THE GREEN LINE WALKABILITY SURVEY

A “Routes to Rails” Project

of the

District Councils Collaborative of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

and Neighborhood Partners

Presentation by Anne White

for the

2012 Rail~Volution Conference

Hollywood CA, October 17, 2012
The Green Line in the Central Corridor

District Councils Collaborative of Saint Paul and Minneapolis
www.dcc-stpaul-mpls.org
District Councils Collaborative of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

2006 – DCC Created
• Purpose: To ensure that community concerns are addressed in planning for Central Corridor LRT and that benefits are equitably distributed
• Membership: Neighborhood planning councils along Central Corridor

2006-2010 – Focus on LRT Planning & Construction
• Equitable access to transit -- 3 stations added to LRT alignment
• Equitable development & employment opportunities
• Maintain neighborhood livability & adequate supply of affordable housing
• LRT construction planning & communications, minority hiring
• Community engagement & representation on decision-making bodies

2011-2012 – Accessing the Green Line – the “Routes to Rails” Project
• Bus Connections – “Transit, More Than a Ride” Trusted Advocate Pilot
• Walking to the Station – “Last Mile to the Green Line” Walkability Survey
The problem: how will people get to the Green Line if they’re walking?
Two years to opening day for the Green Line...

It’s a mess!

- Businesses struggling
- No on-street parking
- Traffic jams
- Confusing detours
- Treacherous pedestrian crossings
- Jackhammers
- Construction trucks
- Dust and dirt

When will it end?
Looking to the future...
What will it be like to walk to the Green Line when it opens in 2014?
Walkability Matters

It’s anticipated that 50 – 80% of people riding the Central Corridor Green Line will be *walking* to a station.

**Challenging conditions:**
- Sidewalks in disrepair
- Traffic speeding
- Areas that feel unsafe
- Worse in low income neighborhoods

**Results if not addressed:**
- Fewer people will walk
- Elderly, handicapped & low income most impacted
- LRT ridership will decline
Purpose of the Walkability Survey

1. Motivate people to walk to their future light rail station

2. Gather on-the-ground concrete feedback about major issues that would discourage walking to the Green Line

3. Use data collected to help government agencies prioritize issues to be addressed

4. Advocate for implementation of needed improvements before the Green Line opens in 2014
The Walkability Survey Tool

- Developed with input from public sector staff, nonprofit organizations & academic institutions

- Four sections:
  1. Demographic data
  2. Maps for each station area to input spatial data of assets & problems
  3. Ranking of walkability indicators from 1 to 5 by strength or weakness
  4. Listing of top three pleasant aspects and top three challenges

- Opportunity to submit photos & videos
- 200 4-color paper surveys printed for each station area
- Shorter online Survey Monkey version developed with Google mapping
Walkability Survey Launched

April
• Recruit survey participants & leaders
• Training session

May - June
• May 6th group walks & kickoff event
• Community members walk to stations & complete surveys
Implementing & Promoting the Walkability Survey

**What worked?**

- **Walkability Survey Kickoff:** 100+ people walked to stations with neighbors & attended opening event with Charles Landry
- **Collaboration:** Partnered with community organizations to recruit participants & lead walks
- **Leadership Training:** Designed to motivate station area leadership teams
- **Multiple Ways to Provide Input:** Options for paper or electronic surveys
Implementing & Promoting the Walkability Survey

What were the lessons learned?

• Set realistic goals: 100 people per station (1500 overall) was too ambitious.

• Keep the survey short and simple: When we shortened the online survey, the number of submissions increased dramatically.

• Allow a longer time period for the survey: The original 3-week timeframe was too short.

• Plan for adequate staff & volunteer resources: The project turned out to be far more complicated & labor-intensive than anticipated.

• Engage as many community leaders and groups as possible: In station areas with active neighborhood leaders many more surveys were done.

• Develop and adequately resource a strategic publicity and outreach plan: Despite a lot of interest and enthusiasm for the survey, we often did not have the capacity to adequately follow up.
The Walkability Survey Analysis

375 surveys submitted with data from 14 stations

- 1130+ map notations with locations where problems were encountered
- 1195+ comments about pedestrian realm concerns & assets

Comments & map notations sorted into four categories

- Physical Environment – sidewalks, parks & gardens, buildings, trees, litter
- Traffic & Safety – speeding cars, pedestrian lighting, bikes on sidewalks
- Accessibility – crosswalks, curb ramps, missing sidewalks, snow removal
- Walking Experience – Street life, urban design, views, noise level, signage

Data mapped & analyzed for each station area & corridor-wide

- 48 station area maps & 3 corridor-wide maps were produced
The Physical Environment

Problems encountered
• 45% of concerns corridor-wide about the physical environment.
• The #1 issue was the condition of sidewalks.

Positive aspects of the walk
• 56% of positive comments were about the physical environment.
• Mainly shade trees, parks, historical landmarks & proximity to LRT.

“The sidewalks are in a lot worse shape than I realized, particularly if you use a mobility device.”
Downtown Walkability Survey Participant
Traffic and Safety

Problems encountered

- 29% of concerns corridor-wide were about traffic and safety.
- The #1 issue was traffic going too fast and not yielding to pedestrians in crosswalks.

“What were the biggest problems? Speeding and careless driving, no regard for pedestrians, especially at I-94.” Dale Station Area Resident
The Top Three Survey Findings

The #1 issue was the condition of sidewalks.

As one survey participant noted: “Lots of cracked and narrow sidewalks – not very accommodating for seniors and folks with disabilities.”

1. A quality sidewalk is the foundation of walkability.

The problem: Building and maintaining sidewalks is not generally a high priority and is frequently under-funded or not funded at all.

The solution: The Walkability Survey began building public awareness of sidewalk conditions & the importance of good walking routes to LRT.
2. Traffic calming is essential to create safe walking routes to LRT.

The problem: Speeding traffic is most often a problem on arterials and when entering or exiting freeway ramps. These locations are generally considered the most dangerous places to walk, but they are often the shortest and most direct route to the station.

The solution: The Walkability Survey clearly identifies the need for traffic calming, marked crosswalks & curb ramps at every corner, good pedestrian level street lamps and longer times allowed for pedestrians to cross at traffic signals to make people feel safer and more comfortable walking to LRT.
Walkers took special note of the presence or absence of shade trees. Where shade trees were lacking, especially in industrial areas, the route was described as bleak and desolate.

3. The urban forest plays a critical role in the pedestrian realm.

The problem: Trees are often missing from industrial areas and surface parking lots that pedestrians must cross to get to their destination.

The solution: The Walkability Survey identified a number of locations where shade trees are missing. The survey findings will help make the case for greening the primary connecting streets that people will use to walk from their neighborhoods to the train.
Other Issues...
Next Steps

- Share findings with the community

- Present report to elected officials and government agencies

- Work with the Disability Community to develop new survey tools

- Co-convene a workshop that explores the relationship between economic development and the pedestrian realm

- Share the Walkability Survey tool and lessons learned with other groups in the Twin Cities

- Share our experience nationally and support inclusion of pedestrian realm improvements as part of New Starts projects.
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FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE SURVEY
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