

# WALK BIKE QUESTIONNAIRE

## 2019 NASHVILLE METRO COUNCIL CANDIDATES



In preparation for the 2019 Metropolitan General Elections, Walk Bike Nashville distributed a Walking and Biking Candidate Questionnaire to Metro Council candidates. This questionnaire is intended to help educate the public about the positions and ideas of

each of the candidates. Walk Bike Nashville is a 501c3 non-profit, and as such we do not endorse or support any candidate.

These are the answers as we received them, unedited, from the candidates.

### 1. What would you do as a council member to promote walking and biking in Nashville?

**Brett A. Withers (Incumbent)**

I promote walking in Nashville by leading by example through walking as much as possible. It would be one thing for me to advise constituents that they can walk somewhere rather than drive; but since I am a highly visible person and I do walk through District 6 quite a bit and people remark upon seeing me walking on Gallatin, etc., I literally "walk the talk." Walking a mile from my home to the Five Points intersection is much less stressful than driving and circling for parking.

Early in this term I was able to get a new B-cycle station installed at Porter/Eastland. I also worked closely with District 7 Council Member Anthony Davis and the three neighborhood associations along Riverside Drive (Rosebank, Inglewood and South Inglewood) to redesign that street to create bike lanes with fewer vehicular conflict points.

### 2. What will you do as a Council Member to reduce pedestrian fatalities and severe injuries in your district and all of Nashville?

**Brett A. Withers (Incumbent)**

I have focused my time and efforts during the past four years on improving infrastructure in District 6 to make it safer for pedestrians. I worked with neighborhoods to lower speed limits on Shelby Ave and Riverside Drive from 35 to 30 MPH. I worked with Public Works to rebuild the traffic signals on Main Street at 7th and McFerrin and on Shelby Ave at 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 11th and to add a new signal at Eastland/Chapel so that pedestrians can have walk signals across all legs of the intersection as opposed to just one crosswalk or no signal at all. I also worked to get left-turn arrows installed at Gallatin/West Eastland and Gallatin/Eastland because drivers were "jumping" those intersections and crashing into other cars and sometimes pedestrians as well. It is my hope that the Gallatin signals will help to reduce pedestrian strikes at that

busy intersection. The Hill Center Greenwood project at Gallatin/Greenwood will create brand new sidewalks all around the property assemblages on both sides of Gallatin and will require that the developer install a new traffic signal and crosswalk across Gallatin.

If reelected to serve a second term representing District 6, I will continue to work to prioritize infrastructure funding and installation for pedestrian safety.

**3. What will you do as a council member to enact WalkNBike and expand low-stress bikeways? If a plan for new bikelanes came across your desk that you had the authority to approve and you thought it was the right thing to do, Metro staff agreed, but a vocal minority were strongly opposed, how would you move forward?**

**Brett A. Withers (Incumbent)**

I largely believe that sidewalk and bike lane projects are public safety engineering projects first and foremost, and while I welcome constructive community input into those projects, I also recognize that the project must meet certain engineering standards in order to be worthwhile uses of the public's dollars. Well-built and designed engineering projects should last a lifetime or more and are fixed assets, while individuals who provide public comment may not necessarily live or work at or near that fixed location for the anticipated lifetime of the proposed infrastructure asset. As Nashville's population and traffic congestion are increasing, it will be more and more necessary to have dedicated bike and bus lanes or queues in place because at some point the dedicated bike lanes or infrastructure in particular will move more people more quickly through the downtown area than the capacity of the narrow streets for cars will allow.

I am presently convening a stakeholder group to help gather public input into the East Nashville Neighborways project which will bring additional infrastructure and design analysis to several East Nashville streets including Collector Streets to make them more comfortable for bicyclists and pedestrians alike.

Bike lanes between downtown and Five Points are needed; however, there are logistical issues that need to be analyzed at key intersections as well as with some building site plans that were previously approved by the Codes Department that may make separating or sharing the pavement challenging at particular times of day. I am committed to creating a low-stress

bikeway between downtown and Five Points while at the same time I am realistic that such a project could require State approvals as well as potential right-of-way acquisitions in certain pinch points. But I do not believe that the presence of some potential challenges should stop the work of conducting that analysis to explore options and create solutions for a low-stress bikeway between Downtown and Five Points.

**4. How can Metro Nashville reduce single-occupancy vehicle trips into downtown in order to ensure that new employees, Nashvillians, and visitors continue to have access to Nashville's urban core?**

**Brett A. Withers (Incumbent)**

I believe that Metro Nashville needs to create a dedicated funding stream for transit and also dedicated lanes or rails so that high-capacity vehicles can move in traffic and carry more passengers to and from work and events. I personally supported the downtown tunnel component of the LetsMoveNashville plan for this reason: we should not have bus lines or transit lines be blocked by event closures on Broadway or other streets.

Typically, high parking rates are a deterrent to driving downtown in many cities; however, we have seen that fairly high private parking lot or garage prices have not been a deterrent to driving in many cases. With increasing demand forthcoming from office buildings downtown, these private garage prices will only go higher.

I am supportive of the plan to create more metered parking spaces in the downtown area so that those who only need short visits can park on the street at a meter for a nominal fee rather than having to pay garage or special-event pricing which is much higher.

Nashville lacks the legislative authority to implement congestion-induced pricing for entering the downtown area, and so our best bet for the short term may be to conduct public education campaigns about the benefits of taking the bus. Even if the bus is stuck in the same traffic as someone's car would be, those riders can still socialize or read or enjoy leisure time on the bus during the commute and best of all, not have to pay to park.

**5. The WalkNBike Plan states that only 19% of Nashville's streets have sidewalks. How can Metro expand our sidewalk network? As a council member, what would**

you do to support this?

**Brett A. Withers (Incumbent)**

I joined lead sponsor CM Angie Henderson as a cosponsor of the Sidewalk Bill and have worked diligently with Planning and Public Works staff on sidewalk variance request applications to analyze site constraints and find feasible solutions. I do not support blanket exemptions from Sidewalk Bill requirements through the BZA hearing process as some of my colleagues have done. I believe that everyone generating growth and development has a shared responsibility to contribute to the expanding or at least maintaining our sidewalk network. I have been diligent in working with staff to find solutions for site-specific cases where variances are requested.

For the last few years Metro Government has included funding for sidewalks at a level that has exceeded our capacity to design and deliver those sidewalks, and there is presently a back-log of projects. I believe that Metro Government should streamline design and build processes where possible and expand the number of contractors who can construct the sidewalks and related gutter and storm drain infrastructure. While we are presently under a hiring freeze, I believe that in upcoming years and as soon as possible Metro should add staffing to a dedicated Department of Transportation to oversee and coordinate sidewalk, bike lane and transit projects.

6. Transportation remains severely underfunded in Nashville and lacks a dedicated, consistent funding source. Which of the follow options would you support? Please explain.

- A. Referendum to raise sales tax, business tax hotel/motel tax, and/or wheel tax
- B. Increasing property taxes and using those funds for transportation
- C. Bonds
- D. Other \_\_\_\_\_
- E. None of the above

**Brett A. Withers (Incumbent)**

Referendum to raise sales tax, business tax hotel/motel tax, and/or wheel tax, Bonds

**6. b. Please explain your response to the options above.**

**Brett A. Withers (Incumbent)**

I support creating a dedicated funding stream for transit through IMPROVE ACT-enabled tax sources or through bonds. I support property tax increases for other Metro Government needs, such as schools. While it is likely that a property tax rate increase would provide funding for transit operating costs or capital projects at least for a time, those revenue increases deplete over time through inflation or changing priorities. And so with property taxes I believe that we will inevitably get back into positions of having transit or sidewalks compete for General Obligation Bond dollars with other Metro needs and may not provide a dedicated funding source in sequential years.

**7. What are your thoughts about the Metro Traffic Calming Program? Should speed-management (either lowering speed limits or adding physical traffic calming) be used to slow car speeds? If so on what type of streets?**

**Brett A. Withers (Incumbent)**

I cosponsored the Metro Council Resolution calling upon the Public Works Department to submit a formalized proposal for implementing a traffic speed lowering rollout throughout the Urban Services District. While I would have liked to lower the speeds from 30 to 20 on local streets and also include Collector Street that are more residential in character, I believe that this proposal to lower speed limits from 30 to 25 on local streets is a good start. Any such proposal for a large-area speed limit reduction should include a robust public education program about how vehicle speed factors into mortality rates in collisions with pedestrians or anyone who is not protected by a vehicle with seatbelts and airbags. While we are at it, a general Driver's Ed reminder about how to utilize turn signals and how to approach all-way stop signs would be helpful to many...

Overall, I am happy with the Traffic Calming Program. It is a good start with limited resources. I feel that the criteria that were established for selecting the eight neighborhood applications that had the highest priority in speeds or crash history was useful and objective. I look forwarding to seeing how the results of these projects work out through neighborhood engagement and design and how we measuring success rates over time. This is another area where more funding would be helpful but for now focusing on a limited number of projects as real-life test cases makes sense.