

ON THE RIGHT TRACK:

Recommendations for the Future of Active Transportation in Little Rock



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Now more than ever, young people are choosing the community they want to live in first, and then finding a job. The City of Little Rock considers this as it continues to develop areas, such as the downtown corridor. Active transportation is one key aspect of increasing the city's appeal. In recent years, Little Rock has shown commitment to active transportation by building the highly successful Arkansas River Trail, supporting the building of pedestrian bridges, and adding designated bicycle lanes on several city streets.

In order to build on Little Rock's successes thus far, the City of Little Rock requested a team of graduate students from the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service to develop recommendations for the future of active transportation in Little Rock.

The team conducted 16 interviews with Little Rock city officials as well as community developers in Little Rock. Based on these interviews, the project team identified focus areas for interviews in cities to be visited. The team traveled to Austin, Texas; Chattanooga, Tenn., Fayetteville, Ark., and Memphis, Tenn. and interviewed city officials in each of these cities to find out more about how these cities manage their bicycle and pedestrian programs.

The recommendations in this document are based on information acquired during the interviews and secondary research. The project team centered recommendations in three categories, 1) innovation, 2) collaboration, and 3) connection.

The team's recommendations, which are explained further on page 5, are:

- View bicycles as transportation, not just recreation
- Increase community involvement in design phase of projects
- Create collaborative networks within the city to plan and implement infrastructure projects
- Consider diverse funding sources such as private foundations, additional federal grants, or innovative approaches (e.g. crowdfunding)
- Allow city planning to be a creative process
- Encourage leader(s) of the bicycle and pedestrian program to consider a total mobility perspective
- Improve education and outreach with communities

**“It’s not about adding bicycle lanes.
It’s about improving the transportation
experience for everybody.”**

*- Jon Honeywell, Director of Public Works, City of Little
Rock²²*

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ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION IN LITTLE ROCK

Overview

In order to determine the perceived needs of the current bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, the project team interviewed thirteen city officials in Little Rock. The purpose of the interviews was to determine 1) the perceived strengths of current infrastructure, 2) the perceived challenges of current infrastructure, 3) most successful projects over the last five years, and the 4) goals of the City over the next five years.

Strengths

The strengths of Little Rock identified by city officials were:

- Arkansas River Trail and bridges
- Re-striping of roads
- Recent increase of popularity of bicycling
- Vocal cycling community
- Strong city leadership

Challenges

The challenges of Little Rock based on interviews with city officials were:

- Lack of funding opportunities
- Few incentives for bicycling and walking
- Lack of community buy-in
- Insufficient education for cyclists and drivers
- Scarcity of connected infrastructure for bicyclists and pedestrians

Future Goals

Little Rock city officials identified the following goals for bicycling and pedestrian infrastructure:

- » Connectivity
- » Completion of Master Bicycle Plan
- » Closing the Arkansas River Trail loop
- » Establishment of Complete Streets Ordinance
- » Increased community involvement



Above: View of downtown Little Rock, Arkansas. Image credit: Huffington Post. Retrieved from: www.huffingtonpost.com/kiva-cep/kiva-ceo-to-speak-at-litt_b_3992124.html

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LITTLE ROCK

1. View bicycles as transportation, not just recreation

Introduction

Historically, bicycling in Little Rock has been viewed as a form of recreation, a weekend activity for families and individuals. But more and more cities throughout the country are viewing bicycling and walking as a means of transportation. Officials in Austin, Chattanooga, Memphis, and Fayetteville emphasized this point; in each city, when creating a comprehensive transportation plan, engineers are encouraged to design streets for multi-modal transportation, because bicycles and sidewalks should be seen as a viable means of travel.

Opportunities

When bicycling and walking become part of overall transportation planning, implementing an effective active transportation network becomes easy. Little Rock is already moving in this direction with its many repaving projects, as well as its efforts towards the creation of a complete streets ordinance. By utilizing the concept of a “travel shed”, as discussed on page 8, Little Rock can ensure the travel needs of all citizens are taken into account.

Challenges

Little Rock is still a car-centric city. City planning in the mid-20th century resulted in transportation networks centered around the interstate highway system and suburban developments. As a result, viewing bicycles and sidewalks as a viable transportation option and not just recreation will require a change in mindset about the evolving transportation needs of the 21st century.

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2. Increase community involvement in design phase of projects

Introduction

Officials in all four research cities discussed the

value of community involvement in the planning and design process of transportation. Through the input of citizens, cities were able to create projects that fully reflected the desires of the communities and increased support of project implementation.

Opportunities

Giving communities more of a voice builds trust, makes implementing and maintaining projects easier, and promotes community ownership. Little Rock could use a wide range of techniques, such as utilizing online GIS mapping applications to allow communities to interactively contribute to planning. In addition, Little Rock could establish a program, such as the Neighborhood Partnering Program in Austin, which accepts project proposals from communities.

Challenges

Outreach campaigns, neighborhood meetings, and other public interactions require substantial effort by city officials to be successful. With a limited budget, Little Rock may need to develop partnerships with other agencies in order to conduct community outreach. Changes in infrastructure can be a contentious issue among some, but involving and updating community members is well worth the time and effort.

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3. Create collaborative networks within the city to plan and implement infrastructure projects

Introduction

A key message expressed by all four cities was the value of creating and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships both within and across agencies. In order to be more effective and efficient, agencies need to hold a shared vision of city development.

Opportunities

There are several agencies in Little Rock that

play a part in overall transportation planning and maintenance, such as Public Works, Metroplan, and the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department. By deepening existing partnerships and creating new connections, funds could be grouped together to achieve multiple aspects of projects. Little Rock city officials, especially at the senior level, should constantly identify areas in which they can work both across agencies and within their own departments to realize common goals.

Challenges

Collaboration within such a complex network of departments and agencies can be challenging. Given the large amount of tasks delegated to individual staff members it can sometimes be difficult to find the opportunity to plan cooperatively. During interviews, officials in other cities noted the demanding nature of creating a system of collaboration, but acknowledged that doing so is vital for success.

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4. Consider diverse funding sources such as private foundations, additional federal grants, or innovative approaches (e.g. crowdfunding)

Introduction

Funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects is best secured through diverse outlets. With budget diversity the city can more confidently plan for future projects and ensure the sustainability of current infrastructure. This is more important in today's economy than ever.

Opportunities

Federal grants are a competitive funding resource and can significantly reduce the financial cost for a project through matching funds. Federal grants cannot only be attained through the Department of Transportation, but agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control as well. Sales taxes or fee-based services, such as a transportation fee listed on local utility bills, are direct and can be attributed to the entire city or selected communities where projects will be constructed. Crowdfunding is another innovative funding opportunity that allows

communities to raise their own funds for a specific project in their neighborhood.

Challenges

Securing federal funding is time consuming and not guaranteed. Without truly considering bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure as viable transportation options, funding for such projects will always be inadequate. In addition, permanent taxes and fees can be perceived by some as harmful to communities and crowdfunding may not produce adequate funding. Thus a comprehensive funding plan is necessary.

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5. Allow city planning to be a creative process

Introduction

Federal and state regulations can be restrictive to the planning process but allowing planners and engineers freedom to create innovative projects can help Little Rock become a model for urban planning. Austin demonstrated the need to nourish creativity by redefining city planners and engineers as “imagineers.”

Opportunities

Providing city engineers and planners greater freedom in designing new traffic projects can lead to a culture of innovation within the city. Cities such as Portland, Chicago, and Austin are attracting new residents with their cutting-edge built environments. Little Rock can capitalize on the talent and vision of its employees to help create a city that others throughout the nation will look to for inspiration.

Challenges

Although city engineers and planners must follow federal regulations, they can also feel disempowered to “think outside the box.” It may also be difficult to create a culture of innovation within the city because of the risk associated with implementing unique projects; however, city officials in Austin noted that risk is mitigated through ensuring that projects can always be refined and adapted over time.



Above: Bicycle lanes on south Main Street in Little Rock, Arkansas. Image credit: SoMa Little Rock's Southside Main Street Project. Retrieved from: www.facebook.com

Challenges

Hiring full-time staff will take additional budget allocations and may not be viewed as a high priority. Having only one staff member focused on bicycle and pedestrian planning may limit the extent to which active transportation is seen as part of overall transportation networks.

7. Improve education and outreach with communities

Introduction

In all cities, strong efforts were made to educate the public about bicycle safety and the overall importance of active transportation. City officials highlighted bicycle education programs, partnerships with public schools, and development of public service announcements as effective means to accomplish these goals.

Opportunities

In order to allow city officials to focus primarily on expanding infrastructure, advocacy groups, such as Bicycle Advocacy of Central Arkansas (BACA), could complement the efforts of Public Works by conducting programs the city does not have the resources or staff to do. For example, BACA could establish a bicycle safety program in public schools throughout Little Rock, as officials and advocacy groups did in Austin, Memphis, and Fayetteville. Furthermore, BACA could create educational materials, such as brochures or public service announcements, to build awareness of bicycling and walking as transportation within communities.

Challenges

With a limited budget, education and outreach materials such as brochures and public service announcements can be difficult to fund.

6. Encourage leader(s) of the bicycle and pedestrian program to consider a total mobility perspective

Introduction

City officials insisted the leader of the bicycle and pedestrian program must be passionate and have the ability to advise senior officials and motivate field staff. She or he must also sincerely look at all forms of transportation to create the most comprehensive transportation network possible.

Opportunities

In order to see the total mobility perspective, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator should be passionate about their mission and take into consideration the transportation needs of all citizens. Currently, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator in Little Rock is a part-time position. To improve its bicycle and pedestrian network, the city should consider full-time staff dedicated to consistently looking at opportunities to include bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure on the street, maintaining partnerships with other agencies and communities, and finding new revenue streams.

REVIEW OF FINDINGS: Chattanooga, Tennessee

INNOVATION



Above: People on bikes ride past a docking station for Chattanooga’s bicycle share system. Image credit: Angela Lewis. Retrieved from: www.timesfreepress.com/news/2012/jul/13/ringgold-eyes-chattanoogas-bike-share/

Overview

Over the past two and a half decades, the City of Chattanooga has been working to integrate alternative forms of transportation into their overall transportation network. From the re-purposing of the Walnut Street Bridge for pedestrian use in 1993 to the launch of the city’s bike share program in 2012, Chattanooga has been working to create a more comprehensive transportation system.^{1,2} Their efforts have paid off. Each year Bicycle magazine ranks cities based on the quality of their biking system and culture.³ Chattanooga ranked 22nd in 2013 due to its greenways and multi-use trail system running along the Tennessee River.³ As the city moves to fully implement its 2002 Bicycle Facilities Master Plan, updated in 2010, it has identified five guiding principles for the region’s bicycle and pedestrian network : increase safety; provide facilities; build and support usage; align policies and programs; and design for non-motorized travel.⁴

Bicycle Share Program

The Chattanooga Bicycle Transit System boasts a bicycle share program with a fleet of 300 bicycles and 31 docking stations⁵. It is the largest bike share per capita in the nation and in 2013, the bike share was used for 210,000 miles of trips¹. The program is overseen by Outdoor Chattanooga, part of the city’s Parks and Recreation department⁵. The city works with businesses to provide their employees with subsidized rentals⁷ and also partners with businesses in order to provide sponsorships⁸. Aside from the sheer amount of usage, city staff are also proud of the diversity of the individuals who use the bike share program¹. “For us, it has never been about the

bicycles, it has always been about the cultural shift. We want people out riding more.” said Stefanie deOlloqui, Associate Director of the Active Living and Transportation Network in Chattanooga¹.

“Travel Shed”

During future construction of the city, Chattanooga’s updated bicycle master plan suggested creating diverse transit options in order to make bicycling and walking a more viable option⁴. After hearing a speaker from Cleveland’s Bus Rapid Transit System, Chattanooga’s Transportation Director, Blythe Bailey, was introduced to the term “travel shed”, similar to a watershed⁶. By looking at transportation networks as similar to water networks you can view transportation in a much wider lens; residential streets, highways, and interstates can then be seen as creeks, streams, and rivers that, instead of moving water through Chattanooga, are moving people⁶.

“City Traffic, Transportation, Engineering, and Public Works staff need to buy into the understanding that providing multi-modal transportation is part of their job just as much as hanging traffic signals, picking up garbage, or addressing stormwater.”

- Ben Taylor, Traffic Engineer, City of Chattanooga²

COLLABORATION

Community Involvement

The City of Chattanooga placed great emphasis on community input in creating new bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. The hallmark of Chattanooga’s bicycle and pedestrian network, the Walnut Street Bridge, was slated for demolition after being struck by a barge. However, through a grassroots effort by the community, it was redeveloped into a pedestrian bridge.^{1,2} In 2002, it was also community input that led to creation of Chattanooga’s on-road bike facilities.²

Local foundations also play a large role in creating bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure projects in Chattanooga. The Lyndhurst Foundation, Benwood Foundation, and Maclellan Foundation all support bicycle and pedestrian projects due to their environmental, health, and community benefits.⁶

Chattanooga also uses an innovative approach to gain feedback at community meetings. Charrettes is a process that allows citizens to view a blank map of the city and draw projects on the map that they would like to see implemented.¹ “You cannot discount the community will,” said deOlloqui.¹ Chattanooga redefines traditional community meetings by encouraging officials to discuss their infrastructure plans as “visioning meetings.”¹ The city works with partners, including universities, the health department, Bike/Walk Chattanooga, Safe Routes to Schools, and the Bike and Pedestrian Task Force to increase awareness of bicycling and walking¹. Chattanooga also hosts events, such as the US Handcycling Criterium National Championships, to increase awareness.^{1,9}

CONNECTION

Economic Development

Chattanooga has experienced an industrial resurgence over the past years. Companies such as Volkswagen have been drawn to the area in part because of the “intangibles” the city provides.¹ For example, the power company Alstom specifically noted the location of Chattanooga’s river trail in front of their facility as a reason for establishing their manufacturing plant in the city.¹ Furthermore, conference hosts have found the city bike share program an appealing incentive for conducting meetings in Chattanooga¹.

Biking and Walking as Transportation

For Philip Pugliese, Director of the Active Living and Transportation Network in Chattanooga, it is important to make bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure a natural part of any conversation regarding new transportation projects.¹



Above: The Walnut Street Bridge, a pedestrian bridge, in Chattanooga, TN. *Image credit: Tatiana Riddle*

REVIEW OF FINDINGS:

Fayetteville, Arkansas

Overview

In 2010, Fayetteville was awarded the Bronze - Bicycle Friendly Community Award by the League of American Bicyclists.¹⁰ Fayetteville has an extensive trail system that runs North/South and spans the entire length of the city. The trail connects to the University of Arkansas, neighborhoods, several parks, the Northwest Regional Mall, and to the regional Razorback Greenway. The trail is an important transportation route for people, especially University of Arkansas students. Currently, the trail work is overseen by Fayetteville's Trails Coordinator, Matthew Mihalevich. To build and maintain trails, Mihalevich works with a crew of nine construction workers from the Transportation Division.¹¹

COLLABORATION

Developing partnerships

Fayetteville's trail system functions through collaborative efforts of the Engineering Department, the Transportation Division, and the Parks and Recreation Department. These departments work to build 2-3 miles of trail every year.¹¹ Mihalevich explained that the maintenance and upkeep of the trail system is divided up between the Parks and Recreation Department and the Transportation Division.¹¹

Mihalevich also stated that general maintenance such as mowing, cleaning, and sweeping of the trails is the job of the Parks and Recreation Department while pavement and lighting maintenance is the responsibility of the Transportation Division. Fayetteville also works with community members to help maintain its trail system through the "Adopt a Trail" program, based on the "Adopt a Highway" model.

The Parks and Recreation Department also houses the Fayetteville Alternative Transportation Trail (FATT) Master Plan that outlines the current trail

system and over 100 miles of future projects.¹¹ The Engineering Department handles the in-house construction and supports the nine person crew when needed.

Education and Outreach

The main advocacy group in Fayetteville, the Bicycle Coalition of the Ozarks (BCO), plays a collaborative role with the City of Fayetteville. Mihalevich noted that the city is very efficient at building trails, but is often not as successful in reaching out to communities.¹¹ In order to achieve these goals, the city works closely with BCO to integrate education and outreach.¹¹ Paxton Roberts, the Executive Director of BCO, discussed a program that has existed for several years in Fayetteville's public schools. The program teaches safety and riding skills to children.¹¹ "It's a lot harder to get people our age to get out of cars and ride our bikes," explained Mr. Roberts, "...but if we start with the younger generation ... then hopefully that will stay on as they get older."¹¹

Political Support

"To get elected in Fayetteville you have to be a



Above: Intersection of street and trail in Fayetteville, AR. Cyclists and walkers can push a button to initiate a stoplight for street traffic in order to cross. *Image credit: Rebecca Zimmermann*



Above: A bridge of the Lake Fayetteville Trail. Image credit: Experience Fayetteville. Retrieved from: www.experiencefayetteville.com/images/homeslideshow/freshair_920_370.jpg

supporter of the trails program,” said Jeremy Pate, the Director of Development Services.¹¹ Pate also said that the trail system is in the “forefront of a lot of people’s minds.”¹¹ Former Mayor Dan Coody was instrumental in gaining support of the trail system.¹¹ In addition, the Current Mayor Lioneld Jordan has been “an advocate for improved city streets with sidewalks and bike lanes and for funding the expansion of our multi-use trails system.”¹⁰

CONNECTION

Local Assets

Part of the success of the Fayetteville Trail system has been through catering to needs of the University of Arkansas students. The trail system offers a way of transportation for students who do not have vehicles.¹¹ Fayetteville is also an integral partner in a regional trail system called the Razorback Greenway. The Razorback Greenway spans 36 miles and connects six different cities.¹²

Through the efforts of public-private partnerships, The Walton Family Foundation was able to contribute \$15 million towards completing the entire trail.¹²

INNOVATION

Budgeting

The City of Fayetteville budgets \$1.5 million dollars a year on trail development which enables them to match federal grants or complete projects on their own. Just a few years ago, Fayetteville regularly debated whether or not to have a budget allocation for trails, but that debate ended once citizens embraced the vision of a comprehensive trail system.¹¹ Pate said, “It makes sense. People buy-in and they get it, you know. And for a lot of communities getting that first trail can be the hardest part.”¹¹

**“To get elected in Fayetteville,
you have to be a supporter of the
Trails program.”**

*- Jeremy Pate, Director of Development
Services, City of Fayetteville¹¹*

REVIEW OF FINDINGS:

Memphis, Tennessee



Above: In front of entrance to City Hall in Memphis, TN. *Image credit: Rebecca Zimmermann*

Overview

In 2010, Memphis was voted one of the “worst” cities for bicycle-friendliness in *Bicycling* magazine. Just two years later, in 2012, Memphis was voted “most improved bicycling city in 2012”¹³. With the adoption of a Complete Streets policy in 2013 by Mayor AC Wharton, the city is on track to complete 45 miles of bicycle and pedestrian facilities and trips being taken by bicycle are estimated at 5,000 a day.¹³

INNOVATION

Utilizing Old Infrastructure

According to the State of Bicycling 2014 report, Memphis has invested much of its resources in repaving projects to add bicycle lanes to streets where applicable.¹³ Kyle Wagenschutz, the Bicycle and

Pedestrian Coordinator for the City of Memphis, said the repaving and restriping projects are utilized to increase infrastructure for bicycles and did not cost the city any additional budgetary funding.¹⁴ Wagenschutz’s position is located in the Engineering Department, giving him quick and easy access to the repaving and restriping schedule of the city. He receives the city’s repaving and restriping schedule for the year and plans bicycle lanes for those projects based on traffic counts, current road conditions, and whether or not the street is aligned with the city’s Bicycle Master Plan.¹⁴ Through this process, Memphis has doubled the amount of bicycle facilities from 2010 to 2013 and anticipates doubling facilities again by 2016.

Wagenschutz also collaborates with the Community Development Council of Greater Memphis to distribute federally funded projects. This process saves time for the developers to find funding opportunities and projects to implement and allows more time to address implementation.¹⁴

In Memphis, 100% of the bus transit fleet is equipped to carry bicycles. Wagenschutz posed the question, “How do we get more people on bikes and also how do we expand the reach of transit services without actually spending money to make transit go to new places?”¹⁴

“Part of what we do is try to make sure that all the initiatives we work on are connecting to issues people think about on a daily basis.”

- Paul Young, Administrator, Memphis and Shelby County Office of Sustainability¹⁴



Above: Shelby Farms Greenline in Memphis, TN. This green line was once an active railroad line and was converted to a bicycle and pedestrian trail with the Rails to Trails Conservancy. *Image credit: Rebecca Zimmermann*

Funding

Repaving and restriping city streets is one way to effectively add bicycle lanes to the roads without increasing cost, but other projects may require substantial funding. Currently, federal grants cover about 80% of expenses associated with bicycle infrastructure, with the remaining 20% of funds coming from the city.¹⁴ For 2014-2016, Memphis has 157 federally funded bicycle projects that total 129.79 miles of infrastructure.¹⁵ Of those, 50.78 miles of infrastructure was through repaving and restriping.¹³ These projects include bicycle lanes, cycle tracks, shared use paths, marked shared roadways, and signed shared roadways.¹⁵ The average length a project was .82 miles.¹⁵

School Programs

Memphis has 20 to 30 schools that participate in a Bike to School day and has rolled out a new program, Ride for Reading, in which individuals deliver school books via bicycle. There is even one school that implements a Bike to School event every week in which over 100 children participate.¹⁴

Community Buy-In
According to Paul Young, Administrator of the Memphis and Shelby County Office of Sustainability, “The things we have done that have had the most engagement have been the community surveys.”¹⁴ The surveys are distributed through paper and digital format. Another method the city uses to engage its community is through a Geographic Information System (GIS) tool that allows residents and business owners to drop a pin at their property and leave

comments about what type of bicycle or pedestrian facilities should be adjacent to their property.¹⁴

Furthermore, the demographics of Memphis are very different from the average demographics of the United States. The United States’ average proportion of Blacks or African Americans was 13.1% in 2012, whereas the most recent census of Memphis showed that 63.3% of Memphis’s population are Black or African American.¹⁶ Young noted that the Blacks or African Americans demographic has a higher impoverished number of people that often question the benefits and purpose of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, although Blacks or African Americans happen to be among some of the fastest growing groups of riders with bicycle trips doubling from 2001-2009.¹⁷ Young explains, “Part of what we try to do is make sure that all of the initiatives we work on are connecting to issues people think about on a daily basis.”¹⁴

REVIEW OF FINDINGS:

Austin, Texas

Overview

In 2009, Austin updated its 1998 Bicycle Master Plan, which envisions “nearly 750 miles of bicycle lanes, 9 miles of bicycle boulevards, and over 300 miles of multi-use paths.”¹⁸ The plan sets a benchmark to complete 100% of its bicycle network by 2030 and emphasizes that a dedicated staff and budget allocation are crucial to developing a bicycle-friendly Austin.¹⁸ In 2009, Austin had a 1,451-mile bicycle network and in 2013 alone, added 37.8 miles of bicycle routes.²¹ In 2013, Austin also built 66,270 linear feet of ADA compliant sidewalks.²¹ Projects are funded through grants, bonds, and a ‘transportation user fee’, which is about \$6 per month, and is included in the utility bill for each household.²⁰

INNOVATION

Leadership and Staff Empowerment

Howard Lazarus the Public Works Director for the City of Austin, said, “Leadership at the senior level is really important. You have to decide what you’re going to design for. Some department heads are



Above: Example of a street designed to accommodate multi-modal transportation in Austin, TX.
Image credit: Rebecca Zimmermann

“Instead of being engineers, we are “imagineers” who really apply principles and practices as opposed to flipping through the books and finding a standard.”

- Gary Schatz, Assistant Director of Transportation & Traffic Engineer, City of Austin¹⁹

willing to work together. It’s an environment that builds upon itself. Once you see what you can do, people are more expansive in their thinking.”¹⁹ Mr. Lazarus also discussed that often, city officials get tied up in doing only one job, so it is up to the senior staff to consistently encourage their staff to identify ways in which they can work together and accomplish mutual goals. He went on to say: “Funding drives a lot of collaborations, if you really want to get things done...If you sit down and take a step back, you have to see the big picture and see where collaboration can happen.”¹⁹

Other city officials echoed this sentiment. John Eastman, a Project Manager in the Neighborhood Connectivity Division, talked about the necessity of empowering staff at the ground level in order to be more effective. “When I on-boarded 3 years ago, they [senior officials] said ‘yeah, go out and do interesting projects. I’m here to back you up, I want you to do these things.’ That really empowered the staff that’s out in the field to go make things happen rather than constantly asking for permission.”¹⁹



Above: Green line, or a protected bicycle lane, near the University of Texas-Austin campus on Guadalupe Street in Austin. Image credit: PeopleforBikes. Retrieved from: archinect.com/news/article/91832887/protected-bike-lanes-strengthen-city-economy-report-finds

function even though it was owned and sponsored by the Parks Department, so we funded it with a transportation bond.”¹⁹

Building Trust with Communities

Having programs like Safe-Routes-to-School or crossing guards are helpful ways to interact with communities in Austin to determine the bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure communities would most like to see.¹⁹ Austin’s Neighborhood Partnering program, established three years ago, enables communities to draw up projects for their community and submit those to the City of Austin, allowing for community ownership of projects.¹⁹ A conditionality of implementing these projects is that the community agrees to contribute towards the cost of the project, whether

through direct financial support or donated services.¹⁹

In addition, Lazarus highlighted the importance of direct communication with communities: “We’ve changed the way we do outreach in the community. We go door to door and I don’t think we’ve always done that in the past, and we work strongly with the community leadership.”¹⁹ Moreover, Schatz said, “Be smart about how you engage and be inclusive... the wheels fall off because now instead of doing something **for** the community, you’re doing something **to** the community. Big difference.”¹⁹

Nathan Wilkes, an Engineer Associate in Austin’s Bicycle Program, said that all community outreach is a process and depends on the type of projects that

COLLABORATION

Integrating Public Works and Transportation Department

According to Lazarus, “The vertical integration through the two departments [Public Works and Transportation Department] for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure has been a key way to get more work done, more quickly. The partnership has been great and brings company skill sets together and I think over the last 5 years we have made some extraordinary progress.”¹⁹

For example, the Boardwalk Trail at Lady Bird Lake in Austin was funded with a transportation bond. Robert Spillar, Director of Transportation for the City of Austin, said, “Collectively, we decided the boardwalk served an important transportation

REVIEW OF FINDINGS:

Austin, Texas



Above: Preparing to rent a bicycle through Austin’s bicycle share program, Austin B-Cycle. *Image credit: Rebecca Zimmermann*

engineering. Eastman gave an example of effective partnerships: “We were able to build 150 feet of sidewalk, a rain garden, and relocated this intersection and we were able to do it because of partnerships. Our contracting methodology allowed us to implement that on a really accelerated schedule.”¹⁹

Spillar noted that often, other agencies say that their funding can’t be used for bicycles or public transit, but “The reality of municipal funding in the future is that you can’t have silos anymore.”¹⁹ Furthermore, Spillar talked about the process of identifying needs in specific areas and then locating funding sources that could be combined to build the infrastructure.¹⁹

Mark Cole, Sidewalk Program Manager for the Neighborhood Connectivity Division, said, “We’ve had some real advantages at the staff level because we’ve been able to participate with some outside entities like CapMetro [Austin’s transit system] and TexDot, where it doesn’t have to be such an overall agreement. It can be smaller scale and we can go to our management and tell them we’re doing this and say don’t worry.”¹⁹

are implemented; if projects are more controversial, more public meetings will take place.²⁰ Wilkes went on to say, “Almost every project is made better by public input.”²⁰ While city officials are sometimes constrained by mandates of pre-existing plans, “The physical nature of what we do on the street to make it safe is something we do have flexibility about and we repeatedly communicate that to stakeholders through public meetings or mailers.”²⁰

Developing Partnerships

City officials discussed not only working across agencies, such as Public Works and the Texas Department of Transportation, but also working across disciplines, such as architecture and

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