



**DOWNTOWN:**  
*On the go!*

# LINKS TO OPPORTUNITY

Downtown On the Go Final Report

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Downtown On the Go is a local non-profit that works directly with the community to improve the opportunities for walking, biking, and taking transit.

We celebrate the City of Tacoma for recognizing that engaging the community can no longer be done from city hall alone. By inviting Tacoma Housing Authority and Hilltop Action Coalition to address the barriers to traditional civic engagement so that we can begin to reach those who have been excluded; most of our city's population and our most vulnerable residents. We acknowledge that we cannot ask community members to come to another public meeting and we cannot ask community members to take another survey without showing them results.

**We celebrate the City of Tacoma for recognizing that engaging the community can no longer be done from city hall alone.**

For the aforementioned reasons, Downtown On the Go collected all public input and did all public outreach on the streets. This final report outlines our target audiences, engagement activities/demonstrations, key themes from engagement, and next steps to follow up with neighborhood stakeholders.



Downtown On the Go has thoroughly enjoyed working on this project with our fellow team members and we are excited to support the innovative work that the City, AHBL, and Sound Transit have embarked upon in the Links to Opportunity Project.



### Target Audiences Reached

**Everyone is a pedestrian.** People in cars, people who walk, people on bikes, people who take transit; employed, homeless, student, retiree, and everyone in between. We all deserve safe and equitable streets. Our outreach plan is centered on that idea. By stationing our engagement efforts on the actual footprint of the Tacoma Link Expansion, we were positioned to meet the entire community.

Everyone is a pedestrian and the pedestrians who walk along M.L.K Jr. Way - for a few steps or few blocks - were engaged and heard through our engagement strategy.

By being on the sidewalk, we pushed the idea "go where the people are" even further and reduced all barriers to location, time, and place and captured the people who use the corridor regardless of their status of residency, employment, income, or time commitment. We didn't advertise any demonstration to ensure that the feedback provided came from those who were organically using the corridor. We did not ask the people we talked with to give us demographic information but anecdotally, we know that we spoke with all ages, races, income levels, and varying connections to the neighborhood: residents, employees, visitors, business owners, and community leaders.



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## Engagement Activities and Dates

We engaged in four different outreach tactics in 13 demonstrations throughout the last few months. Each style of event drew in different people, perspectives, and feedback. The strategies we used were pop-up placemaking, traffic calming, tactical urbanism, and Speak Up Trainings.

**Pop-Up Placemaking** involves engaging the local community in creating and using public spaces that promote livability, health, happiness, and well-being. These projects inspire long-term ideas and advocacy.

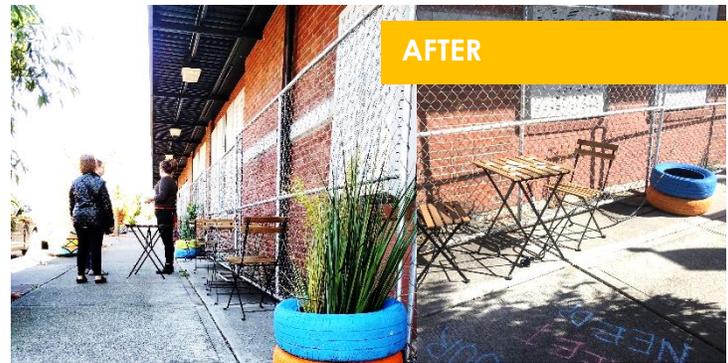
“Streetscape” is not a commonly used word and it can be hard to imagine the potential aspects of a street design. So, we created tangible examples of seating, plants, and added color at our pop-ups. By grounding questions in palpable examples, we’re able to give passers-by a fuller understanding of the project without having to attend, read, or know any other project details.

Hilltop is an eyes-on-the-street neighborhood. That means when someone is hauling colorful tires and setting up café seating outside of the Rite Aid: people come by and ask questions. Creating a hullabaloo attracted people who would not normally partake in a more formal outreach experience, allowing us to capture voices that had previously been unheard.

We spoke to about 10-20 people at each pop-up, talking to about 100 people total.



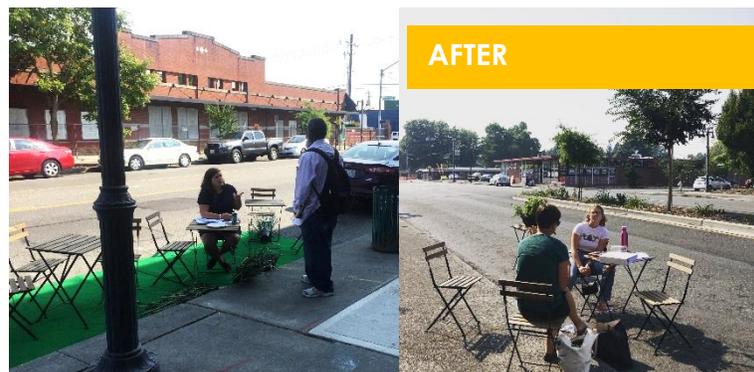
BEFORE



AFTER



BEFORE



AFTER



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**Traffic calming** is a way to slow our streets temporarily to raise awareness of transportation and our most vulnerable users: pedestrians. Traffic calming seeks to slow traffic with visuals like color or infrastructure: like bulbouts and other kinds of activation.

We worked collaboratively with the City of Tacoma's Public Works and Active Transportation staff to ensure that the addition of color was properly permitted.



VOLUNTEERS ADDING COLOR TO S 15<sup>TH</sup> & MLK



SURVEY PARTICIPANT

We added temporary paint to all existing crosswalks at the intersections on S. 9<sup>th</sup> and S. 17<sup>th</sup> to highlight the crossing and to draw attention to pedestrian safety along MLK. We then surveyed anyone who crossed about safety and streetscape design. We also surveyed at S. 11<sup>th</sup> and S. 15<sup>th</sup> regarding the lack of crosswalk there and streetscape design. The act of spray chalking the crosswalks drew attention from many people using the intersection and from local businesses.



COLORFUL CROSSWALK AT S 9<sup>TH</sup> & MLK

We used our stipend funds to buy one hundred \$10 gift cards from Pho King, Manifesto, Red Elm Cafe, Subway, Johnson Candy, and The Fish House. Every person who shared their ideas about pedestrian safety and the corridor received a gift card in exchange for their time. This way we could pay community members for their valuable time; showing respect and demonstrating the worth of their opinions and ideas. Coordinating with the businesses was an additional point of contact for the Links to Opportunity Project.

We surveyed more than 100 people.



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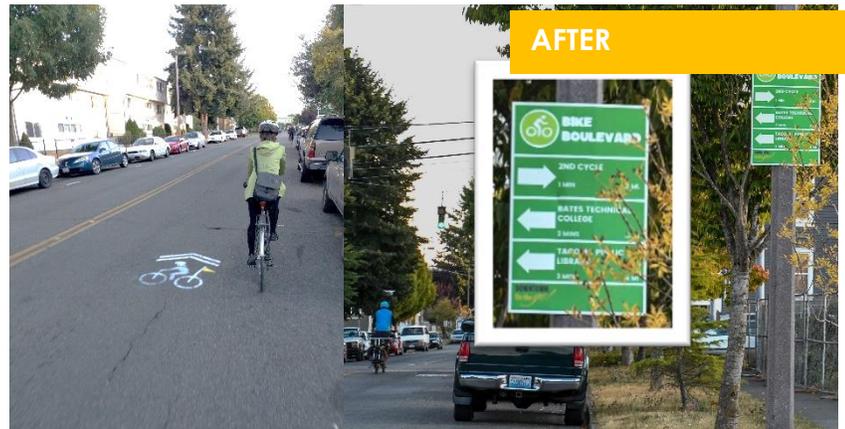
**Tactical Urbanism** involves using the pop-up concept for future infrastructure improvements and to test things without committing to them. These pop-ups were short-term tests to determine the success of different long-term changes.

The Link Extension project will involve many infrastructure changes that will take place over the next four years. Using light, cheap materials we imagined the street parallel to the corridor could be safer for people on bikes.

We partnered with the City of Tacoma's Public Works and Active Transportation team and the experts from Alta Planning + Design to design a bike boulevard and bike lane that will be pivotal connectors for when the link is expanded.

We added "sharrows" and wayfinding signage along 5 blocks of J Street. Sharrows help cars understand the rights of people on bikes and the wayfinding signage help people on bikes and pedestrians navigate to the street.

Along with the city staff and LTO project staff, we also had 30 local commuters ride this route with us and provide feedback.





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## Speak Up Trainings

train locals on the who, what, where, and how of making your voice heard.

Downtown On the Go is Tacoma's leader in advocacy around transportation and smart land use policy. We can connect people to many agencies and elected officials. Our relationships with Pierce Transit, Sound Transit, City of Tacoma, Pierce County, and other social services make us the expert on connecting people to the who, where, and how of speaking up.

### How to Speak Up

YOUR ADVOCACY CHEAT-SHEET FOR CREATING CHANGE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

I am interested in speaking about...

- General Street Issues** (Potholes, broken or out street lights, sidewalk/street damage or debris)
  - Online Reporting
  - Tacoma 311: The City of Tacoma's Customer Support Center. Call 311 or go to [cityoftacoma.org/contact](http://cityoftacoma.org/contact)
  - Pierce County: Pierce County Public Works Department Request for Action. Go to [co.pierce.wa.us](http://co.pierce.wa.us) and click on "Request a Comment"
  - Internet access available at Tacoma Public Library
- Walking and Biking** (Safety while walking or biking, access to walking or biking routes)
  - Tacoma City Council
    - Where: 247 Market St., Tacoma, WA 98502
    - City Council Chambers: 1st Floor
    - When: 2nd Tuesdays, 5 p.m.
    - Council Member representatives meeting: 1st Floor
    - Where: Lauren Walker, 1500 1st St., Tacoma, WA 98502
    - When: 2nd Mondays, 4 p.m.
    - Accessible from hilltop by routes 48 and 3
- Transit** (Pierce Transit Service (Tacoma & Pierce County) or Sound Transit Service (Regional))
  - Pierce Transit Board
    - Where: 2725 16th St., 2nd Floor, Tacoma, WA 98502
    - When: 2nd Mondays, 4 p.m.
    - Accessible from hilltop by routes 48 and 3
  - Sound Transit Board
    - Where: Union Station, 500 S. Jackson St., Seattle, WA 98104
    - When: 1st Mondays, 4 p.m.

**I should talk to:**

**CONTACT** Kristina Walker, Executive Director | [info@downtownthego.org](mailto:info@downtownthego.org) | 253-682-1739

### The Link is Coming to Hilltop...

And Downtown On the Go wants your voice to be heard!

- Sound Transit Tacoma Link Timeline and Construction**
  - Where: Links to opportunity office 1120 South 11th Street
  - When: Tuesdays, Noon - 4 p.m. Wednesdays, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. Thursdays, 9 - 8 p.m.
- Hilltop - Streetscapes, Sidewalk Improvements**
  - Where: The Hilltop Engagement Committee (HETC) Cycle Moppy Board Room at Bates Technical College
  - When: 1st Wednesday, 5 p.m.

**Tacoma Link Expansion**  
Website: [www.soundtransit.org/tacoma-interpassion](http://www.soundtransit.org/tacoma-interpassion)  
Sign up for updates  
Internet Access available at Tacoma Public Library

**Links to Opportunity**

Where does the Tacoma Link currently run? The Link is expanding, right? When will the Tacoma Link hit Hilltop?

**THIS TOOL WAS PASSED OUT AT DEMONSTRATIONS AND PUBLISHED IN THE HILLTOP ACTION JOURNAL**

**WHOA, WHAT, WHY?** This tool was the key for everyone. The Downtown Tacoma Business Improvement Area (BIA) is a board of downtown private owners.

Improvements along the Link Expansion route, including sidewalks, lighting benches, trees, and landscaping.



TRAININGS WERE HELD AT RED ELM CAFE & THE PROJECT OFFICE

As this project inspires many conversations we used this tool and our organizational knowledge to connect people to the services they needed like the City's 311, Pierce Transit Comments, and other speak up opportunities.

We held speak up trainings for those people who wanted to be more connected to the project. Additionally connecting them with the project office and elected officials like Council Member Ryan Mello.



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## Key Themes from Community Engagement

By literally being on the street, we could speak to many people about many things. We synthesized our conversations and surveys into productive feedback for the City, AHBL, and our other partners on the project team. **The exact transcripts of our work have all been documented in Envirolytical.**

We engaged with **more than 250 people**, populating **40%** of the communications in Envirolytical through the conversations we had at our demonstrations, and hosted more than **60%** of the project events overall.

The comments can mainly be separated into 4 categories: Pedestrian Safety and Improvements, Bike Safety and Improvements, Seating and Landscaping, and General Comments. General comments are not directly related to the streetscape or corridor specifically.

## Pedestrian Safety and Improvements

Feedback relating to pedestrian safety and improvements was collected at almost every demonstration. The activity that solicited the most explicit responses were our traffic calming crosswalks.

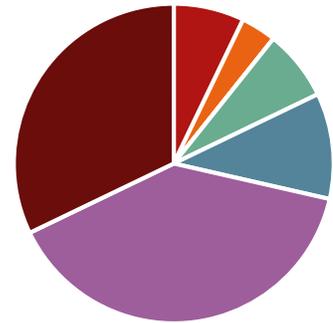
### Concerns:

- **Speed of drivers**
- **Cars parking too close to intersection**
- **ADA sidewalk accessibility**

### Desires:

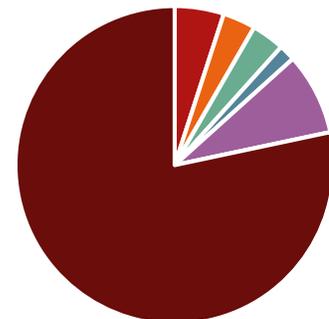
- **More clearly marked crosswalks**
- **Walk signals**
- **Color and art incorporated into crosswalks and sidewalk/ Special treatment of crossing areas**

Incorporating art into crosswalks and other street design would be beneficial for the community



- Strongly Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Strongly Agree
- Disagree
- Agree

There should be more crosswalks along MLK Jr. Way



- Strongly Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Strongly Agree
- Disagree
- Agree



## Bike Safety and Improvements

We surveyed specifically for bike feedback during our tactical urbanism demonstration of the S. J Street Bike Boulevard. Many people ride bicycles in Hilltop; including commuters, people accessing the many social services, and children. Some riders use the sidewalk, some use S J Street, and many ride along MLK Jr Way. Considering the sidewalk design and tracks on MLK, it is pivotal that more riders utilize S J Street.

Infrastructure and streetscape improvements will create a hospitable neighborhood for people on bikes.

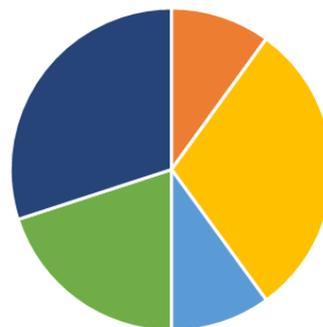
### Concerns:

- Speed of drivers
- Tracks on MLK

### Desires:

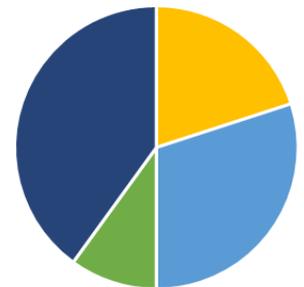
- Wayfinding signage
- Designated bike lanes and signage
- Lighting along boulevard
- Bike racks when appropriate

This route is an important connection for me.



■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree  
 ■ Slightly Disagree ■ Neutral  
 ■ Slightly Agree ■ Agree  
 ■ Strongly Agree

I would ride my bike more if there was more signage and infrastructure in Hilltop



■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree  
 ■ Slightly Disagree ■ Neutral  
 ■ Slightly Agree ■ Agree  
 ■ Strongly Agree

## Seating and Landscaping

People walking by showed excitement and desire for a mix of hardscape and softscape curbside

elements. We gathered this input using tall potted shrubs in colorful pots and café seating. We activated

space in front of businesses and in typically

underutilized space. There is no one treatment that will work uniformly for an entire block or corridor. Specific placement and style will need to be evaluated based on business, community use, and residents.

"It feels so homey!"

"Seating would be nice - the whole [neighborhood] needs a facelift"

"I love the plants!"



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## **Concerns:**

- **Pavement evenness**
- **Seating being stolen or vandalized**
- **Current trees are unloved**

## **Desires:**

- **Plants; varying, not harmful to pavement**
- **Flowers**
- **Color; pots, on sidewalk**
- **Seating; depending on location**
- **Improved bus shelters**

## **General Comments**

The Hilltop Neighborhood has seen great challenges, changes, and triumphs over the last 30 plus years! Through celebration and strife, community members have become passionate in preserving their home. For these reasons and many others, asking any questions about the future of Hilltop solicits loaded answers. There is a palpable distrust of the City and fear in the neighborhood. There is a connection between this project and frustrations connected to housing, businesses, gentrification, policing, and other urban issues.

## **Concerns:**

- **Gentrification**
- **Rising rents**
- **White people**
- **People from Seattle**
- **Homelessness**
- **Rite Aid Building**

## **Desires:**

- **Steady housing prices**
- **Sustainability of current Hilltop Businesses during construction and after**
- **People of color working on the project in every capacity**
- **Faster solutions to current issues**
- **Hilltop to stay the same**

People also shared their joy about how far the neighborhood has come. The stewardship of Hilltop is a joint effort between community members and the City. The Links to Opportunity Project was a great way to introduce or reintroduce people to the City and its commitment to this neighborhood.



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## Next Steps

Construction is just around the corner and the excitement surrounding this project will only grow. Downtown On the Go wants to ensure that the audience we engaged continues to be involved in this process.

## Why is this audience important?

Our target audience were those people who do not necessarily have the time or ability to access traditional engagement opportunities. Out of the more than 250 people we spoke with, only a handful of people knew the Link was expanding at all. If we could find uninformed people through our outreach, there are surely more. The people who use the corridor everyday should be the ones shaping its future and there shouldn't be barriers to their involvement.

## How to stay in contact?

To maintain communication with our target audience engagement: on the street outreach should continue for two main reasons:

- **Testing out / discussing possible streetscape elements, tangibly, along the corridor grants more context** – inviting better informed feedback
- **Hosting conversations and engagement in public space / the sidewalk** - people can more easily engage and do so without a large time commitment

Our audience includes residents, employees, retirees, seniors, children, students, business owners, hilltop visitors, and everyone between. Our audience is the people who use the corridor. This audience and method of outreach is reaching people who have been systematically unheard and underserved. We are committed to being a part of this process and to work with the City and our other partners in welcoming this change to Tacoma in an innovative and inclusive way.

Kristina Walker, Executive Director  
Hally Bert, Coordinator  
253-682-1734

**“...the best way to plan for downtown is to see how people use it today; to look for its strengths and to exploit and reinforce them. There is no logic that can be superimposed on the city; people make it, and it is to them, not buildings, that we must fit our plans.” – Jane Jacobs**