



2015 Walk Bike Nashville Vice-Mayoral/Council Candidate Questionnaire

Name of Candidate: Freddie O'Connell

Office Sought (Vice-Mayor, Metro-Council): Metro Council

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1. If (re)elected what would you do to promote walking and biking in Nashville and ensure all Nashvillians, regardless of who they are and where they are trying to go, have access to real transportation options?

One of the best things I can do to promote walking and riding is to walk and ride myself. Beyond that, I would encourage the incoming mayor to ensure that the Nashville Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC, of which I was an inaugural member and on which I continue to server) remain a key part of the mayor's office. From my experience on BPAC, I would also work to establish a complete streets policy that went beyond an executive order that ensured that all users of Nashville's roadways—pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and motorists—had equitable access. As a long-time board member of Nashville MTA and former board member of Walk/Bike Nashville, and as a formerly car-free individual in Nashville, I would generally prioritize meaningful mobility options as policy and seek appropriate resources to implement these options.

2. The [Strategic Plan for Sidewalks and Bikeways](#), which prioritizes where to build new sidewalks and bikeways, was last updated in 2008- before Nashville began experiencing explosive growth. The plan was slated to be updated every 5 years, and thus is due for an update. What should our priorities for walking and biking be in the next version? How would you go about updating the plan?

The priorities should be driven by a complete streets outlook. I would update the plan by incorporating BPAC's connectivity study, which highlighted projects that would enhance Nashville's overall multimodal connectivity, into the PGI. It might also be good to create refined weightings based on NashvilleNext. I think it would be particularly helpful to have a living appendix and/or annual report that identified all local, state, and federal funding opportunities, whether we applied for them, and what the results were. Generally, having some sort of annual report on progress with basic resources



analysis would be useful. Finally, I think the plan should be transferred to Metro Planning for ongoing updates and administration.

3. In 2014, 18 pedestrians were killed, and many more injured, on the roads of Davidson County. Nashville is currently ranked the 15th most dangerous city in America for pedestrians, according to [Dangerous by Design](#) (Smart Growth America). [Vision Zero](#) is an international effort dedicated to the belief that even one preventable pedestrian injury or death is too many. Streets should be engineered to protect all road users – especially pedestrians, who are most exposed to dangerous conditions on the road. How can we apply Vision Zero policies in Nashville? What can we do as a city to increase safety for all road-users in Nashville?

We can start with enforcement, with a special focus on areas getting new pedestrian facilities, including the signals at 1100 Broadway and where Broadway and Division split. Signals intended to give pedestrians right of way that is not recognized by motorists make pedestrians more unsafe. Once we can scale our enforcement, we can work to improve our facilities. We shouldn't be afraid to innovate, here. Nashville pioneered the use of green bike lanes, which are now a part of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. Generally, we should create some prototypes of best practices. Music City Central (MTA's downtown transfer facility) and Music City Center (the convention center) would be great opportunities to showcase pedestrian improvements. Others could include Metro Schools, Metro Parks, Nashville State Community College campuses.

4. Where do you think Metro should construct sidewalks first? How should Metro prioritize sidewalk projects?

I generally think the PGI in Strategic Plan for Sidewalks and Bikeways (SPSB) should contain the guiding principles. If it's not working, we should fix it. I made some suggestions for improvements above when discussing the SPSB.

5. As part of the [Nashville Next](#) process, the Planning Department has collected public input to create a long-term transportation plan called [Access Nashville 2040](#). The plan recognizes that our citizens do not desire, nor can our city afford, expensive new roads. Rather than pursue costly widening projects that provide a temporary solution to congestion and a permanent maintenance burden, we must operate our existing street network more efficiently by expanding access to multimodal transportation. Do you support this conclusion? What would you



do to ensure Nashvillians can use walking and biking as real transportation options, and not just forms of recreation?

I so support this conclusion. I think fully capitalizing the SPSB is an important step, particularly if some of the recommendations I've suggested become part of the plan.

6. Studies consistently show that the greater the population density in a given neighborhood, the more walkable that neighborhood will be (e.g. walking to grocery store, work, transit). What are your thoughts about density in Nashville and how it relates to transportation challenges?

While our metropolitan government has given us some distinct advantages as a city, it has also given us some distinct challenges, including our suburban, sprawling urban form. NashvilleNext gives us some good tools to concentrate our urban form in ways approved of by residents. We should not expect that our city will become especially dense over the next 25 years, but we very well could have denser districts (the "centers" from NashvilleNext) that improve walkability and multimodal access.

7. There is clear support in the Nashville community for spending more money on sidewalks, but the source of funding is always the major question. Do you think the city should spend more, less or the same amount on sidewalks and bikeways? If more, what policies or initiatives would you propose to increase funding for sidewalks and other pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure projects? If less, what would you opt to not fund and why?

I think we should fully fund the SPSB, which means spending more. I think adjusting our sidewalk closure fee for development projects could be considered. I also think that indexing that fee and the in lieu of fee could mean we don't wind up with anachronistic scenarios in fees.

8. While our sidewalk, greenway and bikeway networks are expanding, there are still many gaps in connectivity that rule out biking and walking as real transportation options for many Nashvillians who would otherwise be interested in biking or walking to work, school, the grocery store or to community events. What initiatives or policies would you propose to bridge the gaps that separate walkable and bikeable areas from adjacent communities?

My first step would be accelerating completion of all projects in BPAC's connectivity study. It would be worth refreshing that study when the SPSB is next refreshed and then adding its results to the SPSB.



9. Everyone wants to be able to get across the city quickly, yet roads designed to carry cars as quickly as possible are usually the most dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists. Do you support adding traffic calming approaches (example: [bulb outs](#); [road diets](#); [slow zones](#)) along Nashville's major pikes and arteries? When are these projects appropriate?

I think reducing Nashville's background speed limit to 25mph in most areas could be very helpful for safety. Otherwise, I think ensuring that we have capacity for protected right of ways for cyclists and pedestrians whenever possible is one of the safest approaches to complete streets implementation. When that is not possible, other facilities should be consistently monitored for safety and enforced when violations occur.

10. Nashville is currently a Bronze [Bicycle Friendly Community](#), as determined by the [League of American Bicyclists](#). What would you do to move us towards becoming a Silver Bicycle Friendly community?

I would start with strengthening our Safe Routes to Schools program. There is work afoot in this regard, but we can continue. I think we need a high-profile full-time SRTS coordinator for the city. I think most of the other ideas I've already expressed in some form: refreshing the SPSB and connectivity study, fully funding the SPSB, more protected facilities, and a complete streets policy. I think improved policies around closures should be included in that.

11. Are there any specific bicycle or pedestrian infrastructure projects or initiatives that you would work to complete during your term?

I'm already working on a BPAC subcommittee regarding right-of-way closures in construction zones. I would seek to complete that work and support it from Council as necessary. I would also seek to strengthen our complete streets policies as a city. I would also seek to accelerate completion of the SPSB, connectivity study project, and downtown multimodal mobility study recommendations.