

Ann Arbor Lower Town Mobility Study

Stakeholder Interview Summary

Throughout December 2019, consultant staff performed a series of stakeholder interviews with groups around Ann Arbor that have a knowledge of the Lower Town area, an interest in improving mobility within the City of Ann Arbor, and/or represent specific interest groups. The OHM team scheduled interviews with 10 different stakeholder groups. The groups were chosen by staff from the City of Ann Arbor and the consultant team to ensure that a broad and diverse representation of all viewpoints was achieved. The stakeholder groups and individuals shown in Table 1 below were interviewed for the Lower Town Study:

Table 1: Lower Town Stakeholder Groups

Stakeholder Group	Date of Interview	Attendees
Ann Arbor City Council	12/2/19	Jeff Hayner
University of Michigan	12/2/19	Sue Gott
		Sven Sawin
		Steve Dolen
Ann Arbor Public Schools	12/2/19	Liz Margolis
		Tina Carmichael
		Meg Fenech
		Carlene Colvin-Garcia
Transit and Commuting	12/5/19	Chris Simmons
		Ken Anderson
Regional Agencies (MDOT & WATS)	12/5/19	Kari Martin
		Laurent Fournier
		Ryan Buck
Neighborhood Groups	12/16/19	Laura Stowe
		Tom Stalberg
People with Disabilities	12/16/19	Alex Gossage
Lower Town Businesses	12/17/19	N/A
City of Ann Arbor	12/17/19	Molly Maciejewski
		Kathleen Summergill
		Hillary Hanzel
		Brett Lenart
		Luke Liu
Walking and Biking Advocacy	12/18/19	Nate Phipps
		Valarie Shinaberger
		Larry Deck

Each stakeholder interview consisted of a small group of individuals, between one and four people in most cases. The number of individuals invited to each stakeholder group interview varied between two and 12, depending on the group. The two Ann Arbor city council members that represent Ward 1 (where Lower Town is located) were invited. The 12 businesses and 10 neighborhood associations located in the Lower Town neighborhood were also all invited, however no representatives from the neighborhood business stakeholder group were able to join. In order to capture as much input as possible from the

stakeholders, the project team will develop a four-question online survey to send to those who were unable to join the interviews. The survey will consist of the same questions asked in the interview.

Interview Results

After meeting with and talking to the diverse group of stakeholders representing the Lower Town Neighborhood, the project team was able to identify some common themes related to mobility in the area. Many of the same issues were raised by each group but opinions varied on how to fix the problems.

Mobility Issues

Traffic

Volume and speed of vehicular traffic are the most common issues heard regarding transportation in the Study Area. A variety of reasons for the traffic were cited by the various groups that were interviewed, including:

- New development and growing population
- Commuters from outside Ann Arbor to University of Michigan Hospital
- A2 STEAM parents dropping off and picking up students
- Fewer walkable businesses
- Disconnected walking and biking facilities

Many of the individuals who were interviewed talked about the traffic problems leading to additional problems in the neighborhood. Groups mentioned that it can be hard to turn or get through certain intersections due to backups, on-street parking in the neighborhood is becoming scarce, and the growing traffic makes walking and biking feel unsafe.

Traffic Safety

The groups interviewed discussed a number of areas in the study area that have traffic safety issues, for both vehicles and non-motorized users. The following areas were identified:

- Broadway St at Plymouth Rd – no buffer between sidewalk and road
- Pontiac Trail at Swift St – speeding drivers hit guardrail, needs traffic calming
- Barton Dr at M-14 – frequent crashes
- Division St at Detroit St – heavy congestion at times, confusing intersection design and related signage
- Moore St/Pontiac Trail/Longshore Dr signals are confusing to navigate through
- Pontiac Trail at Barton Dr – perceived as a dangerous intersection by non-motorized users
- Barton Dr near M-14 – street is narrow, pushes cyclists to sidewalk
- Division St at Broadway Bridge – vehicles speeding, bike lane ends abruptly, vehicles coming up Carey St can't see bikes

Traffic Speed

Most of the individuals interviewed cited vehicle traffic speed as an issue through the neighborhood. Issues depend on the area in the neighborhood, the time of day, and amount of congestion. At certain times of the day, in certain areas, vehicles travel too fast. Stakeholders identified Pontiac Trail, Barton Drive, Plymouth Road, Division Street, and Broadway Street as roadways where motorists are driving too fast. During the peak travel period, these same streets can have very slow traffic speeds causing

backups through the neighborhood. Interviewees are concerned about fast moving vehicles as this poses a safety risk to non-motorized users and children in the area.

New Development

Lower Town has seen a huge influx of development over the past few years, especially north of Barton Drive along Pontiac Trail. A large new development is currently being constructed at Broadway Street and Maiden Lane. Stakeholders are concerned about the new developments in a variety of ways. The new developments have reduced parking requirements, with the aim to reduce car ownership by making it harder or more expensive for residents to park. However, many of the new residents are parking an additional car on other neighborhood streets for free, limiting parking for the people who live on the street.

A common issue heard from the stakeholders is that although development is high density, no additional retail has been added to the neighborhood. This means that residents must drive to take care of many basic daily needs. Many residents get stuck in traffic traveling to the grocery because they are competing with commuters, school drop offs and others who are moving through the neighborhood. True mixed-use development connected to the surrounding neighborhood may help relieve congestion for residents.

Limited Access to New Developments

The new developments along Pontiac Trail, north of Barton Drive, that consist of townhouses, duplexes, and other higher density residential housing types have been constructed without being connected into the existing street grid, only to the main streets. This forces residents to use the same major roadways that everyone is using rather than distributing through the neighborhoods, increasing traffic on the main streets.

Commuting

Many employees working downtown and at the University of Michigan Hospital use Barton Drive, Pontiac Trail, and Plymouth Road as main routes to and from work. These routes have become highly congested during the peak commuting times and is exacerbated during school drop off and pick up times at the A2 STEAM school. The essential cause of this is due to the limited crossing points of the Huron River. Additionally, many employees working at the Hospital park in the Lower Town Neighborhood and walk to work, limiting parking for the residents of the street.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Connectivity

Many stakeholders discussed the lack of connectivity between existing sidewalks, bike lanes, and non-motorized trails. This is a major impediment to encouraging bicycle and pedestrian travel because those who are interested in non-motorized travel may not feel comfortable or safe using the areas lacking facilities. This also leads to safety issues with pedestrians walking in the street and bicyclists switching between dedicated bike facilities and riding in the travel lane. Some intersections are lacking in safe and visible crossing infrastructure as well.

Pedestrian Safety Around A2 STEAM

The A2 STEAM school is located in the neighborhood and many parents and teachers are concerned about the safety of students accessing the school. Since becoming A2 STEAM in 2014, the school has

gone from about 200 students and staff to 635. The school is a magnet school and students from all around Ann Arbor attend, meaning there are a lot of pick ups and drop offs that happen each day. Parents are now encouraged to drop students off at lots near the school where they can easily walk over. Some of the streets adjacent to the school are lacking connected sidewalks which can pose safety hazards for young children walking to school, especially with the commuter traffic through the neighborhood. School officials and parents successfully applied for and received a Safe Routes to School infrastructure grant for sidewalks but were unable to construct any sidewalks due to neighborhood resident backlash.

Public Transit

Most of the stakeholders view public transit as a viable option to reduce single occupancy vehicle trips in the area, but the service offered by TheRide and the UM bus service is not as convenient or frequent enough to encourage more people to stop driving. Some of the issues with transit service in the neighborhood are related to traffic on Pontiac Trail and Plymouth Road, which slows buses down and makes trips inconvenient. Other issues were related to the lack of coordination between UM and TheRide in regard to route and schedule planning.

Other Issues

There were other issues heard from those interviewed that were not as universal as the previous statements but are still important. The following comments below were mentioned by multiple groups interviewed:

- Argo Pond & Cascades area parking in the summer overwhelms neighborhood and creates pedestrian safety hazards
- Snow removal and trash pickup on streets with bike lanes can be difficult
- Steep grades at certain areas in the neighborhood can make cycling and walking more difficult, especially for those with mobility restrictions

Opportunities

Most of the opportunities discussed by the groups interviewed centered around the need to increase travel using alternative modes of transportation (walking, biking, public transit, carpool, etc.) to reduce traffic in the neighborhood. Many of the residents of the study area are interested in using other modes of transportation but either find travel not convenient enough or are not entirely comfortable with the trip.

Public Transit

There are a number of AAATA transit routes that travel through the study area, specifically on Plymouth Road and Pontiac Trail. Interviewees mentioned that more frequency of service, more direct routing, and upgraded amenities like shelters would help encourage residents to use transit more often. TheRide is currently looking at implementing Transit Signal Priority along Plymouth Road to speed up service.

Enhanced Pedestrian Connection to Hospital

Maiden Lane is a major connection point to the UM Hospital Complex, especially for pedestrians. A large number of hospital employees live in the Lower Town area and walk to work. Additionally, two new parking garages on Maiden Lane provide parking for hospital employees. The small sidewalks, steep hill,

bridge and busy crossings make this street less than ideal for pedestrians. Improving the comfort of the street may help encourage more pedestrian trips and a more comfortable last mile trip from a nearby bus route to the hospital.

Non-motorized Connections

The Lower Town area contains many bicycle and pedestrian facilities that make up the greater non-motorized network. There are opportunities to better connect the existing facilities to provide seamless connections between the activity centers in Lower Town. Many of the missing connections exist at the Plymouth/Maiden/Pontiac Trail intersection, which is not a comfortable place to ride a bicycle.

Additionally, a non-motorized connection to the Border to Border trail at Fuller Rd is needed. Improving these connections with safe, visible infrastructure could help encourage more non-motorized travel.

Maximize Comfort of Bicycles and Pedestrians

Building upon the opportunity for improved non-motorized connections, many of the interviewees mentioned that maximizing the safety and comfort for non-motorized users will help encourage walking and biking. The goal is to get the people who are “interested but concerned” about a walking or biking commute to feel safe and comfortable while traveling by introducing more protected facilities and seamless connections.

Transit-Oriented, Mixed-Use Development

Many of the groups were concerned about the lack of retail development that is available in the Study Area. An opportunity that was brought up many times was incorporating true mixed-use buildings into these developments that would allow for additional neighborhood retail. Pairing mixed-use with transit-oriented development design principles could help encourage more walking, biking, and transit trips and help reduce traffic.

Contextual Information

The following comments related to the existing mobility issues and potential solutions were made by the interviewed individuals as context for the discussions:

- Pontiac Trail residents living on Township parcels have issues with sidewalk maintenance and do not plow or remove snow, which discourages pedestrian use
- Lower wage workers can't afford to live in Ann Arbor and need to drive to work which is causing congestion during commute times
- Rapid growth at the A2 STEAM school is contributing to congestion
- People perceive vehicle issues as the #1 safety concern and overlook safety of children walking and biking
- Lack of true mixed-use development is causing distrust from residents and leading to congestion
- There is little collaboration between UM and TheRide transit agencies
- A paradigm shift is needed to get people out of their cars – better non-motorized and transit facilities may help
- Safety is a unifying message and can help justify otherwise contested measures like speed reduction, sidewalk connections, and bike infrastructure

Online Engagement

The Lower Town Mobility Study interviews were not attended by all of the identified stakeholders and as a way to gather additional information from the public, the project team developed an online version of the interview questions and sent them to those stakeholders that missed. The project team used Survey Monkey to pose the same questions asked in the interview to the remaining stakeholders.

Four additional stakeholders responded, and their responses are displayed below.

- What are the most important issues that exist in Lower Town?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Vehicle Traffic	75.00% 3
Vehicle Speed	50.00% 2
Bicycle and Pedestrian Connectivity	50.00% 2
Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety	25.00% 1
Traffic Safety	25.00% 1
Commuting	0.00% 0
Public Transit	50.00% 2
New Development	0.00% 0
Total Respondents: 4	

- What other existing transportation issues do you see in Lower Town? (open ended)
 - Walkability
 - In my opinion, we are getting too much dense development in this traffic flow challenged area. U/M building more and more parking structures is NOT helping.
 - Stopped at lights with no crossing traffic.
- What opportunities do you see to improve transportation conditions in Lower Town?
 - More bike lanes - less requirements for parking - greater transportation options.
 - Keep the train station where it is, so those arriving and departing from the station don't have to negotiate the mess on Broadway/Maiden Lane/Fuller. Support the light rail bills coming up for a vote. We must have more effective, safe, and responsive traffic lights/ped. crossings. What about closing off Maiden Lane so it doesn't connect Plymouth Rd. with Fuller? Have it open to Fuller, but close it off at Broadway. No round about please!!!! That will NOT make bike/ped transit safe.
 - Vehicle congestion.
- What goals do you have for this project?
 - Greater walkability and higher quality of life for the region
 - Look at this from the view of the pedestrian first. If this doesn't work for pedestrians you will never achieve a goal of less vehicular traffic. This city is paying taxes to subsidize U/M caused traffic messes. They need to step up more. We need safe passage for pedestrians and cyclists from housing area to town in all directions.
 - Less vehicle traffic.
- How can you or your organization assist in the development of the study?

- I live here and walk lots. Ride my bike lots. Use buses a lot. And drive. The intersection of Maiden Lane/Moore/Broadway/Plymouth is very dangerous -- I've witnessed as many as 3 near misses with cars trying to make turns on a Sunday morning in just a 15 minute time. Please ask residents who live in the apartments on Wall Street and Maiden Lane to participate. Put flyers in their doors. Whatever you must do. These folks are held hostage to commutes at both ends of the day. Why not just close off Wall Street and Maiden Lane at the west end to through traffic? That would stop much of the mess for people living on those streets. Please do lots and lots of planning and walking on foot on site.
- Surveys like this.