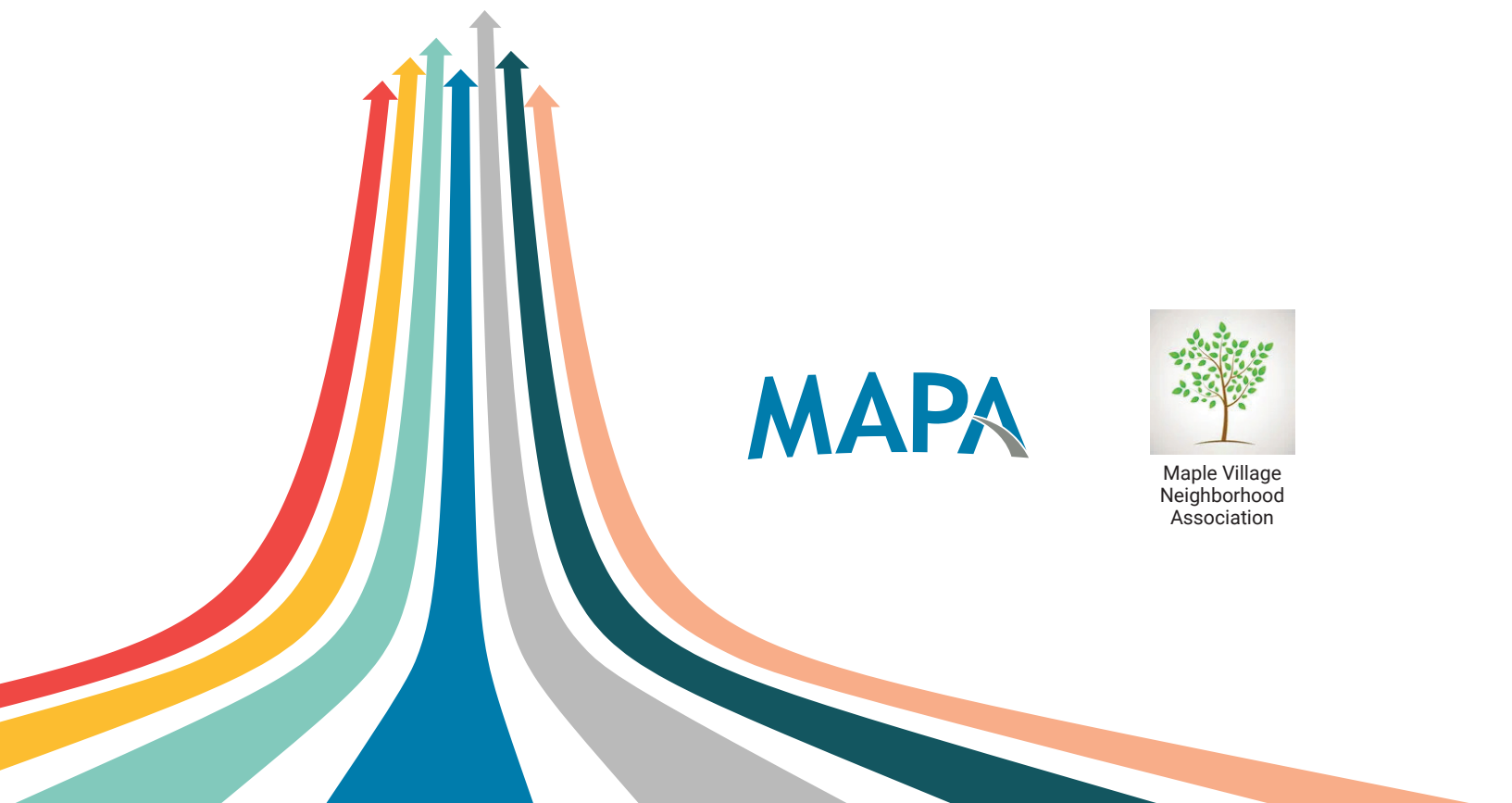
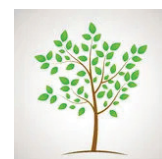




BLOCK TALK



MAPA



Maple Village
Neighborhood
Association

Virtual Maple Village Block Talk

MAPA's mission is to provide local governments with planning and technical support, thinking regionally and long range on the core issues that impact the vibrancy of the Greater Omaha-Council Bluffs area. Facilitating Block Talks is just one of many ways MAPA is here to promote vibrant places to live, work and play.



Background

Block Talks are a public engagement presentation that introduces stakeholders and citizens to the experience of a pedestrian or alternative transit rider on the built infrastructure of our communities. These are walk audits that are designed to help a neighborhood identify strengths and weaknesses of the infrastructure in an area and identify projects, programs, and policies that can be done to improve the built environment. Walks look at the sidewalk and road design and how it relates to businesses and activities along the street. This report provides an assessment of virtual public input from a Virtual Block Talk along the Maple Street and West Maple Road corridor in and near the boundaries of the Maple Village Neighborhood Association.

Participants were asked to rate each segment of street and specific stops that highlight some aspect of the area and give feedback. This feedback will then be shared with stakeholders and partners to confirm or update organizations who were considered to be responsible for the project, policy, or program related to the comment.

The Block Talks were conducted in partnership with the Nebraska Department of Transportation and the City of Omaha Traffic Engineering to identify safety projects to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety features.

Partner Organizations

Maple Village Neighborhood Association

MVNA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization serving the residents, homeowners, and businesses within its boundaries in all matters of community development and enhancement. Our boundaries are Maple Street to Fort Street, 90th Street to I-680. This includes the neighborhood subdivisions of Maple Village, Hummingbird Heights, Hummingbird Hills, Tomahawk Hills, Palomino Hills, and Golden Hills.

City of Omaha Traffic Engineering and Maintenance

The mission of the City of Omaha Traffic Engineering Division is to provide for the safe, environmentally compatible, and efficient movement of pedestrians, bicyclists, and motor vehicles through the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of traffic control systems.

Traffic Engineering staff maintains 1,000 traffic signals, lane lights, and flashers, 2,850 lane miles painted (conducted annually), and 120,000 traffic signs. Traffic Engineering staff also conducts 350 traffic studies and counts traffic at 250 intersections per year. The division duties include planning and design of traffic facilities, reviewing development plans and plats as well as funding and administering 56,000 street lights.



Nebraska Department of Transportation

The mission of the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) is to provide the best possible statewide transportation system for the movement of goods and people. NDOT collaborates with local, state, and federal partners to improve roadway safety and reduce the number of fatal and serious injury crashes in Nebraska.

Federal Highway Administration - Nebraska Office

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Division Offices are local field offices that provide leadership, guidance, and direction to State Departments of Transportation in the project development and delivery of transportation projects. Working collaboratively with State partners, FHWA Division Offices ensure that the nation's roads, bridges and tunnels are safe and continue to support economic growth and environmental sustainability.

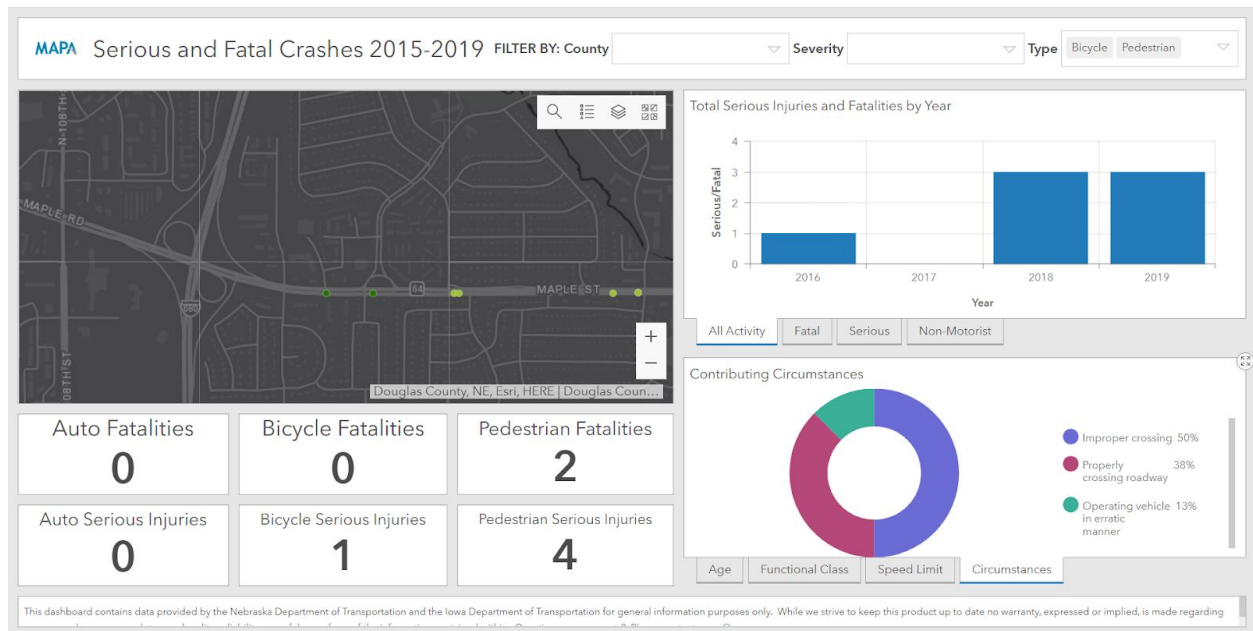
Addressing Pedestrian Safety

In the fall of 2019, MAPA began to work with the City of Omaha and the Nebraska Department of Transportation to facilitate public outreach to better understand pedestrian and bicycle traffic along the Maple Street corridor. The first of several Block Talks was held in person on the afternoon of February 12, 2020. Due to the inclement weather and the distance and location for the walk, several members of the public chose not to attend. Additional feedback following the February event noted the overall length of the Block Talk (2 hours) as well as a single, scheduled event time made it difficult for people to attend. Therefore, MAPA was fortunate to have already been working towards the development of virtual (both online self-access and facilitated) Block Talks prior to the impacts brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In coordination with the Nebraska and Iowa Departments of Transportation and member communities, MAPA maintains a Safety Dashboard which displays fatal and suspected serious injuries within the region. The following figure shows pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities (dark green) and serious injuries (light green) in and around the Maple Street corridor near Maple Village. The crashes depicted are for the period 2015-2019.



Figure 1: MAPA Safety Dashboard | Pedestrian and Bicyclist Fatal and Serious Injuries



safety.mapacog.org

FHWA | Safe Transportation for Every Pedestrian Initiative

Under the Every Day Counts Initiative, FHWA is promoting the Safe Transportation for Every Pedestrian (STEP) process. The process provides tools and best practices for the “Systemic application of cost-effective countermeasures with known safety benefits can help reduce pedestrian fatalities at both uncontrolled and signalized crossing locations.”¹

The STEP Studio is an FHWA provided toolkit to assist municipalities in identifying appropriate countermeasures for improved pedestrian safety. Step 1 of this process is to **Collect Data and Engage the Public**. Of the six tasks under this step, this Block Talk has been conducted to 1.) *Request and Receive Public Input*, and 2.) *Conduct a Walkability Audit*.²

¹ FHWA. (2020). Center for Accelerating Innovation. Every Day Counts: Safe Transportation for Every Pedestrian. https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/innovation/everydaycounts/edc_5/step2.cfm

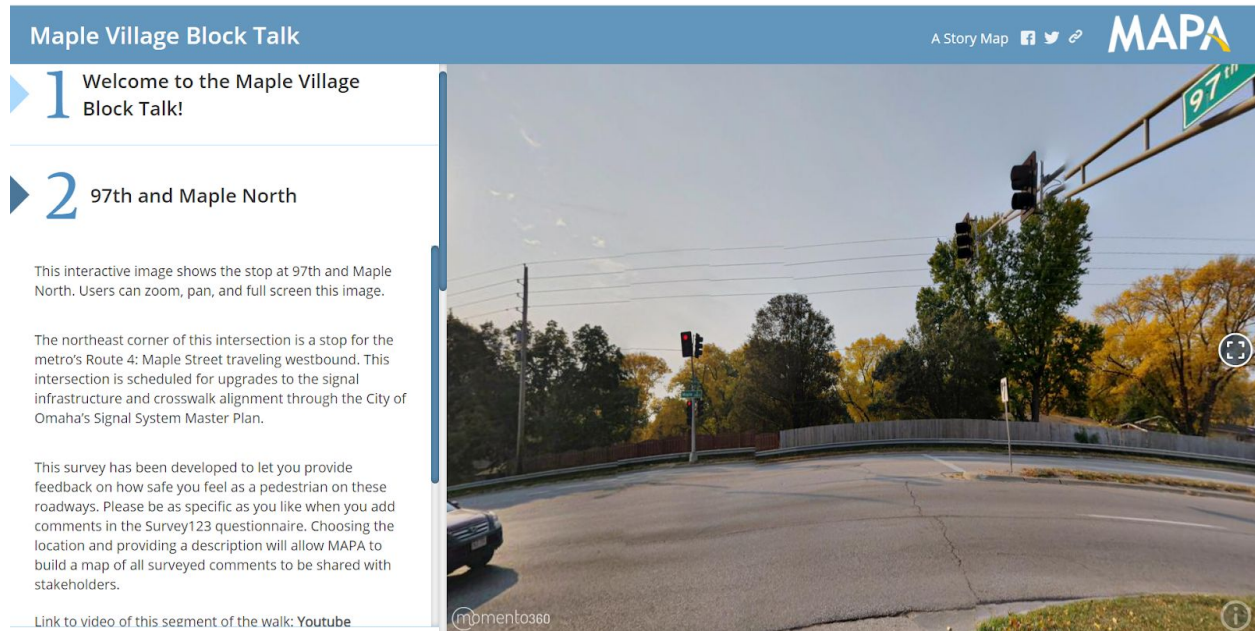
² FHWA. (2020). STEP STUDIO: Tools for selecting and implementing countermeasures for improving pedestrian crossing safety. https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/step/resources/docs/step_studio.pdf



Virtual Tools

In order to make Block Talks more accessible and allow for social distancing, MAPA staff developed virtual Block Talks that allow for participants to virtually travel along the corridor. Participants can and examine key points and intersections in depth with 360° virtual images both through the facilitators shared screen or on their own link.

Figure 2: 360° Image at 97th and Maple from the Facilitated Block Talk StoryMap



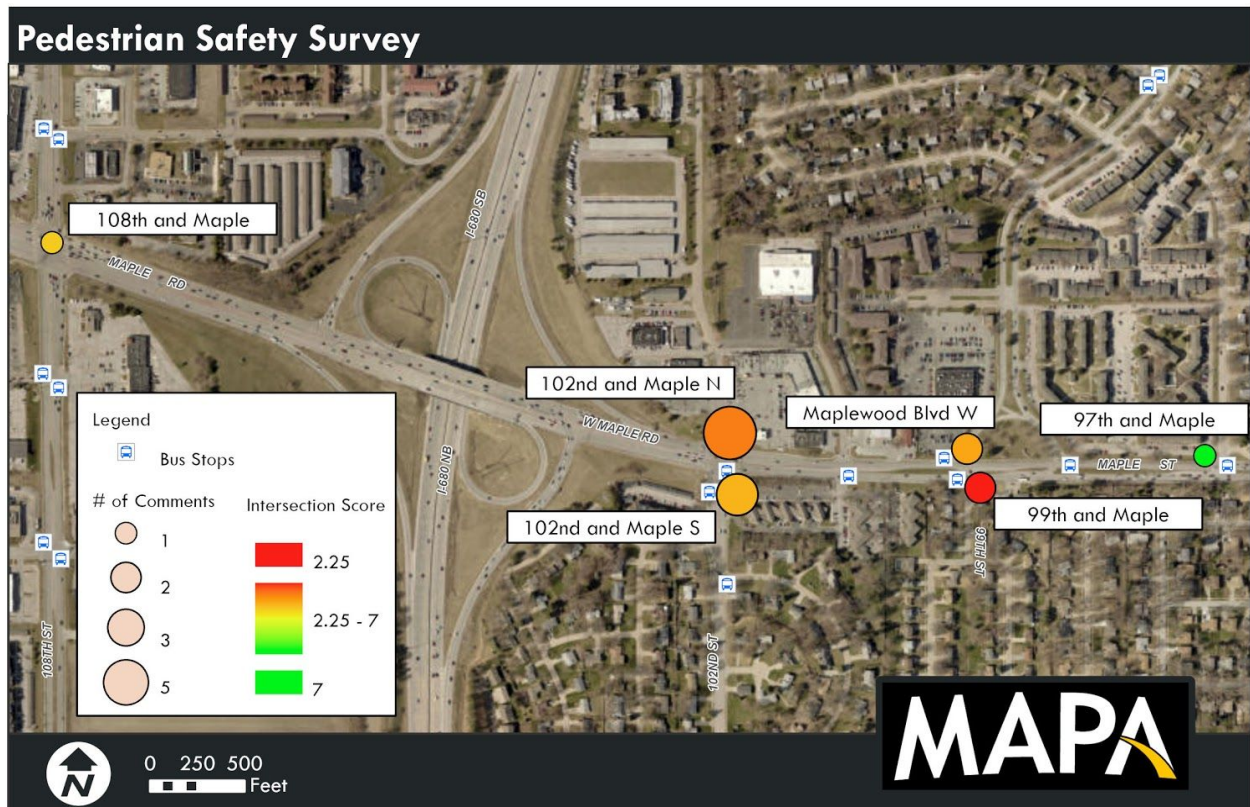
Participants then choose a numeric score to give the stretch and provide comments, like in an in person Block Talk with facilitators recording comments on an intime survey tool. This is then used to generate a map of the comments which was used to inform the facilitated Block Talk.

Facilitated Block Talk

The facilitated virtual Block Talk was held the evening of November 12th during the previously scheduled Maple Village Neighborhood Association meeting time. The online virtual survey had been open for two weeks with very limited response, so these results were incorporated with the input from the facilitated Block Talk. Five members of the public participated in addition to stakeholder agencies, and were broken into three groups to consider individual intersections with MAPA facilitation and input from NDOT and Metro Transit staff. Responses were recorded via Survey123 forms and Jamboard with each group reporting the main issues and solutions found for their segment. The evaluated intersections with overall scores and number of identified safety issues are shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Maple Village Pedestrian Safety Evaluated Intersections and Segments



Summary of Safety Comments

The most common concerns noted in both the online and facilitated session were traffic speed and volumes. These concerns were typically mentioned in conjunction with sidewalks being too close to the curb, and/or being constrained by guardrails or other roadside features on the far side of the sidewalk. An additional frequent concern was the absence of, or degraded condition of crosswalk markings at intersections. Attendees also noted the challenges faced by transit-dependent pedestrians, as they, along with other local pedestrians must cross the Maple Street bridge over I-680 (which does not have dedicated pedestrian facilities) for work or access to services. Finally, in various locations across the corridor sidewalk gaps exist which, particularly in poor weather conditions, make access difficult.



Maple Village Action Planning Results

Notes on Process

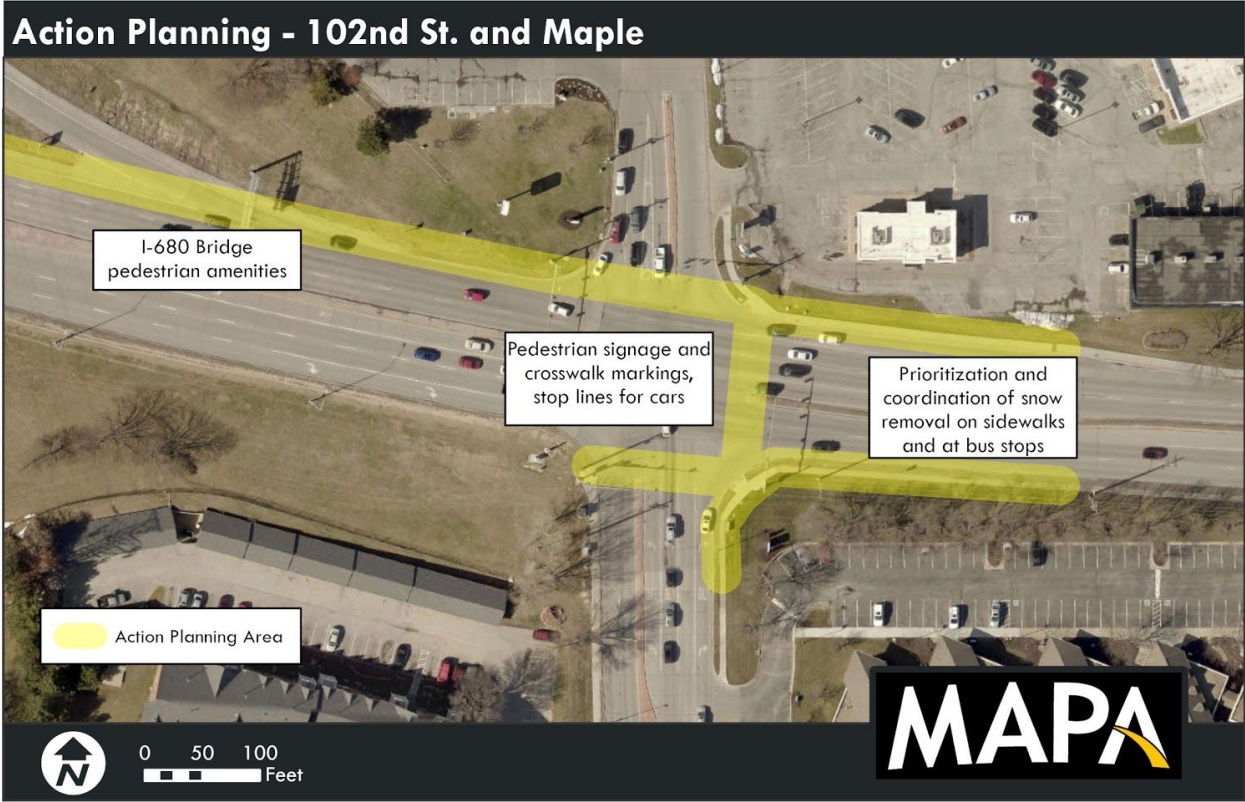
The action planning process establishes broad categories of Projects, Programs, and Policies, and identifies notional short and long-term periods to focus discussion. The complete set of pedestrian safety comments and potential solutions will be provided separately to the City of Omaha Public Works and NDOT participants. All of these actions will require additional research and coordination, and are intended only to provide a place to start. The three intersections below were evaluated during the facilitated session.



102nd and Maple Street and I-680 Interchange

Figure 4 below illustrates the recommendations for potential improvements to enhance pedestrian safety. The group noted that the on ramp to I-680 northbound actually begins on the east side of the 102nd and Maple Street intersection, which introduces additional conflict points for both drivers and pedestrians. The absence of a clearly indicated stop bar, and the skewed nature of the intersection make it easier for cars to feel the need to encroach on the crosswalk area, and in both the video production by MAPA staff, as well as a participant walking the route to complete the virtual walk noted a failure to yield of right-turning vehicles.

Figure 4: Map of Action Planning Project Responses at 102nd and Maple Street



Note: The City of Omaha is responsible for maintaining crosswalk paint and other intersection pedestrian amenities. Intersections are inspected annually but residents can also report discrepancies through the Mayor’s Hotline.



99th and Maple Street / Maplewood Blvd

Figure 5 below shows the recommended improvements to this unique intersection. Prior to the first Block Talk in February a pedestrian assessment was conducted by the City of Omaha, which showed both pedestrians and bicyclists choose to cross Maple Street here. This intersection provides pedestrians and bicyclists a unique opportunity to cross where they have:

1. Greater visibility of traffic moving both east and west along Maple
2. Easier gap identification
3. Fewer conflicts with turning vehicles
4. A pedestrian refuge provided by the raised median

By law, the pedestrian would have the right of way at this unmarked crosswalk, however, in practice it would seem the users of this intersection choose to yield to drivers.

Figure 5: 99th Street and Maplewood Blvd



97th and Maple Street and Broader Corridor Improvements

The intersection of 97th and Maple Streets is currently under design for improvements, and therefore the intersection itself was not considered by the reviewing group. However, Figure 6 highlights the areas where existing pedestrian facility improvements could be made. The numerous crossings at Maplewood Blvd, with its unique large radius curbs and separate access for turning traffic creates a more challenging location for transit-users walking to or leaving the adjacent bus stops. Guard rails on sections of both the north and south sides of Maple Street are positioned outside of the sidewalk, providing no protection for pedestrians and creating an unnecessary constraining condition. Finally, pedestrians crossing ramps to I-680 have a long distance to cross without any supporting facilities.

Figure 6: 97th and Maple Street and Corridor Segments



Post Workshop Survey

After the virtual facilitated Block Talk, MAPA sent participants a survey to gauge their experience of giving feedback, using zoom, using the survey tools, and the structure of the meeting. Overall, the responses were positive with people feeling comfortable with the technology and that their input was received and would be acted on. Of the 8 participants 3 provided feedback

Table 10: Post Workshop Survey Results

Question	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very Unsatisfied
How would you rate your virtual block talk experience?	100% 3	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0
How user friendly did you find the technology?	66.7% 2	33.3% 1	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0
How likely are you to recommend attending a Virtual Block Talk to others?	66.7% 2	33.3% 1	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0

Overall people found that the technology was intuitive to use and that the small break out groups facilitated good conversation about the stops.

“With the small breakout groups, it was very easy to have a good discussion. Great job from the group moderator.”

One participant felt that they had a better understanding of their neighborhood after.

“It was very informational about issues in my neighbor. Foot traffic is very challenging on Maple Street.”

The report outs and after session summaries were useful to most of the participants and fostered a sense of buy in and willingness to continue to be a part of the planning process.



The report outs and documentation of steps made after the Block Talk will be a vital part of ensuring that future efforts are successful and people will remain willing to give time to these efforts.

