procured by cities today may create durable infrastructures that broaden state surveillance, social control, and corporate influence tomorrow. Our methodology includes studying how historic technology infrastructural changes have expanded the city's carceral reach. Examples include how cell towers enabled cities to expand electronic monitoring and police surveillance through cell-site simulators or how CCTV cameras paved the way for biometrics technology such as facial recognition.

The Lab is currently focused on three emerging governance technology infrastructures and the interconnectedness of their futures—one relies on the parallel development of the others. We refer to these technologies for that reason as a triad—(1) centralized databases, (2) digitized wallets and (3) digital identification cards.⁶ In this report, we examine how MyCity, a centralized city database, creates core infrastructure for expanding future surveillance, state control, social exclusion, and corporate influence on public policy.

NYC Tech History 2010-2022

While MyCity has developed under Adams' administration, the seeds for MyCity were planted by the administrations that preceded him—starting in 2010 when Mayor Bloomberg consolidated IT services across government in partnership with Microsoft.

In addition, NYC has more than a decade of cautionary tales about the perils of outsourcing tech procurement—and of course the warnings carried by CompStat, which has a longer history that began in 1994.

At the same time, road maps and corrective actions have been recommended by civic technology organizations, the Department of Investigation, and the City Council about how to better steer New York City into the future.

2010

Bloomberg



#IT_CONSOLIDATION

Executive Order 140 of 2010. This Order authorized DOITT

to consolidate the infrastructure of and establish coordinated citywide policies for information technology and telecommunications for the City of New York.⁷

Mayor Bloomberg and Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer Announce Cloud-Computing Partnership.

[This agreement] will Consolidate Dozens of Agency License Agreements into One, Provide New State-of-the-Art Technology Resources to City Employees and Save the City \$50 Million over Next Five Years.⁸

2011

#EXECUTIVE_DASHBOARD

New York City has spent the past 18 months developing a database on four million residents, most of them the city's neediest, which officials say will enhance social services but which advocates for the poor say could put their privacy at risk. Using data-sharing concepts developed by the Department of Homeland Security and other law enforcement agencies, the database links together vast amounts of information gathered by city agencies that previously maintained their files separately.⁹

#IT_CONSOLIDATION, #CIVIC_TECH_ROADMAP

In 2011, the city government began a database project that relied on "data-sharing concepts developed by the Department of Homeland Security and other law enforcement agencies."¹⁰

The technology is based on the National Information Exchange Model, known as NIEM, which was started in 2005 by the federal Departments of Justice and Homeland Security. The exchange model helps agencies with different types of databases communicate and has been used, for example, to allow the police to track warrants across state boundaries. More recently, the federal Department of Health and Human Services joined the NIEM executive steering council, and is promoting the shared data model for efforts like preventing Medicare fraud and enforcing child support.

2012

#EXECUTIVE_DASHBOARD

Mayor Bloomberg, Police Commissioner Kelly And Microsoft Unveil New, State-of-the-art Law Enforcement Technology That Aggregates And Analyzes Existing Public Safety Data In Real Time To Provide A Comprehensive View Of Potential Threats And Criminal Activity.¹¹

#EXECUTIVE_DASHBOARD

Former NYPD Captain John Eterno publishes *The Crime Numbers Game: Management by Manipulation*.

[an] empirical analysis of this management system-exposing the truth about crime statistics manipulation in the NYPD and the repercussions¹²

2013

#IT_PROCUREMENT

Verizon was hired by the city in 2006 to develop software to transfer phone calls from residents to the new 911 system. But the company fell behind schedule, then failed to meet city standards in 2009 for testing of the software, known as Vesta. That prompted delays, until the system became operational in 2011.¹³

#CIVIC_TECH_ROADMAP

The People's Roadmap to a Digital New York City is released by BetaNYC.

In this citizen created roadmap, we outline how to humanize technology, move beyond transparency for transparency's sake, and ensure we have government technology that works for the people, built with the people.¹⁴

2014

de Blasio



#IT_PROCUREMENT

A federal judge in Manhattan on Monday sentenced three men to 20 years in prison for their roles in the scandal-ridden payroll modernization project known as CityTime, and he also sharply criticized New York City's contracting procedures for what he called a lack of 'adequate and effective oversight.'¹⁵

#IT_PROCUREMENT

Department of Investigation Report on City Time:

Specifically, the Report found the City did not implement proper internal controls and other management safeguards to prevent substantial cost overruns and delays in connection with CityTime, and failed to detect the enormous fraud against the City and its taxpayers.¹⁶

THE DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATION ISSUED SIX RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CITY IN THEIR 2014 REPORT:

1. Establish "an interagency working group to oversee the project and [assign] an on-site City project manager with the requisite technical expertise."

2. "The City should assign to all large-scale information technology projects an integrity monitor selected by DOI [to] perform regular audits of the time worked by consultants on a project and analyze the hiring of consultants based on project needs."

3. "The City should create a more robust due diligence and approval process regarding large-scale technology contracts, amendments, and change orders."

4. "The City should hold contractors accountable for failures to provide deliverables on time and on budget by explicitly stating penalties in all contracts and enforcing those penalties where appropriate."

5. "Consultants on large-scale technology projects should be required to undergo a conflicts of interest background check and the City should require that contractors disclose any subcontractors that receive \$100,000 or more and the City should vet and approve those subcontractors."

6. "The City should develop a plan on all large-scale technology projects to transition maintenance and control to the City at the conclusion of a project."

#IT_PROCUREMENT

Testimony by Dept. of Investigation Mark Peters to the Committee on Oversight and Investigations jointly with the Committee on Contracts and the Committee on Technology about the findings and recommendations in the July 2014 report above.¹⁷

2015

#IT_CONSOLIDATION, #IT_PROCUREMENT

Rebooting NYC reported that

In 2015, DoITT signed a five-year Master Services Agreement with Dell for \$67.46 million; by the time the contract was completed, it had been modified to the tune of \$220.94 million.¹⁸

2016

#SINGLE_WEB_PORTAL #CIVIC_TECH_ROADMAP

ACCESS NYC relaunched in March 2017 with a simplified 10-step eligibility screening process, plain-language program information, content in seven languages, a location finder, and an accessible, mobile-responsive design.¹⁹

The Beek Center for Social Impact + Innovation at Georgetown University concluded:

ACCESS NYC's redesign provides a model for how states and local governments can create and deliver accessible benefits information that meets the needs of residents.²⁰

2017

#SINGLE_WEB_PORTAL #CIVIC_TECH_ROADMAP

A New York City Council bill would require that an office designated by the Mayor review the feasibility of establishing online applications for all permits, licenses, and registrations issued by city agencies.²¹ Such review would also include an evaluation of the feasibility to create and maintain a single web portal to access such applications and a plan and timeline for creating such web portal. Findings for the review shall be reported to the mayor and the council on or before June 1, 2018. The report *Feasibility of Allowing Online Submission of Applications for City-Issued Permits, Licenses, and Registrations* was released June 2018.²²

2018

#SINGLE_WEB_PORTAL #CIVIC_TECH_ROADMAP

A New York City Council bill would require the Mayor's Office of Operations (MOO) to complete a study on client information management systems.²³ Client information management system would mean any electronic software used to collect, record, or manage information about social services that individuals may apply for or receive. The study would include an assessment of efforts to update and integrate systems of agencies that provide social services, strategies to help facilitate information sharing among such agencies to improve inter-agency coordination, an examination of how such agencies can use digital tools to best serve clients, and recommendations of how the City can continue to monitor and evaluate existing systems in order to remain current in the use of technology. The bill would require MOO to submit an annual report on its findings and recommendations as well as a progress update each year for three years after the release of the report.²⁴ The report *Information Sharing and System Modernization in New York City* responded to this bill.²⁵

2019

#IT_PROCUREMENT

Ivalua Inc. was first hired by the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications in 2016 to come up with a system that allows 40 city agencies to buy products and services online. In the years since, the contract has ballooned from \$30.5 million to a whopping \$46.9 million, the watchdog Checks and Balances Project found. The city has spent \$27.5 million on the contract so far.²⁶

2020

2021

#CIVIC_TECH_ROADMAP

Building off of NYC Planning Labs, NYC Digital Services announces job listings for developers, designers, product managers and devops engineers hoping to expand New York's capacity for building government technology.²⁷

2022

Adams

#CIVIC_TECH_ROADMAP

Rebooting NYC report by the Urban Tech Hub calls on New York City to pass "foundational requirements" including privacy, data gathering, and infrastructural protections prior to undertaking any massive technology projects.²⁸

MyCity: How It Started and How It's Going

Despite his campaign promises to build MyCity “in-house”, many of the same failures that New York experienced with tech procurement since 2010 are now being repeated in real-time by Mayor Adams’ administration with the development of MyCity.

CAMPAIGN PROMISE: MyCity will be built in-house

The Mayor’s office originally stated that MyCity would be developed using in-house staffing and expertise under the new Office of Technology and Innovation, initially earning support from civic technologists.²⁹

WHAT IS HAPPENING: It will not be built in-house

CAMPAIGN PROMISE: MyCity will be built with in-house staffing

WHAT IS HAPPENING: Agency staff not resourced

“While it’s exciting to see the centralization of services and at least the incorporation of a modern technology stack, it is disappointing that the city’s internal teams are not resourced to support this ongoing work,” said Noel Hidalgo, executive director of BetaNYC, a civic technology group, who advised Adams’ transition team on the MyCity portal....

“It’s not just a website. This is about the fundamentals of how government services are built in the 21st century,” Hidalgo said.³⁰

CAMPAIGN PROMISE: MyCity will be built with in-house expertise

WHAT IS HAPPENING:

Long-term sustainability concerns

A former city technology manager “questioned the reason behind the choice for MyCity. ‘Why wasn’t the internal team meeting the goals? Why is the NYC Digital Service not a thing anymore? What happened to that?’” he asked.³¹

He did have some words of advice for the administration. “Full ownership [of the software] and capacity for maintaining the project has to stay in house. Otherwise, you’re setting yourself up for failure because...you can’t have forward continuity when there’s nobody around that actually knows how the thing works.”³²

Dubious contracting practices

PassPort lists 68 contract entries for MyCity (including 20 “revisions”).³³

“Since 2022, the city has registered 54 contracts worth a combined \$16.6 million to 26 different vendors charged with working on MyCity, according to records kept by the comptroller’s office.”³⁴

The majority of the contracts belong to three external consulting firms: Innovative Business Concepts, Rangam Consultants, and Unique Comp Inc.³⁵

CAMPAIGN PROMISE: MyCity would be built in one year

The Mayor made his first promise about MyCity during his first State of the City address.³⁶ In July 2022, the Mayor’s office stated that MyCity would launch by late 2022.³⁷

WHAT IS HAPPENING: MyCity is still being built

MyCity launched phase one in early 2023 with childcare services.³⁸ The portal does offer links to services for businesses, jobs, and benefits but each link directs a viewer to an existing city website for those services.³⁹

CAMPAIGN PROMISE: MyCity will CompStat the city

“We must build a single data platform for the entire City government. Believe it or not, nearly all City agencies are siloed, operating separately from one another without sharing data or metrics, often duplicating efforts and resulting in waste, inefficiency and poor delivery of services. By combining all agency metrics onto a single platform similar to CompStat and using analytics to track performance in real time, we can go from a reactive management approach to being proactive and, eventually, predictive. This will improve performance and save billions of dollars while delivering far better services.”

“and, eventually, predictive” is signaling that the intent for the backend of MyCity may be to have data across agencies centralized and programmed with automated decision-making systems built on to some or all of them. It’s unclear what the exact intent of a “predictive” system might be, but as explained below, automated systems for benefits, child services, and policing have already caused documented harms.

WHAT IS HAPPENING:

CompStat questions

While the Mayor has spoken less often about MyCity’s backend features for city management after the campaign, his calls for returning to CompStat raise concerns. CompStat’s data management program was described by police as “management by manipulation.” What would make MyCity different?

Multi-agency data sharing agreement signed

A data-sharing agreement signed by the Office of Technology and Innovation (OTI), Administration of Child Services (ACS), Department of Homeless Services (DHS), Department of Education (DOE), Department of Human Resources Association (HRA) in 2023 may change how police and courts access all of city data.⁴⁰

continued on next page...

CAMPAIGN PROMISE: MyCity will CompStat the city

WHAT IS HAPPENING

Data sharing agreement

“OTI may disclose MyCity Data as required by judicial order, lawfully issued subpoena, or as otherwise required by law, provided that OTI will (i) promptly notify the providing agency of the Program Data sufficiently in advance of disclosure if possible, but in no case more than five (5) business days after OTI’s receipt of such demand, to permit, if possible, the provider of Program Data to seek a protective order and to make any notifications required by law, and (ii) disclose such Program Data only to the extent allowed under a protective order, if any, or as necessary to comply with the law, subpoena, or court order.”

Lays predictive groundwork

While this is not directly a data-sharing agreement with policing agencies, this centralization of data has the potential to create “proactive and, eventually, predictive” systems designed to eliminate access to health care⁴¹, public benefits⁴², and to punish⁴³, like so many other systems⁴⁴ have done elsewhere.⁴⁵ When these systems were introduced, each described in more detail in “Key Concerns,” they also promised efficiency and better public access.

CAMPAIGN PROMISE: “Efficiency mandate” (aka budget cuts)

“We will institute a standing Program to Eliminate the Gap (PEG), which will reduce agency spending at least 3-5%. We will apply an efficiency mandate that eliminates ineffective programs and unnecessary spending, while using an inequality impact test to protect programs vital to lower-income New Yorkers.”⁴⁶

WHAT IS HAPPENING: City-wide budget cuts

In September 2023, Adams announced⁴⁷ a budget cut of 5% for all city agencies, resulting in a \$1 billion cut⁴⁸ for the Department of Education and closing⁴⁹ New York Public Library branches on Sundays. Crains reported that “the controversial November budget cut that ended Sunday library service amounted to \$24 million.”⁵⁰

CAMPAIGN PROMISE: Adams administration will cut city staff

"We can significantly reduce labor costs by \$1.5 billion through attrition by not replacing retiring or resigning essential City workers and working with the State to offer early retirements to others over the next two years."⁵¹

WHAT IS HAPPENING

Hiring freeze and "ceased staff"

Indeed, according to NYC payroll data, in addition to the Mayor's "hiring freeze", 331 staffers "ceased" working for OTI in 2022 and 2023 (as of June), not including call center staff and summer interns.⁵²

Self-fulfilling prophecies

A Crain's report⁵³ from February 1, 2024 reported "Mayor Adams... said outsourcing had become necessary due to the hiring freeze he imposed⁵⁴ in September, as well as an existing struggle to recruit tech industry workers amid the rise of remote work."

Key Concerns With Where MyCity Is Taking Us

The Surveillance Resistance Lab maps how the technology procured by cities today may create durable infrastructures that broaden state surveillance, social control, and corporate influence tomorrow. Our methodology includes studying how historic technology infrastructural changes have expanded the city's carceral reach. Examples include how cell towers enabled cities to expand electronic monitoring and police surveillance through cell-site simulators or how CCTV cameras paved the way for biometrics technology such as facial recognition.

The Lab is currently focused on three emerging governance technology infrastructures and the interconnectedness of their futures—one relies on the parallel development of the others. We refer to these technologies for that reason as a triad—(1) centralized databases, (2) digitized wallets and (3) digital identification cards.⁵⁵ In this report, we examine how MyCity, a centralized city database, creates core infrastructure for expanding future surveillance, state control, social exclusion, and corporate influence on public policy.

The foundation for MyCity also has history. In 2011, the city government began a database project that relied on “data-sharing concepts

developed by the Department of Homeland Security and other law enforcement agencies.”⁵⁶

“The technology is based on the National Information Exchange Model, known as NIEM, which was started in 2005 by the federal Departments of Justice and Homeland Security. The exchange model helps agencies with different types of databases communicate and has been used, for example, to allow the police to track warrants across state boundaries. More recently, the federal Department of Health and Human Services joined the NIEM executive steering council, and is promoting the shared data model for efforts like preventing Medicare fraud and enforcing child support.”⁵⁷

Much like the promises about MyCity, this effort also promised to “[link] together vast amounts of information gathered by city agencies that previously maintained their files separately.”

According to the MyCity website, it will be “a one-stop shop for New York City services and benefits.”⁵⁸ “New Yorkers can use MyCity to check eligibility qualifications, complete applications, track services status, and securely store personal

information and documentation for future use.” Yet MyCity is much more than a streamlined platform for New Yorkers to conveniently access city services. This report highlights key concerns related to MyCity by examining New York City IT procurement history, Adams’ administration statements, and how similar technology has evolved in other cities. We examine the backend and the business of MyCity to understand it as (1) an executive “predictive” dashboard that expands policing, (2) an embedding of corporate technology in public infrastructure and (3) a political project that leverages the state to serve corporations over New Yorkers, to the detriment of our governing power.

1

MyCity wants to be an Executive Predictive Dashboard

In her book, *A City is Not a Computer: Other Urban Intelligences*, Professor Shannon Mattern warns, “The dashboard-as-talisman, when deployed in municipal buildings...is intended to aggregate data for the purposes of divining the future—and shaping policies and practices to bring a desired world into being.”⁵⁹ What is the “desired world” of cops working with tech companies to build a new city management dashboard? Whose desires will shape the policies and practices of the city’s future?

During his mayoral campaign, Mattern warned then-candidate Adams, “[CompStat] urbanism” is not good governance.⁶⁰

“[CompStat] urbanism promotes an impoverished, and even dangerous, understanding of what a city is and how it functions. CompStat for Education, for Community Affairs, for Homeless Services—each with its own control center streaming real-time data—would provide a semblance of accountability and control, but there’s so much that escapes the screen: all the layers of history and cultural dynamics and social inequities. All the things that matter, but which simply can’t be transformed into data points.”

As Giuliani embraced CompStat for the appearance of control over crime, the Adams administration has embraced the MyCity dashboard.

For nearly twenty years, New York City mayors have been laying groundwork to centralize access to New York City agency services and data. Mayor Rudy Giuliani became “addicted” to CompStat—a NYPD dashboard system under former Police Commissioner Bill Bratton that centralized crime statistics in 1994.⁶¹ Not everyone agrees that CompStat was a success. A former police captain even wrote a book about it called *The Crime*

Numbers Game: Management by Manipulation which documents “how [integrity] succumbed to a short-term numbers game, casting a cloud on the [police] department.”⁶² Adams readily admits that it is a political power tool that can be—and was—abused.⁶³

Combining Adam’s statement with those of Matthew Fraser—head of the Office of Technology and Innovation (former Gartner consultant and previous Deputy Commissioner and Chief Information Officer at the NYPD)—the potential for MyCity to be weaponized as a political power tool is clear.⁶⁴ Fraser spoke about how digital wallets—another “triad technology” the Lab studies—which may be integrated with MyCity, can be used to police and track the spending habits of New Yorkers.⁶⁵ Mayor Adams has flagged that MyCity will “[combine] all agency metrics onto a single platform similar to CompStat and [use] analytics to track performance in real time, we can go from a reactive management approach to being proactive and, eventually, predictive.”⁶⁶

Indeed, a MyCity data sharing agreement signed by the Office of Technology and Innovation (OTI), Administration of Child Services (ACS), Department of Homeless Services (DHS), Department of Education (DOE), Department of Human Resources Association (HRA) in 2023 may change how police and courts access New Yorkers’ data—and how New Yorkers find out about it. For example, it allows OTI to respond directly to a subpoena instead of

redirecting the requests to the agencies New Yorkers shared their information with, and who may be required to notify people about the legal demand for information.⁶⁷ While it requires OTI to give the agencies five days’ notice about the request, New Yorkers must nevertheless pay attention to how other cities have centralized databases and layered on predictive tools. MyCity could be turned into a tool for the executive administration to automate denial of access to social services—doing the opposite of what it promises.

This has already played out in other cities and states.

MICHIGAN

The Michigan Integrated Data System (MiDAS) was launched in October 2013 as a replacement for a 30 year old system that the Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency used to administer unemployment benefits.⁶⁸ Simultaneously with the system’s rollout, the UI agency reduced its staff by one third.⁶⁹ By the time the system was shut down in September 2015 under community and legal pressure, MiDAS had incorrectly accused more than 34,000 people of unemployment fraud, cutting these people from receiving benefits, due to a poorly designed algorithm within a poorly designed system.⁷⁰

ARKANSAS

In 2016, the Arkansas Department of Human Services implemented a new algorithm to determine how benefits would be allocated to individuals enrolled in the state's Medicaid home and community based services program.⁷¹ This algorithm had a dramatic impact with beneficiaries, on average, losing 43% of the homecare support hours that they had previously received.⁷² The algorithm was only dropped after state officials were pressured by impacted community members, following lawsuits at both the federal and state levels that challenged the algorithm's use.⁷³

PASCO COUNTY

Predictive tools have also been used to expand policing powers in other cities. For example, starting in 2011, the Pasco County Sheriff's Office created three different policing programs, including one focused on local students.⁷⁴ The sheriff's office had access to more than 66,000 student records and built a database of several hundred students who were closely monitored as "potential criminals" based upon an algorithmic risk assessment tool designed using data including grades and abuse history.⁷⁵ The sheriff's staff made more than 12,500 "preemptive" visits to these children from 2015-2020. In 2023, under pressure from a coalition of community groups, the Pasco County Sheriff ended its use of this algorithm.⁷⁶

RAMSEY COUNTY, ST. PAUL

In 2018, Ramsey County, the City of St. Paul, and St. Paul Public Schools entered into a joint data sharing agreement to create a predictive algorithm under the auspices of providing services to students who were most likely to be caught up in the criminal legal system in the future.⁷⁷ Once this agreement and plan came to light, community members researched, organized, and challenged the plan, eventually forcing government officials to end the program in early 2019.⁷⁸

In many other cities across the country and the world where centralized city data was announced as the initial step, intended to serve the public with more efficiency and access to services, the data sharing and predictive analytics have followed. As Ben Green warns in “The Encroachment of Smart Cities,” a chapter of *Resisting Borders and Technologies of Violence*, co-edited by Lab founder Mizue Aizeki,

By partnering with technology companies through behind-the-scenes partnerships and data-sharing agreements, law enforcement can expand its surveillance without public knowledge or oversight.⁷⁹

Any government savings from reducing costs of agency staff or mass denials of services are diverted towards more policing and investments in durable corporate infrastructure.

2

MyCity invites Corporate Infrastructures to “Lockin”

Eager to seize long-term “lockin”⁸⁰ through infrastructural contracts across multiple mayoral administrations, technology companies have paid close attention to and shaped the emerging triad technologies, including MyCity.

Professor Keith Breckenridge describes “lockin” in the context of the information economy as the “familiar, almost banal” corporate ambition to dominate “bounded networks of compatible resources and fiercely defended terrains of control over the global market in personal communications.”⁸¹ We all experience this as Apple or Google customers whose options for headphones, chargers, software, and other services are determined by which devices we own. Companies have also recognized centralization of city data as an opportunity to lockin their products as “proprietary architectures”—durable infrastructure that guarantees a long-term dependency by the state on companies.⁸²

This “lockin” between companies and the state mirrors that of customers locked in, for example, to Apple or Google. Corporate power is even more amplified when executive power is consolidated—consider how Mayor Bloomberg’s 2010 Executive Order to consolidate citywide IT infrastructure alongside Microsoft created the possibility for the “new and innovative” Master Service Agreement for technology.⁸³

MASTER SERVICE AGREEMENT

A type of contract under which a vendor or pool of vendors hold a master agreement defining a general scope of services, with specific assignments determined through subsequently issued task orders.⁸⁴

Over just seven years, the cost of Master Service Agreements has increased from \$563.54 million in 2014 to \$2.73 billion in 2021, while the number of agreements has remained steady.

For example, in a report published in January 2022, Cornell Tech researchers flagged that “[as] the City’s spending on technology has ballooned, DoITT has concentrated its spending in fewer, but much larger, contracts. The overall number of active contracts has declined from 667 in FY14 to 438 in FY21.⁸⁵ In FY14, DoITT had 46 active MSA contracts totalling \$563.54 million. Today DoITT’s 43 MSA contracts total \$2.73 billion.”

The same report noted that “In 2015, DoITT signed a five-year Master Services Agreement with Dell for \$67.46 million; by the time the contract was completed, it had been modified to the tune of \$220.94 million.”

MyCity invites a new layer of long-term vendor lockin with technology companies, and a potential expansion of the city’s future costs of digital infrastructural services far beyond the \$17 million cost already projected from MyCity construction contracts. **Without any oversight, this invites a new era of corporate encroachment on government services alongside an outsized executive political power over city agencies through digital dashboards.**

This long-term dependency on a shrinking number of companies erodes our city government’s power over industry, and erodes New Yorkers’ power along with it.

3

MyCity is Corporate Welfare

Measuring the costs of MyCity contracts against Adams' own articulation of the urgent need for austerity policies reveals a contradiction—for New Yorkers in need of social services, such as weekend library access, the city is strapped. For technology contractors, as well as for police, the City is flush. Putting the two price tags next to each other, as a Crain's report did in February, demonstrates this contradiction clearly—MyCity contracts are already nearing \$17 million, closing in on the \$24 million dollar cost of “the controversial November budget cut that ended Sunday library service.”⁸⁶ Austerity logic is not only relied on to reduce city services, but also to defend an inordinate amount of outsourcing. When confronted with questions about why he outsourced so much of MyCity's construction, Adams invoked his own hiring freeze, which he promised on the campaign trail, along with his policy prohibiting city workers from working remotely. Clearly, these self-fulfilling policies can change.⁸⁷

These outsourcing costs are about more than short-term price-tags—outsourcing erodes New York's technology capacity into the future. As civic tech advocate Noel Hidalgo explained, “[MyCity]’s not just a website. This is about the fundamentals of how government services are built in the 21st

century.”⁸⁸ Further explaining the significance, a former city technology manager elaborated on why this matters for the city's future—“Full ownership [of the software] and capacity for maintaining the project has to stay in house. Otherwise, you're setting yourself up for failure because...you can't have forward continuity when there's nobody around that actually knows how the thing works.”⁸⁹

Like the other trends identified above, the pairing of austerity rhetoric and corporate welfare are not unique to New York City. Unsurprisingly, like the other digital dashboards and automated systems across the country, these products have been sold by corporations and their supporters within the government as austerity tools—ways to reduce waste, detect fraud, increase efficiency, and cut staff. **What they accomplish is excluding and criminalizing the people who rely on city social services, diverting spending from city services towards the bank accounts of corporate vendors.**

In dollars and democratic control over governance tools, Adams' expensive executive dashboard will cost New Yorkers for years to come.

Some Open Questions About MyCity

If CompStat is held up as a model of governance

- What would prevent MyCity, a “CompStat for the City,” from being abused the way CompStat was under previous administrations?
- Who would decide what metrics each agency uses to measure its operations,
- collect the data that informs the metrics, and what power do agencies or the public have to control how it is entered?
- How would the City identify and incorporate the harmful lessons from other cities’ experiments with data sharing agreements across agencies?
- How would people relying on social services for survival be more exposed to policing and criminalization?
- How would “CompStat-ing the city” impact New York City’s democracy?

If lack of oversight of external consultants led to CityTime abuses

- Is there an interagency working group to oversee the MyCity project?
- Is there an on-site City project manager with the requisite technical expertise?
- Is there an integrity monitor selected by DOI performing regular audits of the time worked by consultants on a project and analyzing the hiring of consultants based on project needs?
- What is the due diligence and approval process regarding large-scale technology contracts, amendments, and change orders?
- Have all consultants undergone a conflicts of interest background check?
- How does the City hold contractors accountable for failures to provide deliverables on time and on budget?
- Has the City developed a plan to transition maintenance and control to the City at the conclusion of a project.”
- How can the City learn from projects that were run efficiently and effectively?

If the City needs durable and democratic city tech infrastructure

- What foundations for civic technology have already been outlined for New York City?
- What recommendations have been outlined by civic technologists that support the long-term infrastructure of city technology projects that preserve democratic control and governance?
- What other cities have developed in-house systems that streamline access to services?
- How can the City Council, agencies, and New Yorkers have more democratic process—access, oversight, and accountability—over Master Service Agreements and other large technology expenditures?
- How can the city protect federal and state constitutional, statutory, and city rights through the procurement process and in binding contract language?
- When should technology vendors be bound in contracts or by city law as state actors for the purposes of preserving access to courts for constitutional violations?

Whose City? Our City! Join Us.

We need a hearing on what MyCity is, what it should be, and what it should not be.

MYCITY SHOULD BE

- A public good.
- A portal that facilitates access to services for New Yorkers.
- A model of publicly developed and operated durable infrastructure.
- Developed in-house by internal staff at OTI.
- Incrementally and modularly built rather than a behemoth, legacy system.
- Open source, including all algorithmic decision making models.
- Continually modified and updated by in-house OTI staff.

MYCITY SHOULD NOT BE

- A city management tool that will “CompStat the city”.
- A centralized database for police access to New Yorkers’ data without oversight from the agencies that created that data or the public.
- A platform for creating predictive or automated projects that cut people from benefits.
- A tool that drives more state actor surveillance, automated denial of benefits, and increased policing, whether digital or in-person encounters.
- Indefinitely locked in corporate infrastructure.
- Outsourced to corporate vendors.

To learn more about MyCity, the Lab, and our projects

- Stay tuned for a more in-depth report on MyCityINC later this year.
- Join us on March 27, 2024 at 7PM at NYU Law School’s Furman Hall for *Digital Identity & Domination: The Mayor, the NYPD, and the MyCity Platform*.
- Contact us here to share information, connect with us, and find out more about upcoming events: <https://surveillanceresistancelab.org/contact/>
- Look out for more from the Surveillance Resistance Lab on new city technology infrastructures like MyCity, mobile drivers’ licenses, and digital wallets, and data-sharing work together to create conditions for unprecedented future state surveillance and control.⁹⁰
- Visit our website at <https://surveillanceresistancelab.org/> for more research, toolkits and organization information.



About the Surveillance Resistance Lab

[The Surveillance Resistance Lab](#) investigates and makes visible the often obfuscated ways in which tech is increasing state and corporate power over our lives—through AI, data collection, and more. By translating research into action, we nurture and accumulate the power of organizing and resistance—locally and transnationally—against technologies of violence and control. We are senior organizers, researchers and strategists with expertise in legal analysis, corporate investigation, migration control, and domestic policing. We develop research, strategy, campaigns, and networks around the following areas of work:

- **Digital Public Infrastructure and Democracy**

This cross-city and cross-sector strategy is focused on government procurement of technologies that expand surveillance, deepen corporate power, and weaken democracy. This includes technologies with hidden carceral consequences such as mobile driver's licenses, digital wallets, and centralized benefits distribution portals. We center sites such as schools and hospitals.

- **Digital Infrastructures of Migration Control**

This work builds a transnational network to share knowledge, narratives, and strategies to challenge the Everywhere Border—the digital infrastructure of migration control. We partner with R3D and the Temple University's iLit to conduct research and build collaborations including organizations in Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, the EU and beyond.

- **The Internet as an Infrastructure of Control**

This area of work expands shared understandings of the internet as an infrastructure—including fiber optic cables, WiFi, data centers, platforms and people—increases state and corporate power. It makes visible internet infrastructures and the data collection, labor exploitation, resource extraction that undergird them, so we can build power to fight back.

The Lab launched as an independent project in January 2023 to urgently and strategically respond to issues at the intersection of carcerality, power, technology, democracy, the economy. The Lab was formerly housed at the [Immigrant Defense Project](#).

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