

# East Douglas Avenue Redesign

## Abstract

A great way to make Wichita more economically vibrant is to make it more appealing and safer for people to shop, dine, and spend their time on Douglas Avenue. The proven design concept of going to three lanes maintains traffic flow and parking while increasing safety for everyone. Why wait to create a thriving Douglas when nearly every city, small and large, that has done something similar is enjoying an increased number of people and retail sales in their project area? We feel it is wise for the City of Wichita to proceed with the Better Block experiment on Douglas Ave to provides the opportunity for residents to experience new possibilities and provide their input.

## Why is this issue important now?

Every citizen group, business group, study, and consultant that has considered how to improve Wichita's future and economic vitality has agreed that the best way to do it is to make downtown, including East Douglas, a place where people want to be, and that the best way to do that is to make it more appealing and safe for people walking around, shopping, dining, and entertaining.

Nearly every city, small and large, that has done something similar has had better than expected results, increasing the number of people downtown and increasing the retail sales for the businesses in the area. Those cities also say that the traffic capacities of their streets were not harmed by going down to three lanes - one lane in each direction with a turning lane. In fact, in many cities, the number of cars actually increased, but the number of crashes went down due to improved traffic flow and predictable spaces for all modes of transportation.

## Why Douglas Avenue?

The City of Wichita's official, adopted policies; numerous public surveys; every study conducted by independent consultants; the retail businesses along the corridor; and the already existing popularity of the corridor as a bicycle and pedestrian route all strongly argue for redesigning Douglas Avenue to create a more attractive, safe experience. ***Douglas Avenue is an iconic avenue, one of the most prominent areas in the city.*** It should be one of the primary places where our values and goals are highlighted. The mix of local businesses and organizations located along Wichita's main street need more people visiting, socializing, and doing business. By prioritizing people, including people who drive, bike, and walk, a redesign of the space can focus on meeting the needs of all users which will make it more attractive.

The Douglas Design District portion of the project, Washington to Grove, has been in discussion and planning with local business owners and stakeholders for the past few years. *\*Discussions and an initial plan actually date back to 2008 and beyond.* Recent consensus among the majority of stakeholders shows a desire to move forward with the more bold design including a road diet to better match the traffic demand and desired goals of attracting more people to the district. The project will address improved parking, increased public transit demand, pedestrian crossings to increase access to businesses, protected bike infrastructure, sidewalk amenities, lighting, and art. Douglas Avenue stakeholders and residents will have opportunities to provide input during the design process and construction funding is committed for 2022 (possibly 2021). It makes sense (and cents) to extend the improvements the river.

## Supporting Data

- **Traffic counts** on Douglas from the Ark River to Hillside are pretty steady at 9,000-16,000; Delano is less at 9,000-10,000. A well designed 3-lane avenue can easily handle up to 20,000 vehicles. [Data](https://www.wichita.gov/PWU/TrafficDocuments/FLOW%20MAP%202018.pdf): <https://www.wichita.gov/PWU/TrafficDocuments/FLOW%20MAP%202018.pdf>
- **85% traffic speeds** on Douglas are 28-30mph between Delano and Broadway, increasing to the east of there to 37mph at Washington and 38mph at Hydraulic, 37mph at Grove. This also means that 15% are traveling faster than these speeds!
  - Pedestrian Survivability: 7% of being killed at 20mph, 12% at 25mph, 20% of being killed at 30mph, 31% at 35, & 40% chance at 40mph.
  - “Speed limits are more likely to be remembered if they apply to an entire district and the signs say so.” (Walkability Rules # 34)
- **Traffic Crashes** - “Downtown Wichita has the highest concentration of traffic accidents.” Particularly Douglas, including Washington to Grove, per [Wichita Places for People Vision Book](#), p. 21.
- **Bike Share ICT** usage on Douglas between Washington and Grove is several times greater than usage on 1st & 2nd Streets (5 times the traffic on 1st and 7 times the traffic on 2nd) per Zagster info. Currently, most bikes are being ridden illegally on the sidewalks due to a lack of bike infrastructure & fast traffic. Additionally, scooters are also banned from sidewalks and will be traveling up to 15mph - currently in traffic lanes.
- **Number of people walking & biking** [Wichita Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's Annual Bike/Ped count](#) consistently shows Douglas & Washington as one of busiest bike/ped locations in Wichita: 2018 #3, 2017 #1, 2016 #1, 2015 #4, 2014 #3, 2013 #1, 2012 #2.  
**2018 count data revealed an 80% overall increase since 2012!**
- Strava data is not quantified because the City does not currently obtain it, but the Strava heatmap shows that this area of Douglas is one of the most heavily biked streets in the central part of the City.
- This heavy bike and pedestrian usage is despite the fact that there is almost no bike infrastructure or pedestrian crossing infrastructure in the area now. The reason for the high bicycle and pedestrian traffic is the attractive destinations:
  - on the west are downtown and Delano, a popular retail district; Downtown is one of the fastest growing areas of the city, 10 to 15% per year
  - on the east are popular restaurants and breweries (near Hydraulic and Grove), the closest grocery store to downtown and more restaurants and retail (at Hillside) and a popular boutique retail area (Clifton Square) and Oliver.
- Both ends of Douglas restrict traffic speeds by design and speed limits
  - on the east side by East High School, which generates substantial student pedestrian traffic and should require slower vehicle speeds
  - further east by Eastborough, which has a 20 mph speed limit
  - on the west side by the downtown business district, which has traffic lights at every intersection
  - further west by Delano's two lanes, one of Wichita's more vibrant urban areas
- Kellogg, a limited access expressway, is ½ mile to the south. Anyone wishing a quick passage through or to downtown can most effectively use that route.

## Policies, Studies and Reports

The City's stated policies mandate that bicycle and pedestrian facilities be considered in any Street design or construction:

- In 2012, Wichita City Council unanimously adopted that the [Wichita Master Bicycle Plan](#) stating that future street designs should emphasize bicycle access and safety.
  - Wichita Bicycle Master Plan, February 5, 2012: "GOAL 1: Increase the amount of bicycling in Wichita. GOAL 2: Improve the safety of bicyclists in Wichita".
  - 4,000+ individuals provided input.
- In 2014, Wichita City Council adopted the Wichita [Master Pedestrian Plan](#) stating that any future street designs should emphasize pedestrian access and safety.
  - Wichita Pedestrian Master Plan, November 4, 2014: "By 2024, the City of Wichita will be a pedestrian friendly community and a place where walking is an easy choice in all people's daily lives." "The City of Wichita shall use the recommended design concepts and street improvements contained in the Wichita Pedestrian Master Plan as guidance in future planning and decision-making regarding public infrastructure investments, operations and policies." City Council Resolution.
- In 2014, Wichita City Council adopted the [Multi-Modal Accommodation Policy & Street Guidelines](#)
  - "Accommodations for automobiles, freight vehicles, emergency vehicles, transit vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians shall be considered during planning, programming, right-of- way acquisition, design, construction, reconstruction, repair, operations, and maintenance activities to create a well connected and integrated transportation system for all modes of travel." Page 1
  - "To ensure effective implementation of this Policy, the City shall:
    - Make the consideration of all modal transportation networks a routine part of everyday operations. **Every project or activity within street right- of-way or access easements will be viewed as an opportunity to improve the multi-modal transportation system.**" Page 2
    - "every street should be designed to safely accommodate all modes so that there are no unreasonable barriers to traveling by any given mode. The street design process should balance the need to accommodate individual modes of travel in a safe, efficient, and cost effective manner. Street design should first and foremost consider the safety of all street users." Page 11

More recently, we have had a number of studies and reports emphasizing that pedestrian and bicycle friendliness are critical to establishing vibrant and active neighborhoods, especially in the downtown area.

- [Wichita Places for People](#) emphasizes that walkability is one of the most important factors for establishing a vibrant district and also emphasizes that the Central Business District, particularly the Douglas Design District, which is one of the prime areas where improving walkability and bikeability can have a significant impact.

- **"The three main areas with the highest demand for walking [include] along and near Douglas Avenue from Delano to the Douglas Design District."** Wichita: Places for People Walkable Development Book, July 2018
- With wide sidewalks and a high intensity of use, entertainment and restaurants, Downtown is a great location for placemaking related improvements such as public art, benches, and street trees. Wichita Places For People Vision Book, April 2018
- "Downtown streets are wide and have more lanes than needed to accommodate traffic volumes. Wide streets increase a pedestrian's exposure to traffic when crossing the street and encourages higher vehicle speeds. On the long side of blocks in Downtown pedestrians wanting to access businesses and services on the opposite side of the street are more likely to make a mid-block crossing instead of walking out of their way to cross at a signalized intersection." Wichita Places For People Vision Book, April 2018
- [Project Wichita](#), an 18 month project led by local business leaders "to discover the community's vision for Wichita and the region" adopted an action plan that includes creating:
  - "A spectacular gathering spot in the heart of the city serving as a destination for all locals and visitors alike, as a complement to the neighborhood-centered efforts in the region.
  - A comprehensive and unified plan to connect development in the urban core, ensuring a vibrant city center—beautiful, engaging and walkable—that the entire region can be proud of."
  - Guiding Principles:
    - **Invest in Ourselves** – believe in our region and invest in assets that attract, retain and build talent and opportunities
    - **Connected Community** – people connected to each other and connected to opportunities in education, businesses and the region
    - **Future Generation Mindset** – forward thinking problem solving to attract next generation and build a strong future
    - **Boldly Seize Opportunities** – taking risks, acting now, leading boldly
- The [Chung Report](#) stated that walking and biking are increasingly seen as some of the most important factors for people moving into and using the downtown area.
  - Wichita will be able to attract more talented workers if public and private sectors can work together to support alternative transportation options to make the city more walkable, bikeable and bus-able. <https://thechungreport.com/the-future-of-wichita-transportation/>
- Chuck Marohn, the founder of Strong Towns who made a presentation last year, has emphasized that one of the best ways to make cities more vibrant is to tailor design to biking and walking.
  - Again and again, when we look at streets oriented toward people — that is, streets where walking is safe and enjoyable, that people are drawn to visit on foot, and where fast and extensive car traffic is not the #1 priority — we find that they are more economically productive than *any other style of development*. This is particularly true when we compare people-oriented places to car-oriented places—think of that stretch of your town that effectively does everything possible to discourage walking and biking, including a street with multiple wide lanes to ensure fast car movement, acres of parking, and minimal (if any) sidewalks, bike lanes and crosswalks. [Article Link](#)
  - Wide streets are bad for cities. They [encourage faster driving](#), which leaves all road users—pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers alike—less safe. They consume millions of acres of urban land, [pushing uses further apart](#) and exacerbating the problems of spread-out, auto-dependent development. And without some mechanism for pricing street use, such as congestion tolling, they mostly serve to make traffic *worse* through a phenomenon known as

induced demand. Each of these facts on its own militates against the widening of urban roads or piercing new highways through our beleaguered downtowns. [Article Link](#)

- Jeff Tumlin, national expert on parking and economic development, said that survey after survey shows that more and more people want to work in places that emphasize walkability, not exclusively, but that give that option, and that biking and walking generate economic development. He also said that making a place walk-friendly is the starting place for any great place. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHGpeX5swt8>
  - Wichita, especially downtown, has plenty of parking; it just needs to be better managed.
  - Wichita has all the right values and policies. The challenge for us is to assure that the City actually implements those policies. “Align the mechanics of governance with our values.” 1:01:00
  - “Most of the rules that your City engineers and staff are required to follow are profoundly misaligned with our values.” e.g., signalization warrants. 1:03:00 This puts them in an impossible position.
  - “We should start with focusing on our values, establish our goals based on those values, identify the objectives and strategies to achieve those goals. Most importantly, if you can’t measure it, it might as well not exist align; your performance measures with your values and goals. Right now, your city engineer is told that his primary goal is to eliminate seconds. Even more important is to make sure that your budget reflects your goals. Finally, in order to develop trust, collect data and report back to constituents about how have implemented their values. 1:02:00.
  
- The Draft Design Principles of the Riverfront Legacy Master Plan, launched by a coalition of community organizations and coordinated by Populous, a global design firm, include:
  - **Prioritize sustainable development strategies that conserve energy and natural resources** while providing **easy access to multimodal transit**, bike and pedestrian infrastructure.
  - Create solutions that **emphasize accessibility and walkability** to provide a more human-centered experience.

Please contact Bike Walk Wichita for articles, research, or other questions at:  
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