

WALK BIKE QUESTIONNAIRE

2019 NASHVILLE MAYORAL CANDIDATES

RUNOFF EDITION



GENERAL INTRO

1. Walking and biking are a critical parts of Nashville's transportation system. With increasing car traffic, 62 people killed while walking over the last 3 years, 37.4% of Nashvillians overweight, and 1 in 4 urban residents without access to a vehicle, it's never been more important to ensure all Nashvillians have safe and inviting places to walk and bike.

What would you do as Mayor to promote walking and biking in Nashville?

MAYOR DAVID BRILEY:

Nashville has a sidewalk deficit that results from years of neglecting pedestrian infrastructure. I see it firsthand when I walk to the office, as do members of my staff who ride WeGo every day. I want to change that. That's why I announced \$30 million for sidewalks last year, which was more than one out of every ten dollars recommended for general government needs. It's a smart step toward closing that multi-billion-dollar gap, and I will continue to make sure that pedestrian and bike infrastructure is prioritized.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHN COOPER:

The best, most beloved, and successful cities are walkable cities. As mayor, I will be committed to making Nashville more safely walkable and bikeable for all ages and abilities. Our next transportation plan -- we can't wait five more years -- should be a fundamentals-first plan, with dedicated funding for bus system improvements, safer intersections, sidewalks, and protected bikeways.

Sidewalk infrastructure has not kept up with our growth. Nashville is seventy years behind on building sidewalks because as residential development sprawled outwards post WWII, we designed for cars instead of people. As a result, most of our suburban neighborhoods don't have walkable infrastructure. We will not have an effective transportation system without a network of sidewalks to promote connectivity and walkability to schools, parks, libraries, businesses, and bus stops. We need to focus on making arterial and collector streets safely walkable and make strategic investments to connect neighborhoods to adjacent suburban commercial centers.

Everyone paying attention to Metro's sidewalk program understands that our cost per linear foot and our time-to-build are too high. We have to do better and make sure we are getting the procurement process right. We could also speed up the process of sidewalk construction, if we expand our right-of-way acquisition capacity by bringing some of that work in-house at Public Works.

We should fully fund our network of bikeways, neighborways, and greenways, working from the inside out and the outside in. The core is key, but we should simultaneously provide safe infrastructure in suburban areas with ample right-of-way where protected bikeways will not be contentious. As part of the WalkNBike strategic plan, we have already paid for and have a preliminary design and feasibility study for a core bikeable network; now we need to show the community how beneficial, safe and enjoyable this network will be and follow through.

Our greenways are among the jewels of the county, and it has been my pleasure to represent the Council on the Greenways & Open Space Commission. The recent "Plan to Play" Master Plan for Parks put special emphasis on greenways. All the citizen surveys in that planning process showed that residents really enjoy and support greenways and want more of them, not just for recreation but also for transportation. Currently, most residents drive to a park so that they can then walk or bike on our fantastic greenways, but we need to be intentional about better connecting our greenways to our neighborhood streets and providing safe crossings, so that more people can access greenways on foot and on bike.

VISION ZERO

2. Vision Zero is an international effort to eliminate fatal and severe traffic crashes. Mayor Barry instituted a Vision Zero effort as part of her Moving Music City Action Agenda. But unfortunately the number of people killed walking in Nashville has steadily risen with 23 killed in both 2017 and 2018.

What will you do as Mayor to reduce pedestrian fatalities and severe injuries in Nashville?

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHN COOPER:

As Walk Bike Nashville has so valuably identified, many of our most dangerous pedestrian crossings coincide with bus stops. We choose where to locate bus stops, so we have a moral obligation to make sure that people riding buses aren't putting their lives on the line getting to and from those bus stops.

Metro needs to more meaningfully engage with the findings of your group's "Impossible Crossings" work. Metro Public Works identified the 50 most dangerous intersections back in 2014, and as you have tracked, only 4 of those 50 locations have seen meaningful improvements since then. We have to do better. Too many people feel like they aren't safe crossing the street and getting around without a car. Building safer crosswalks and making strategic sidewalk connections should work in concert with larger capital sidewalk projects. Traffic calming with actual physical measures: reduced lane widths, speed tables, raised crosswalks, roundabouts, chicanes, curb extensions, leading intervals, and better lighting are among the reasonable cost solutions and best practices. These are relatively low-cost, have a solid ROI, and can make a huge difference in safety.

In response to mounting community concern about cut-through speeding in neighborhoods and distracted driving, Walk Bike Nashville encouraged and Council passed a resolution this year to recommend 25 mph as the maximum speed for all neighborhood streets. As mayor, I will support the implementation of that plan in concert with physical traffic calming efforts to make sure everyone is safe on our neighborhood streets. And I will encourage continued work with TDOT to make state routes, our most deadly streets, more safe.

Traffic Calming is an important part of any Vision Zero Plan, and Metro's traffic calming program has been ineffective for far too long. Formerly hidden in the "roadways" section of the capital budget, this spending lacked accountability. Recently Council members pushed to make sure the program received itemized funding in the capital spending plan and will be administered internal to Public Works, rather than by a contractor. I think we should do the same for safe crossings in the capital spending plan, rather than having that work hidden in the "intersections" section of the capital budget. This transparency will help establish benchmarks towards the noble and attainable goal of zero deaths on Metro's streets.

Traffic Calming and Vision Zero efforts will help make our neighborhoods and commercial corridors more walkable and bikeable--it's just a matter of implementing what we know works with more intention and urgency. We need to implement the many plans and studies that we have already conducted and paid for.

MAYOR DAVID BRILEY:

According to our quarterly resident survey, we know that about one out of four people in Nashville commuted to work at some point in the last year by some other means than driving alone. We need to make sure that they can do so as safely as possible. I am well aware of the danger presented by Impossible Crossings and share Walk Bike Nashville's sense of urgency in addressing them. That's why I've pledged to invest a portion of the more than \$300 million we expect to get from modernizing our on-street parking system toward safety improvements that will help achieve the goals of Vision Zero.

Also, in response to increasing traffic, our Public Works department will be implementing eight traffic calming projects throughout Nashville this spring and summer. After reviewing applications, Public Works will be doing projects in these areas: Highland Heights, Tennessee State University/39th Ave N, Haywood South, Hillwood, Jones Avenue, Caldwell-Abbey Hall, Katie Hill, Belmont-Hillsboro West. These projects will ease traffic stress and help prevent pedestrian injuries and fatalities.

BETTER BICYCLING

3. People for Bikes recently released the list of the top 50 most bicycle friendly cities. Nashville was not included. Metro's WalkNBike lays out a number of plans to make it easier to bike in the city, including a network of 61 miles protected/low-stress bikeways for the city, of which 54 miles still need to be completed. However, often increasing on-street bicycle infrastructure requires difficult decisions. A classic example is the tension between installing bike lanes, and maintaining on-street parking.

What will you do as mayor 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?

MAYOR DAVID BRILEY

Everybody deserves a voice in important decisions about how we prioritize different modes of transport in our major corridors. I will strive for achieving consensus on any decision I'm faced with in that respect. That said, I support the goal of expanding low-stress bikeways in the city. Curb management will be the issue for urban planners in Nashville and other fast-growing cities in the coming years, and our on-street parking modernization proposal will not only generate more funding for pedestrian and bike infrastructure, but it will also give Metro—and alternative transportation advocates—access to real-time data to improve our decision-making about corridor improvements.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHN COOPER:

We need protected and separated bikeways for safety reasons and also so that bike riders aren't put in conflict with car drivers and seen as adversaries for the same space -- both in the construction/planning phase and also in operation. I'm not aware of any political conflict between sidewalk advocates and motorists, and bikeways should be no different. I will certainly listen to all sides, however vocal or small a contingent they may be. I would be interested in bringing sides together to assuage concerns that investing in walk/bike infrastructure comes at the expense of the driving experience.

The work of the next mayor is to build on our core walkable/bikeable network and connect that to our suburban commercial centers, schools, parks and neighborhoods. As a side note, I'm frequently frustrated to see bikeways that are cluttered with debris that makes them unusable and dangerous. More thorough and consistent street-sweeping and added separation would help us improve and more fully utilize the bikeable infrastructure we already have. Paint is not infrastructure.

DOWNTOWN ACCESS

4. There is currently office space for an additional 40,000 people slated to open up in downtown Nashville. Traffic is already choked by single-occupancy vehicles and there is a finite amount of street-space available.

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?

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHN COOPER

Around 80% of downtown employees drive to work alone! The new Nashville Connector Transportation Demand Management (TDM) effort in our Planning Department is off to a good start and will need to have sustained funding to engage with Nashville's major employers. Corporations receiving incentives from the city should always have a TDM plan, and any major employer that invested in marketing the 2018 transit referendum would certainly find it worthy to have a TDM plan, which will provide their employees with helpful transportation alternatives to driving alone. We should be proactively working with all major employers to help them devise customized plans to fit their employees needs with car/vanpooling, transit ridership, smart garages, and parking cash-out programs.

Our downtown is built on a grid of very narrow streets, and there is not much changing that. Those narrow streets can only handle so many cars, so we should be thinking about ways to encourage bus ridership, carpooling, walking to work, etc. The growth in jobs downtown has also coincided with many more people living downtown, so the possibility of walking/biking to work is real for an increasing number of downtown residents.

To address commuter needs, we should also do more to connect protected bikeways & greenways into downtown. I will make sure we stop closing the greenways at the Ascend Amphitheater and the Nashville Sounds stadium for days at a time!

MAYOR DAVID BRILEY

We can offer small incentives to people who want to carpool into downtown. We already have HOV lanes on our interstate, and we encourage people to use them to their benefit. We can also expand and improve our bus routes to encourage more downtown workers to take transit to and from work. I also think a part of this effort needs to come from the private sector. Large companies in downtown Nashville can incentivize carpooling, walking, biking, and transit options by making their employees pay for parking or offering small benefits for people who don't drive to work. But I know Metro also has to lead by example. Less than three percent of Metro employees uses WeGo to get to work. I'm actively exploring ways to incentivize Metro employees to choose alternative modes of transportation and look forward to launching a pilot program to test ideas in the near future.

SIDEWALKS

5. The WalkNBike Plan states that only 19% of Nashville's streets have sidewalks. How can Metro expand our sidewalk network?

MAYOR DAVID BRILEY

We will continue to allocate money in our budget for sidewalk development and consult with members of Metro Council and residents to carefully study which neighborhoods and streets need them most urgently.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHN COOPER

Please refer to my answer to Question #1. Additionally: Given how far behind we are on sidewalk construction, I will add that one of the core challenges to constructing sidewalks in Nashville is right-of-way acquisition. This is an extremely time-consuming and expensive proposition. Another thing that makes sidewalk construction complex and costly is stormwater design. I think we need to look at bringing some of the sidewalk project work in-house because we know sidewalks are going to be a stable long-term capital spending need. Our next transportation plan should include dedicated funding for sidewalks because we can't have effective transportation system without them.

DEDICATED FUNDING

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

1. Referendum to raise sales tax, business tax hotel/motel tax, and/or wheel tax
2. Increasing property taxes and using those funds for transportation
3. Bonds
4. Other _____
5. None of the above

Explanation:

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHN COOPER:

I'm open to any of the above if used appropriately for a fundamentals-first, cost-effective plan that helps people in every neighborhood get to work. I'd just point out that option C (bonds) would still require a funding mechanism for debt service payments on the bonds. When using regressive modes of taxation, it becomes incredibly important to make sure that the most vulnerable communities are benefiting.

MAYOR DAVID BRILEY:

Nashville's future economic competitiveness requires bold investments in multi-modal transportation solutions. I support all of the above funding options for local funding strategies, but we also need to do everything we can to maximize state and federal funding opportunities.

OPEN STREETS NASHVILLE

7. Nashville has hosted four Open Streets events (the fifth is this year). It is a program that temporarily closes iconic streets to cars to allow residents to walk, bike, or play in the street. Each year it has been co-hosted by the Mayor's office, which has helped pay for police support. You can see a video of last year's event at www.openstreetsnashville.org.

Have you ever participated in an Open Streets Event? What is your vision for Open Streets Nashville and Metro's involvement in this program?

MAYOR DAVID BRILEY

I enjoyed taking part in Open Streets last year, and I would like to do the same this year. I think Open Streets serves as an excellent event – not only to promote non-car uses for our streets but also to foster community bonds and relationships in various Nashville neighborhoods.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHN COOPER:

We need to do more of them! The city should make it easier for non-profits and neighborhoods to put these together. The community loves them, and they're great for small businesses. And after all, we have no problem shutting down all of downtown to host events. Considering Metro spent \$1.4 million on hosting the NFL Draft, it seems that we can find the resources necessary to help put together more than one Open Streets event each year. We should be doing more community building events in our neighborhoods.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

8. In Nashville, issues related to transportation are dispersed between several departments, including Planning, Public Works, the MTA and Parks. What are your thoughts on this structure? How would you improve staff capacity, as well as coordination and communication between the disparate offices that all address mobility in Nashville?

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHN COOPER:

I've mentioned above that I would support bringing some of our contracted work back into staff positions at Public Works, so that speaks to some of the staff capacity question. I can also say that I think Nashville would benefit from more transportation planners in the Planning Department. As for the overall structure and communication between the departments mentioned above, I'll look into the formation of a Transportation Department. That was one of the recommendations in the Nashville Community Transportation Platform, which I was the first mayoral candidate to endorse. I certainly appreciate the way the Planning Department, Public Works and MTA (now WeGo) are working more closely together than in the past, but we are still falling short of implementing our strategic plans. Perhaps a centralized Transportation Department would help that. Consolidation could potentially result in cost savings, which we could then direct into more planners, engineers and project managers. We've got talented Metro staff that care deeply about making Nashville more walkable and bikeable, and I'll be very interested to hear how they think we should organize to better deliver safe streets for people walking, biking and taking transit.

MAYOR DAVID BRILEY

Metro staff in these departments are currently meeting on a regular basis to make sure that activity is coordinated efficiently. I support taking a serious look at formalizing this structure under a Metro Department of Transportation. But we also need to make sure that individual departments are getting the resources they need to perform effectively.

In preparation for the 2019 Mayoral elections, Walk Bike Nashville distributed a Walking and Biking Candidate Questionnaire. 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. We have rotated the order of the responses for fairness.