

Neighborhood Partnerships for Community Research

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Transportation in the Blake Road Neighborhood: The Uses and Needs of Residents

Prepared in partnership with

Blake Road Corridor Collaborative

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Executive Summary

The Blake Road Neighborhood is a diverse community located in Hopkins, MN. Since 2005, the Blake Road Corridor Collaborative (BRCC) has been working to make improvements and engage residents in the community. During this time there have been at least 7 studies completed in the neighborhood, in addition to Blake Road being one of five Twin Cities Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Building Sustainable Communities locations (www.tclisc.org). This neighborhood has been chosen as a LISC community and for research projects because the value and potential for positive growth and change in the community has been recognized. From both the numerous reports and anecdotal evidence, Blake Road Corridor Collaborative had learned that transportation was an issue in the neighborhood. Additionally, Blake Road will be home to a station if Southwest light rail transit (LRT) is built between Minneapolis and Eden Prairie. BRCC is already thinking about the changes and opportunities this will bring to the neighborhood.

The goal of this project was to learn how residents in Blake Road think about and make transportation choices in the community. Knowing how residents are using transportation was to be researched along with the needs and transportation concerns of residents. To research these topics a mixed-methods approach was used; a combination of short surveys, face-to-face interviews, and a youth photo project.

Some of the results were expected, while others were more surprising. Key findings for this project include:

- **Public transit** is used often in the neighborhood and is considered an asset to the neighborhood, especially for travel to downtown Minneapolis. At the same time, it's listed as one of the top concerns of residents and does not adequately meet their needs.

- **Driving** is the most convenient and preferred mode in the community. Residents were generally supportive and familiar of transit but many felt it would be difficult to live without a car.
- **Biking and walking** are used for recreation and fun in the corridor. The Cedar Lake Trail and nearby Parks are important amenities to the community.
- **Blake Road** is a significant feature of the neighborhood. It has some concerning issues such as unsafe crossings, fast moving traffic, and inadequate bike & pedestrian facilities.
- **Engagement** in the community is important to residents and the BRCC. The BRCC community organizer and select apartment buildings work to connect residents and residents were found to be satisfied with their efforts. Residents have excellent ideas on how to continue this work.

Due to the broad nature of transportation, many recommendations could be made for improvements in Blake Road. Examples of recommendations include:

- **Continue** developing a resident advisory group as an offshoot of the BRCC
- **Adopt** the Trusted Advocate model used in St. Paul, MN
- **Engage** Metro Transit in a transit study now, and/or develop a local circulator
- **Focus** on off-street biking and walking connections to neighborhood parks and Cedar Lake Trail
- **Long Term** recommendations include adopting transit oriented development (TOD) principles, improving mobility within the neighborhood, and adopting Complete Streets principles along Blake Road.

The results and recommendations of this study will be used by the BRCC to engage residents and agencies interested in improving transportation within the neighborhood. This research, along with future research around the Southwest LRT, will help to guide the community in improving transportation for all users.

Introduction

In 2005 there was concern over the lack of activities for youth and an increase in crime in the Blake Road neighborhood located in Hopkins, MN. All the issues led to the creation of the Blake Road Corridor Collaborative (BRCC), a working group containing governmental and community organizations, which meets to address various issues in the community. Members of the stakeholders group include Hopkins Police Department, Intercongregation Communities Association (ICA), and 43 Hoops Basketball Academy, among others. To date the BRCC has completed several projects including the creation of a community garden in Cottageville Park and sidewalks on the east side of Blake Road in 2009 (Building Hope, Building Community 2010).

During the past few years, the BRCC has heard through anecdotal reports and research projects that transportation is an issue in the neighborhood. This is an opportune time to study transportation as Hennepin County and the City of Hopkins have been working for several years on the Southwest Transitway project. In the coming years, the BRCC hopes to engage residents in the planning and redevelopment of the neighborhood as light rail and other changes occur. To improve transportation in the neighborhood, the current needs and uses must be understood before we can determine the best solutions.

Why Care About Transportation In Blake Road?

- Slated to receive a light rail stop when Southwest LRT is built
- Blake Road is a dividing feature in the neighborhood- It is the main street in the neighborhood, yet it has no neighborhood feel to it. It has fast moving traffic, areas that are difficult to cross, and overall is designed solely for automobile use.

- Hopkins is one of the 5 cities in the LISC sustainable communities initiative- the goals of this program are (www.lisc.org):
 - *Expanding Investment in Housing and Other Real Estate*
 - *Increasing Family Income and Wealth*
 - *Stimulating Economic Development*
 - *Improving Access to Quality Education*
 - *Supporting Healthy Environments and Lifestyles*
- Blake Road has a unique mix of apartments, duplexes, and single family homes which has led to a diverse population by ethnicity, socioeconomics, and more
- The 2008 Wilder Research report found transportation to be one of the major concerns for Blake Road residents
- The Minnehaha Creek Watershed recently purchased a large parcel of land in the neighborhood with intent to redevelop
- More than 7 studies completed since 2008

Previous Research on the Neighborhood

The studies completed on the neighborhood since 2008 have ranged from several Humphrey School of Public Affairs projects on Cottageville Park all the way to a biking and walking study completed by a consultant. The following list (in chronological order) is work done in the neighborhood:

- *Blake Road Corridor Community Assessment: Final report for the Corridor Advisory Collaborative*, Wilder Research, April 2008.
- *Blake Road Corridor Small Area Plan*, Hay Dobbs, P.A., May 2009.

- *Pedestrian Studies: A Study of Walking/Biking Connections from Cedar Lake Trail Crossing of Blake Road to Nearby Retail/Service Destinations for the City of Hopkins and Hennepin County*, Peter Bruce, February 2009.
- *Cottageville Park: Revitalization and Redesign*, Raya Esmaeili, Anders Imboden, Daniel Schwartz, Alicia Uzarek, & Linden Weiswerda.
- *Hopkins Blake Road Corridor: Cottageville Park, A Guide To Engaging the Immigrant Population*, Mary Blitzer & Kelly Muellman, May 2011.
- *Blake Road Station: A Global Village in a Midwestern Town*, Brett Costain, Jennifer Halcrow, Andrea Long, & Cedric Williams, May 2011.
- *LISC Sustainable Communities Initiative: Hopkins Baseline Report for 2010 (draft version)*, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, May 2012.

In 2008 the Wilder research report was published and listed several transportation issues and themes.

Selections from the survey include (Wilder Research 2008):

- “There is a perception which may or may not be based in fact that is unsafe to walk around the Blake Corridor... I know some trail users feel it is unsafe around Blake Road” (A1)
- “Improve crosswalks and sidewalks” (A2)
- “A city commitment to budgeting for improvements in street lighting, walking paths along both sides of Blake Road, new street lights at Blake and Lake” (A2)
- “Because of lack of transportation, student who need additional academic help before or after school do not have transportation” (A3)
- “Youth in this area don’t have access to activities because of the major highway corridors that divide up the neighborhood” (A3)

- “The configuration of streets and access with an upgrade to the park along with community building activities” (A6).
- “Better access to activities in other parts of the city” (A10)
- “Adults need better public transportation and more access to services within the corridor” (A11)

In addition to the comments above, transportation and pedestrian walkways/safety were listed in the three most important issues section of their collaborative survey (A12). They were also listed in the top suggestions for improving the community section (Wilder Research 2008, A13).

Project Goals

The most noticeable work to address the issues described in the Wilder report has been the addition of sidewalks in the neighborhood. After reading the very broad transportation issues in Wilder it was clear that there are many issues that could be studied in the neighborhood. A mixed-methods approach was chosen to survey mode choice and transportation concerns. Next interviews were to be completed to dive deeper into the issues and comments around transportation. Finally, a youth photo project would help to engage the youth population in the neighborhood, a key piece in BRCC’s work.

The goal then was to determine the transportation behavior and needs of residents. This information, as well as the recommendations and conclusions drawn from the data, will be used to guide future engagement and transportation project priorities for the BRCC.

About the Neighborhood

The Blake Road neighborhood (see Figure 1) is located in Hopkins, Minnesota, approximately 7 miles southwest of downtown Minneapolis. The neighborhood is home to multiple large apartment complexes, single family homes and duplexes, and some smaller apartment complexes. There are some

commercial and retail properties along Blake Road and the large shopping complex, Knollwood Mall, to the north of the neighborhood.

Figure 1. Blake Road Boundaries (cesnsus.gov 2010)



Diversity of Residents

The Blake Road neighborhood is home to approximately 3,900 residents. The neighborhood has a large youth population with nearly 25% of households having children under 18. The racial characteristics of the neighborhood are approximately 8% African American, 5% Hispanic, 15% Asian, 5% other, and 70% white (CURA 2012). The 2012 report from CURA on the demographics of the community

is a draft and may not accurately represent the population due to census tract boundaries and the data available.

Hopkins is also a diverse and welcoming community to many of Minnesota's immigrant communities. According to Hopkins Public Schools, 46 different languages are spoken within the school district (hopkinsschools.org). Within the Blake Road neighborhood, 26% of residents speak a language other than English, and 22% of residents are foreign born (CURA 2012). This is relevant to researching transportation for several reasons. The first question to consider was whether there are differences in transportation needs based on cultural differences? There are studies that show differences in transit use and auto-ownership based on demographics (Pucher & Renne 2003, Blumenberg & Evans, 2010). It was clear then that this study needed to reflect the diversity of the neighborhood by having participants from various cultural backgrounds, different socioeconomic classes, and areas of the neighborhood.

A second question about diversity arose when planning the methods- Do the same methods of research and communication work for all residents on Blake Road? According to the Federal Highway Administration guide entitled, "How to Engage Low-Literacy and Limited-English-Proficiency Populations", there are certain methods that work better when working in communities with multiple languages and cultural backgrounds. For example, a 2 year transportation study in Milwaukee used a mix of one-on-one conversations and larger, more formal meetings and found that they learned more in the small groups than in the larger meetings (PBS&J 2006).

Housing

The housing mix in the Blake Road neighborhood is relevant to the project because it is fairly unique to the community. In 2010 there were 1,670, or 86.2% of households, that were renter-occupied. Only 13.8% or 268 housing units were owner-occupied (CURA 2012). The apartment complexes in the

neighborhood are an important feature and account for a large share of the rentals in the neighborhood. Other rentals include the numerous duplexes in the streets around Cottageville Park on the east side of Blake Road. The significant differences in housing were considered an important part of the methodology, specifically when looking for residents to interview.

Transportation

Before beginning the research it was important to look at the transportation available in the neighborhood, as well as reported trends. In figure 2 we see data from the 2010 American Community Survey estimates on travel behavior. As expected, driving alone is the most commonly used mode of transportation, followed by carpooling, and public transportation.

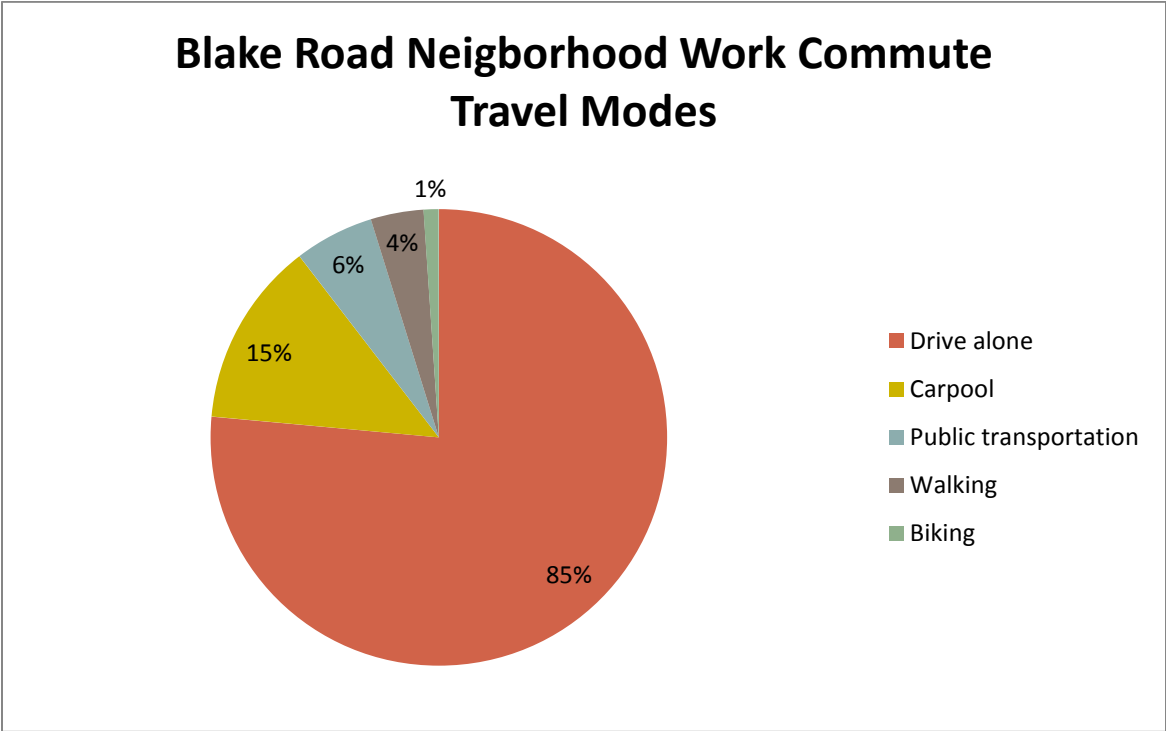


Figure 2. Work Commute Modes (ACS 2010)

Another useful statistic to consider is the number of vehicles by household in the neighborhood. Researchers have found that households without cars are almost six times more likely to take transit than households that have access to vehicles (Blumberg and Evans 2010). Also the more vehicles in a household, the less likely residents are to use modes other than driving (Pucher and Renee 2003). Figure 3 below illustrates the percentage of households who have no vehicles, 1 vehicle, and more. Nearly half the residents of Blake Road have access to 1 or fewer cars.

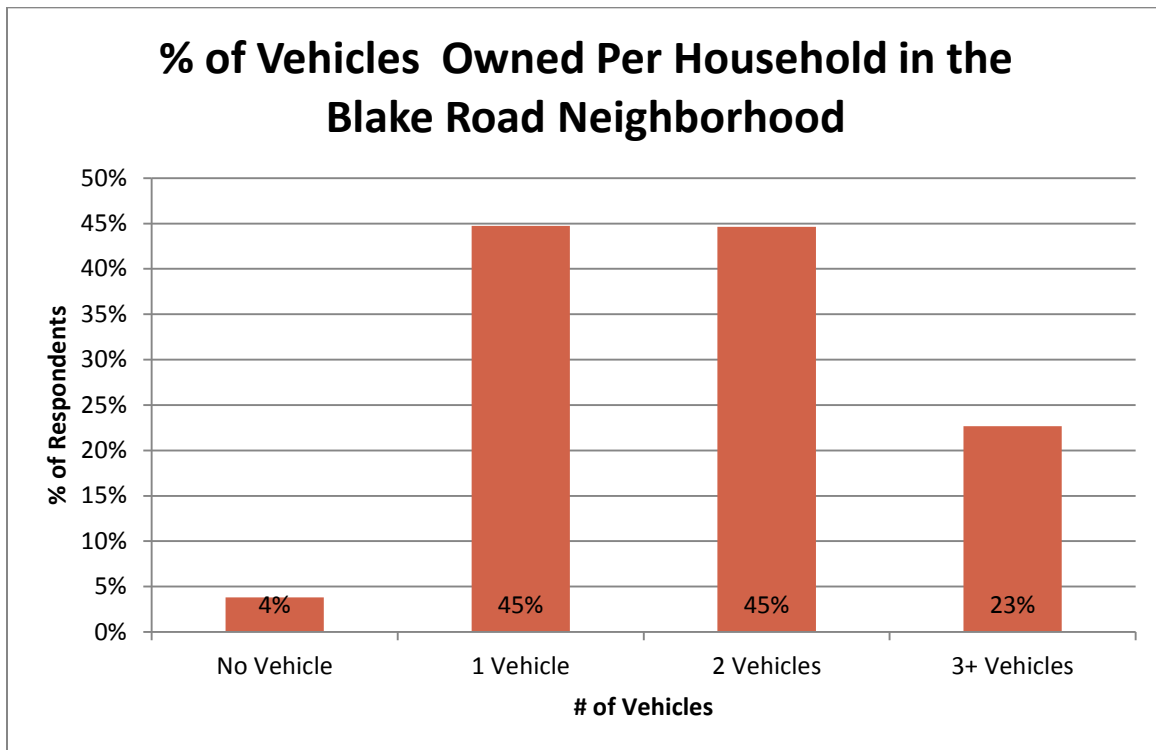


Figure 3. Vehicle Ownership (ACS 2010)

Driving

Blake Road N is a Hennepin County State Aid Highway (CSAH) also known as Highway 20. The Blake Road Neighborhood contains the area between Highway 7, Highway 169, and Excelsior Boulevard (see figure 1). The proximity of the neighborhood to highways and transportation infrastructure is a

benefit for drivers of the neighborhood. They have easy to access to nearby suburban communities, as well as Minneapolis by car.

Non-Motorized

Non-motorized travel in the neighborhood is present on neighborhood streets and the Cedar Lake Trail. The Cedar Lake Trail, which runs 4.57 miles from downtown Minneapolis to Hopkins, is a popular and highly used trail for biking and walking (threeiversparks.org). In February 2009 a study was done on the biking and walking connections from Blake Road to the trail. The study found that the connections from the neighborhood could be improved for cyclists and pedestrians. Despite the poor connections, biking counts on the trail rivaled downtown Minneapolis. On the other hand, walking was much lower on Cedar Lake Trail (Bruce 2009).

Public Transportation

The Blake Road neighborhood is served by 5 transit routes. In figure 4, the 3 most prevalent routes and average daily ridership are shown for routes 17, 615, and 668. The 668 travels between Hopkins and downtown Minneapolis and operates as an express route. The 17 runs from northeast Minneapolis to Blake Road and is the busiest route in the neighborhood. It has the most frequent schedules and runs nights and weekends. The 615 is a local route running from Ridgedale Mall to St. Louis Park.

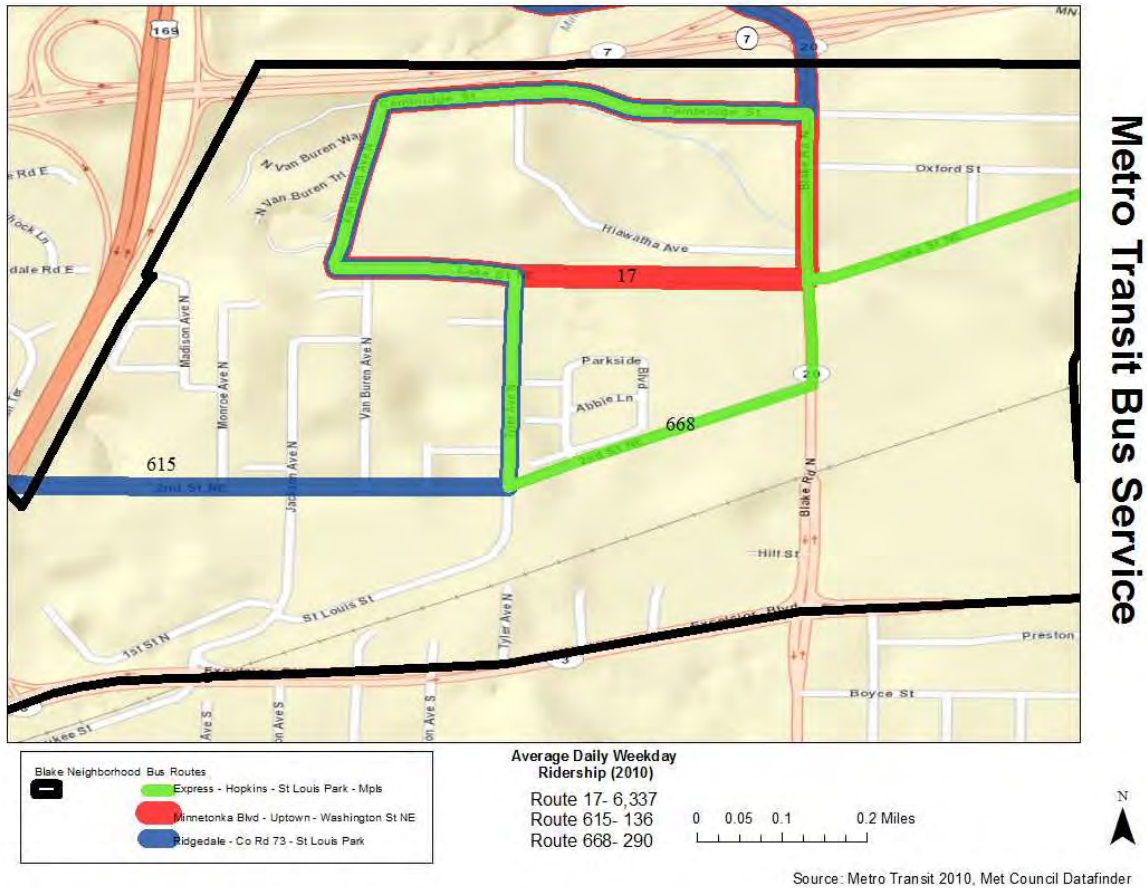


Figure 4. Metro Transit Bus Service

In addition to the 3 routes pictured there are 2 bus routes that run along Excelsior Boulevard- the 12 and the 664. They were not mentioned by residents throughout the entire study so they were left off the map. This could be due to the nature of residents interviewed, the only apartment within easy walking distance is Westside and no transit users were interviewed from the building. The 12 runs from Minnetonka to the Uptown transit station in Minneapolis. The 664, an express bus, also runs from Minnetonka to downtown Minneapolis.

Southwest Transitway

Another important highlight of transit in the neighborhood is the future Southwest LRT transit station (for map see appendix 2). The map in figure 1 shows the proposed Blake Station, the light rail

stop that is tentatively planned for 43 Hoops. The line will run from Minneapolis to Eden Prairie with stops in Minneapolis, St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Minnetonka, and Eden Prairie. The project is currently in the planning stages and several years out from opening (southwesttransitway.org).

The changes that LRT will bring to the neighborhood are one reason why this research project is important, and why so many other researchers have looked at the neighborhood. It will lead to many more studies and changes in the coming years as the project progresses.

Research Methods

The goal of this research project is to determine the transportation needs of Blake Road residents and whether they are met by the current options in the Blake Road neighborhood. To determine this several questions were to be explored: How do residents get around, what are their transportation needs, why do they make those choices, what concerns do residents have, and what suggestions do they have for improvements? As these questions were asked, new questions also evolved to add to the process.

The census data and previous studies can answer these questions in part, but they don't give the details or depth that the Blake Road Corridor Collaborative is looking for. To get a more complete picture of transportation in the neighborhood a mixed methods approach was used. A short survey was used to ask about mode choices and concerns, 12 face-to-face interviews were completed, and a youth photo elicitation project was attempted. Each method has the ability to answer the questions, but in unique ways.

The first step in the research process was to learn more about the neighborhood and the questions that needed exploring. Looking through the Wilder Report from 2008-the most comprehensive study on the neighborhood-there were many answers in the open-ended section that

deserved further analysis. There were comments about parking, safety, transportation for local youth, and other transportation issues that were considered for this research (Wilder 2008). In addition to understanding the previous studies done, information was gathered from professionals working in the neighborhood. Suggestions from these interviews and background from the Blake Road Corridor Collaborative (BRCC) helped shape the methodology and the questions asked.

Neighborhood Transportation Survey

A short survey was created to ask how residents get around and what some their transportation concerns may be (Appendix 1). The survey asks whether one lives or works in the neighborhood, what modes they take and how often, where do they travel to, and what transportation concerns they have. This survey was designed to be short and easy for use at events. For example, it was used at the Hopkins Multicultural Festival, the Ramsgate National Night Out event, and the Cottageville Park public meeting. The goal was to gather a convenience sample with responses from as many residents as possible.

One-On-One Interviews

The second part of the project included interviews with residents. The interviews were designed to be semi-structured with specific questions and probes to guide the interview. Some of the questions included in the conversation are listed:

- **Basic background questions:** How long have you lived in the neighborhood? How many in your household?
- **Typical travel behavior:** Where do you typically travel each day? How do you get there?
- **Thoughts on engagement and Southwest LRT:** What are some of the best ways, in your opinion, to get information out to neighbors? What are your experiences with local agencies working on transportation?

- **Transit use:** Tell me about a typical trip taking the bus. Is there anything that could make taking the bus easier for you?
- **Driving:** Do you usually travel within the neighborhood? Are there any concerns or stories you have about driving in the neighborhood?
- **Non-motorized transportation:** How often do you walk or bike in the neighborhood? How would you describe it to someone who does not live in the neighborhood?

The interviews were designed to take about 30 minutes with room for flexibility in the content. The goal when beginning the interviews was to sit down with 12 residents. Residents were to be selected from all different areas of the neighborhood and with different backgrounds.

Youth Photo Interviews

The third method used was a youth photo elicitation interview. Photo elicitation is the process of using photos in the research process to gain insights and ideas that might not come out of a verbal interview or survey. It is commonly used with children to gain knowledge and perspective that might differ from an adult (Hall et al., 2007). A focus of the BRCC, because of the many children in the neighborhood, is engaging youth in the community. One fun way to get children involved in the project was to have them take photos about transportation in the neighborhood.

One of the summer school programs in Hopkins gathered students who lived in Blake Road who might be interested in participating. Permission slips were sent home and those returned were provided with the disposable camera to begin the project. When many of the school students did not return the

permission slip cameras were distributed to kids whose parents were available by door knocking and knew of the BRCC's work in the neighborhood.

The photo participants were asked to take 10 photos related to transportation. The goal was to have the participants take photos that would give some insight into how they think about and travel within the neighborhood. They were asked to write down why they took the photo, or to at least remember the context of the photo. After the cameras were finished they were collected and developed onto photo CD's. The photos were then to be used to interview the participants about transportation.

Results

Neighborhood Transportation Survey

Of the surveys collected, 66 were from Blake Road resident and were considered in the analysis.

The travel mode choice graph in figure 5 shows how often each mode is used. The data was aggregated into "never" and "use the mode" so if they drive 1-3 days it was included in the below graph with drive every day.

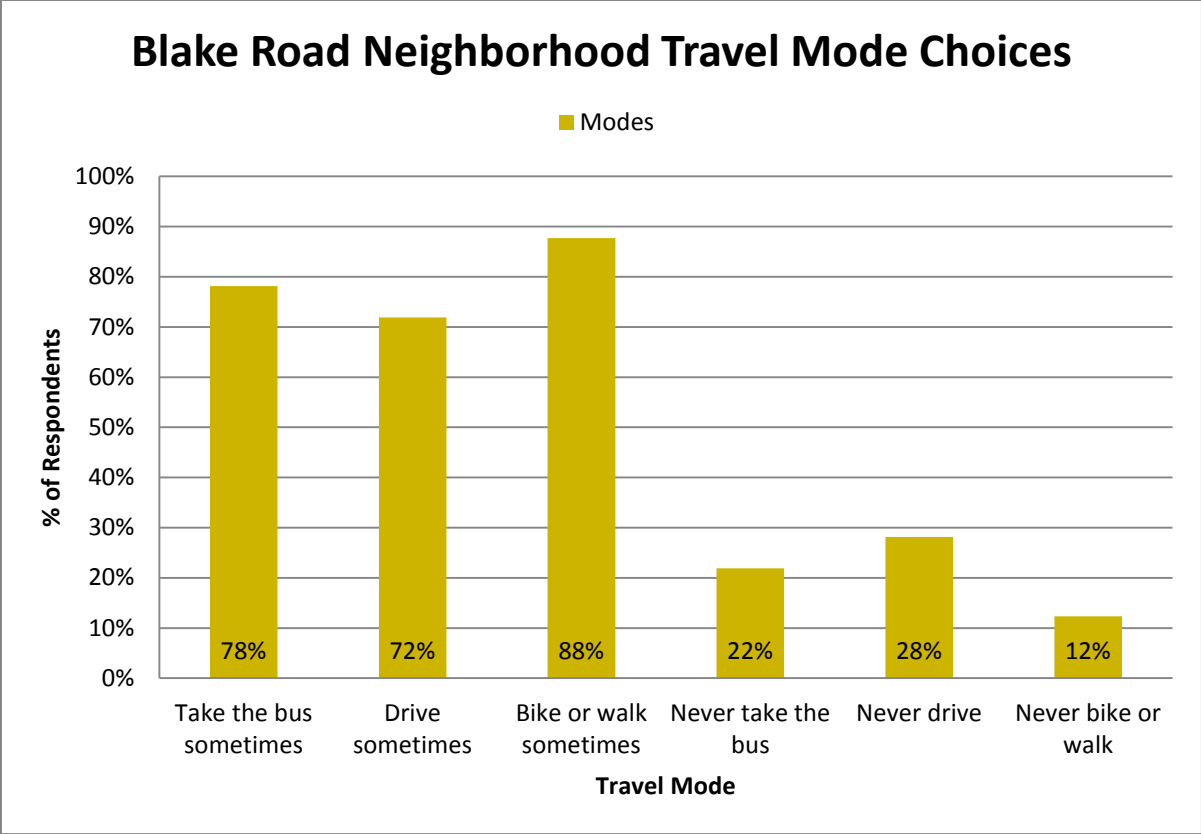


Figure 5. Travel Mode Choices (survey data)

For each mode it was also asked where do survey participants travel when they use the mode? As the table in figure 6 illustrates, the bus is used most often for work commutes in Blake Road. It is interesting that the survey found more people taking the bus to work than driving, considering the census data. The most commonly selected destination for driving was actually shopping, which is expected with the location of services in the community. Non-motorized modes had the most interesting answers- nearly as many people drive to shop as they walk or bike to shop in the neighborhood. Also 38% of respondents bike or walk on the Cedar Lake Trail. Several locations were listed repeatedly in the “other” response section for each mode. The parks were listed frequently in the other common for biking and walking. Downtown Minneapolis was listed as a frequent location in the “other” category for bus travel. This was not unexpected as many interviewees repeated the same idea,

Where do respondents travel?	Work	School	Shopping	Trails	Other (selected responses)
On the bus	44%	20%	30%	-	downtown, appointments
Driving	42%	17%	35%	-	park, volunteering
Biking/Walking	21%	8%	32%	38%	parks, around the neighborhood

Figure 6. Where do respondents travel? (from survey)

The final question on the survey was a multiple choice question asking respondents to pick their transportation concerns from a list. Figure 7 illustrates that all listed concerns were chosen multiple times. With the high bus ridership in the neighborhood it was interesting to see that the top concern was related to the bus. The top concern, selected by 26%, was that the bus is inconvenient. This was followed by I can't get places easily at 24%. There was a tie for 3rd place at 21%- transportation is expensive and I don't have access to a car.

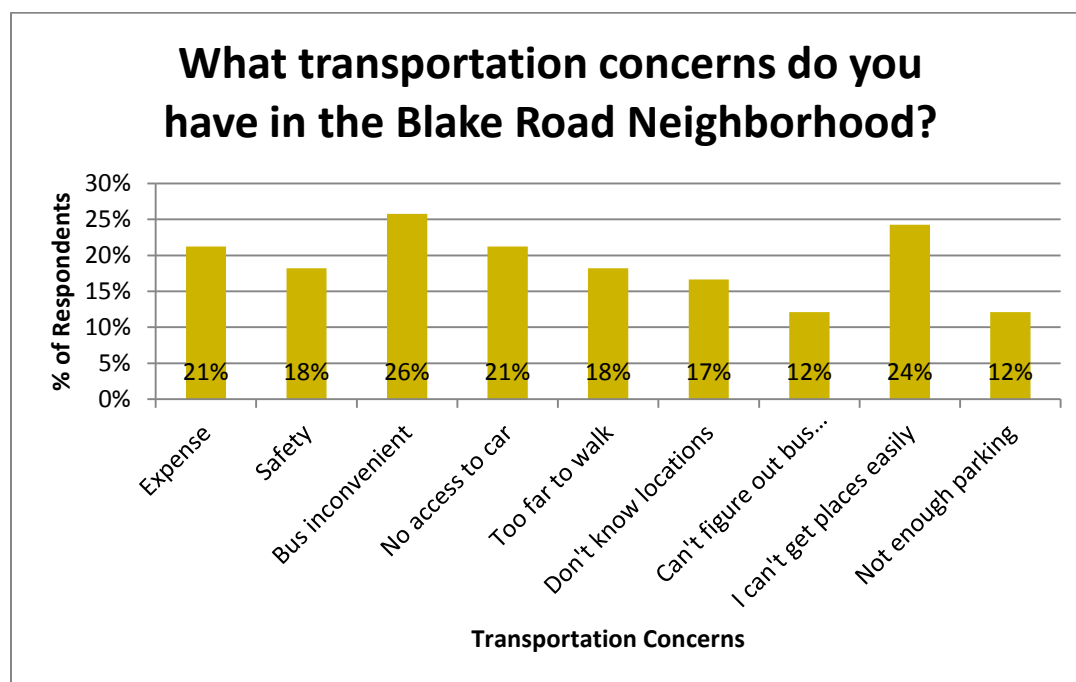


Figure 7. Transportation Concerns (from survey)

One-On-One Interviews

12 residents, with unique backgrounds, were interviewed during the research period. Interviewees were found through the BRCC organizer's community connections. An effort was made to talk to residents from around the neighborhood- Westside Apartments, Ramsgate, around Cottageville Park, and other areas of the neighborhood. The 9 interviews took place at the convenience of residents, at various locations around the neighborhood. Three of the interviews had two people in the interview, because it worked well and was easy to have two interviewees in those situations.

Many recurring themes appeared in the interviews. Qualitative research is not generalizable to the entire neighborhood but gives us an in-depth picture of these particular resident's transportation choices and behaviors. It can then be assumed that there are others have similar transportation behaviors, concerns, and opinions. Themes found from the interviews include the following:

Background information

The interviewees came from a mix of backgrounds. Examples include college students, Somali mothers, a young homeowner, a stay-at-home dad, and a single mother. Residents had lived in the neighborhood for varying amounts of time. The general theme was that they had lived there either a short time (maybe a couple months) or they had lived there 10+ years. Several interviewees had school-age children. Approximately half did not work jobs outside the home, which does reflect different travel choices.

Travel Behavior

When asked about travel behavior most listed their car as their most common means of transportation. Where they traveled depended on their needs- some traveled to work while others traveled mainly for errands and running children to activities.

Driving

10 out of the 12 interviewees drove at least some of the time. Most drove for work and errands because it was more convenient than other modes of transportation. From Blake Road it is an easy drive to other suburban communities for work, downtown Minneapolis, and downtown Hopkins. Travel within the Hopkins area was common for work and errands. One woman said it would be **“impossible to live without a car”**.

There were few complaints or concerns about driving except for the condition of the roads. The potholes and winter driving conditions on the side streets were the only complaints discussed. Most comments were minor and did not appear to be major issues for those interviewed.

Transit Use

As noted under driving, only 2 of the interviewees were car-free and transit dependent. Those two had the most varied experience with transit- having at one time or another used all the routes in the neighborhood and other services like Transit Link or Metro Mobility. The most significant concerns for those with fewer choices were the frequency of routes and the lack of service down Blake Road. One cannot travel the length of Blake Road by bus as the buses are focused more on taking residents out of the neighborhood rather than within.

The 17 and the express route 668 were the most commonly cited routes used by residents. Concerns about the buses mainly involved the frequency of the route and also the length of time the trip takes from the neighborhood to other areas. Some had experienced the bus taking over an hour and 30 minutes each way to travel to work. Residents who don't regularly take the bus said they would like to if it was more convenient and were appreciative of the transit service available in the neighborhood.

A surprising find was that many of the residents considered moving to the neighborhood because of the transportation choices. Many residents take transit to downtown Minneapolis (as also noted in the survey) for recreation, going out downtown, taking the Hiawatha LRT to the airport, or for general errands. One resident would use Metro Transit buses to send her teenage daughter to school when she missed the bus. Others expressed interest in using the bus to save money when they were having a hard time paying for gas and auto expenses. The most interesting comment was from a young, married homeowner who said, **“The main reason we probably bought this house was because of transportation...where I lived before if I had a flat tire I used to have to take a taxi cab so it was nice to be able to get downtown if I needed to...We looked at houses in Golden Valley and St. Louis Park that didn’t really have good bus transportation so you’d have to have a car”**.

There were several suggestions for improvements to transit that were unique to the neighborhood. The first is that there are almost no bus stop amenities within the community. There are no shelters or benches throughout the neighborhood. Residents at Ramsgate apparently wait inside the building until the bus stops at the stop so they don’t have to stand unprotected out in the cold and other weather. Another concern from the Ramsgate building is that many residents who worked downtown have had their offices relocated to Brooklyn Park. Prior to the move, they were a quick transit ride to work downtown and most tended to commute by bus to work. Even those with cars would commute to save on parking and the inconvenience of driving downtown. Now it is inconvenient to take the bus downtown, transfer, and spend another hour on the bus. A desire to have direct service to Brooklyn Park was strong. Lastly another suggestion was that the neighborhood be made more ADA compliant. For someone with disabilities many of the stops were inaccessible and it limited which routes could be taken and the time of day they could travel.

Non-motorized Transportation

Thanks to the Cedar Lake Trail, biking is a very popular activity in the neighborhood. More than half of the interviewees liked to bike for fun, transportation, or exercise. Several of the parents used it as a family activity with their children on Cedar Lake Trail. Others used it to occasionally commute to the bus, downtown Hopkins, downtown Minneapolis, or errands within the neighborhood. There were exclusively positive comments made about biking. One interesting comment mentioned by a resident was that the trail actually takes away from biking in the neighborhood streets. They believed the trail is so well liked that people don't bike on Blake Road or other areas because they have the trail.

Some comments and repeated themes were also seen while talking about safety. From the conversations it is clear that many do not feel comfortable biking on Blake Road. While not everyone would say it, many were biking to the trail via the sidewalks and avoiding the street. Many of the families that bike have small children and safety is an issue. One woman expressed interest in learning how to bike better. She had to teach herself how to bike so she could bike with her kids and worries about her skills and safety.

Walking was as highly regarded as biking by those interviewed. How enjoyable walking in the neighborhood depends on one's location. Residents who lived closer to Excelsior expressed concern over walking and would not let their children out alone on Blake Road. They commented that in the past ten years two people have been killed in pedestrian/car accidents near Westside Apartments. Because of those rumored accidents they do not think it is safe for walking.

Alternatively, those who lived in the northwestern corner of the neighborhood thought it was a great place to walk. They liked the added sidewalks, there are people out walking all hours of the day, and there are paths and destinations within the park. Traffic was noted as being uncomfortable on Blake

but it did not make them unwilling to walk in the neighborhood. Most did not walk to get somewhere but rather just for fun or to walk to a park.

Southwest LRT and Community Engagement

Whether it is real or perceived, there are major differences between the apartment buildings that keep the neighborhood from having more of a community feel. Each apartment building or even the houses around the park makes its own community within the neighborhood that makes the larger Blake Road Neighborhood seem less cohesive. In order to see if there were ways to connect with more residents, the interviewees were asked about their experiences.

What they said about engagement:

- BRCC Community organizer Ann- she has made strong connections and is the reasons many residents know anything at all about community happenings. Everyone agreed she is doing an excellent job.
- Apartment buildings- the residents rely on the apartment buildings for community information and resources. Hosting meetings there (as has been done by the city) is appreciated and easy for residents.
- Media- Interviewees listed social media, TV news, and local print news as good ways to let neighbors know about events and projects.
- Talking to others- This came up multiple times in by different residents. Several believed that the best thing to do is have the information spread by word of mouth. One woman said, **“...knowing someone in the community who can pass the message”** is the way to do it. She also felt that others in the Somali community didn’t know about government or how to get involved but that they should be.

As for Southwest Light rail and public meetings there was mostly consensus. Everyone expressed an interest in the light rail yet claimed to not really know much about it at this time. Public meetings were considered important and a valuable tool yet everyone said they never make it because of time. Working late, having young children, etc. - they all had excellent reasons to be too busy to attend.

Youth Photo Interviews

Completing projects with youth during the summer was found to be challenging. 5 cameras out of 9 were collected and developed. Of those 5, only three of the participants were able to take the time to meet. This project could definitely be expanded and continued with more students during a lengthier period of time.

Despite the lower than desired participation rate there was still information to be gained. Three broad themes came out of the pictures and the responses heard from the participants.

1. Blake Road is a significant presence in the neighborhood and is a place for vehicles. Most of the photos taken by the younger participants show blurred cars driving on Blake Road. The semi pictured below was captured by a five year old who frequently walks along Blake Road. **“I can walk all the way to the Super Target!”**



Figure 8 Youth Photo

2. Walking and biking are fun, family activities that take place in the neighborhood. Numerous photos like the one below showed up in the pictures, as well as kids walking and biking around the neighborhood.

“...We go on a 1 hour ride, run, or rollerblade- always have to... almost every day to St. Louis Park to Sam’s club, up the big hill, and then home...”



Figure 9 Youth Photo

3. Kids rely on their parent’s personal vehicles for most transportation. There were several pictures of parent’s parked cars, which is a major form of transportation for 2 of the three kids interviewed.



Figure 10 Youth Photo

Key Findings

Neighborhood Transportation Survey

- **Transit Use:** In the American Community Survey 2010 data only 6 % of the neighborhood uses public transportation in Blake Road. In that survey, they asked only about work commutes in the past week. According to our survey data, which asked more generally about transit use, 78% of those respondents take transit at least some of the time.
- **Top 3 transportation concerns:**
 1. The bus is inconvenient (26%)

2. I can't get where I need to go easily (24%)
3. I don't have access to a car (21%)
3. Transportation is expensive (21%)

One-On-One Interviews

- Blake Road is considered a desirable place to live because of transportation: Many residents enjoy having access to transit, easy accessibility for highways and nearby communities, and parks within an easy distance.
- Significant differences between east & west side: Transportation and safety is viewed differently in different areas of the neighborhood. Interviewees on the west side of Blake felt safe, enjoyed walking all times of day or night, and had less concerns with Blake Road. The residents on the east side of Blake road are closer to the road and had greater issues and fear related to safety and transportation.
- Many residents are mobile and not committed to the neighborhood: Many of the residents were new to the area and are not permanent home-owners. With such a high percentage of renters and a large population of sometimes short-term, international residents there is a perception that many people are not invested in the community in the long term.
- Almost all residents interviewed drive because of convenience: While residents were moving to the community because they could take the bus and have mode choices, it does not mean that they always use their other choices. It is considered very difficult to live without a car in the neighborhood and because of Hopkins' location it is very convenient to drive.
- Transit is a draw to the neighborhood but it does not meet fully user's needs: Residents expressed an interest in transit because they had positive perceptions on using public transit. Many don't take

it regularly because it is easier to drive. Issues were mentioned that related to getting around the neighborhood and getting to work in areas that are not downtown.

- Walking and biking are for recreation and family time in the community and not exclusively for transportation. The trails and parks are a highly valued amenity for the neighborhood. Rarely discussed was walking to destinations for a purpose. In fact, only two of the 12 residents discussed walking somewhere besides the park or on the trails.

Youth Photo Interviews

- Blake Road is a significant presence in the neighborhood and it is a place for vehicles.
- Walking and biking are fun, family activities that take place in the neighborhood.
- Kids rely on their parent's personal vehicles for most transportation.

Recommendations

Continue developing a neighborhood advisory group

The Blake Road Corridor Collaborative has been working on this as an organization but it should be included to reaffirm the need for this to happen. As new development and the Southwest LRT come through the neighborhood it will be important for residents to be engaged and united. Getting representatives from around the neighborhood together to ask for what they need should be the next step. Residents are currently engaged at their apartment or with the BRCC but not with the larger neighborhood as a whole. A neighborhood advisory group could unite residents from Ramsgate with those from Westside or around Cottageville Park.

Adopt Trusted Advocate model

This comes directly from the interviews- residents believe other residents should be informing neighbors of events, news, and important information. As the one Somali woman interviewed had said,

we need to get more Somali residents involved. One way to do this is to adapt the Trusted Advocate Model that St. Paul has adopted from Seattle and other cities to fit the neighborhood (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2007). This should be in addition to the BRCC community organizer's work so that as many residents as possible can be reached. The advantage of combining the efforts is that those who don't feel comfortable or have issues communicating with Ann or BRCC members can still be reached by those they trust who are in contact with Ann.

Engage Metro Transit in a study

As found throughout the research project, there are issues with public transportation in the neighborhood. One option is to engage Metro Transit in a study sooner rather than later to see how things might be improved. The Southwest LRT will require a transit study which could be started now. For example the city of Minnetonka, also on the LRT line, has been working with Metro Transit since 2010 on a transit study for the community (metrotransit.org).

Starting the study now would allow for current issues to be fixed and to get a head start on planning for Southwest LRT. The disadvantages include possibly needing to do the study again if Southwest is delayed, the station location changes, or any other unexpected outcomes.

Develop a local circulator

An alternative to changing the bus routes within Blake Road is to develop a low-cost neighborhood circulator. There is some history to this recommendation as Hopkins used to have a service called Hopkins Hop-a-Ride. This would improve mobility within the corridor, especially for youth, residents with disabilities, and the elderly. This would provide better access to services on Blake Road that currently are commonly accessed by car.

The disadvantage to this recommendation is the potential cost of the project. In West St. Paul they created the West Side Circulator to address needs similar to Blake Road. The project has been running since 2003 but as of this summer was looking for funding. This particular circulator has operating costs of approximately \$45,000 per year that had been supported by 3 large organizations (sprocketsstpaul.org). The BRCC, local government agencies, and private donors would have to unite to find a way to create a sustainable funding source. One way for this to work may be to have the circulator be an amenity for all of Hopkins, not just Blake Road. A study on this possibility was completed in 2009 and provides more information (Alquist et al, 2009).

Focus on off-street walking & bicycle trail connections to Cedar Lake Trail and local parks

Talking to residents about biking issues brought up several key ideas. The Cedar Lake Trail and parks are an amenity for the neighborhood and they need better access to them. Biking, especially with young children, would be difficult on Blake Road under current conditions. Most residents said outright or implied that they use the sidewalk to bike to the trail and they won't bike anywhere else. To further increase the benefit and safety of the trail it would be best to have off-street trail connection throughout the neighborhood.

Off-street facilities would be ideal but might be costly. An alternative, which was less favored by residents interviewed, is to include bike lanes on Blake Road which is included in the Small Area Plan (Hay Dobbs 2009). However, the plan for improvements on Blake Road could drastically change resident's opinions on biking on the road. A more balanced, safer Blake Road with slower traffic and bike lanes will most likely be more comfortable for bikers and pedestrians.

In addition to bike lanes resident may benefit from adult and youth learn to cycle classes to boost confidence. One woman expressed enthusiasm at learning to bike and was concerned about

safety. Classes designed to teach bicycling safety and skills might help the women and kids biking in the neighborhood feel more confident and more adventurous in route choices.

Long Term

The report prepared for Hennepin County on Blake Road has a wonderful design for the community to look forward to (Hay Dobbs 2009). It includes land use changes, updates to the commercial corridor, and significant pedestrian and bike improvements. The only recommendation for the long term is to make sure that through the BRCC, residents are continually engaged in the planning process.

In the long term it might be helpful to: improve low-cost housing, improve ADA accessibility and non-motorized mobility, and to make the suggested Complete Streets improvements to Blake Road. These improvements will help continue to make Blake Road a more desirable residential location choice.

Conclusion

This project has given insight into the transportation choices and options available to the residents of the Blake Road neighborhood. Getting updated data, more personal and reflective stories about transportation, as well as youth photos has given us a broad but meaningful description of what it is like to live and travel within the neighborhood. This information will be used by the BRCC to guide their work in engaging residents around transportation.

Limitations

While this research has led to new insights and recommendations it does have limitations. Interviewing 12 residents cannot be generalized to the entire population nor is it an exhaustive method. There is limitless information that can be collected from residents, this is just one sample. With that

said, we cannot assume that these are the only transportation concerns or issues in the neighborhood, but that it is a thorough and best-guess answer for the research collected.

Future research

The Blake Road Neighborhood has choices available as they continue to grow and redevelop when it comes to transportation and other planning issues. Each section studied in this report could be analyzed further (as some research has done in the past) to gain even more information. As the Southwest LRT moves forward it is important to be constantly thinking about the changes and improvements that are possible for transportation in the neighborhood. Whether it is a walking study undertaken by the new resident's group or a transit study by Metro Transit- there is still room for more questions and answers on this topic.

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Appendix

Appendix 1- Transportation Survey

BLAKE ROAD NEIGHBORHOOD TRANSPORTATION SURVEY

Do you live or work in the Blake Road neighborhood (check one or more boxes)?

- I live in the Blake Road neighborhood
- I work in the Blake Road neighborhood
- I don't live or work in the Blake Road neighborhood

How many days a week do you take the bus? Circle one.

Never 0-3 3-6 Everyday

Where do you take the bus to (check all that apply)?

- Work
- School
- Shopping
- Other _____

How many days a week do you drive? Circle one.

Never 0-3 3-6 Everyday

Where do you drive to (check all that apply)?

- Work
- School
- Shopping
- Other _____

How many days a week do you bike or walk in the Blake Road neighborhood? Circle one.

Never 0-3 3-6 Everyday

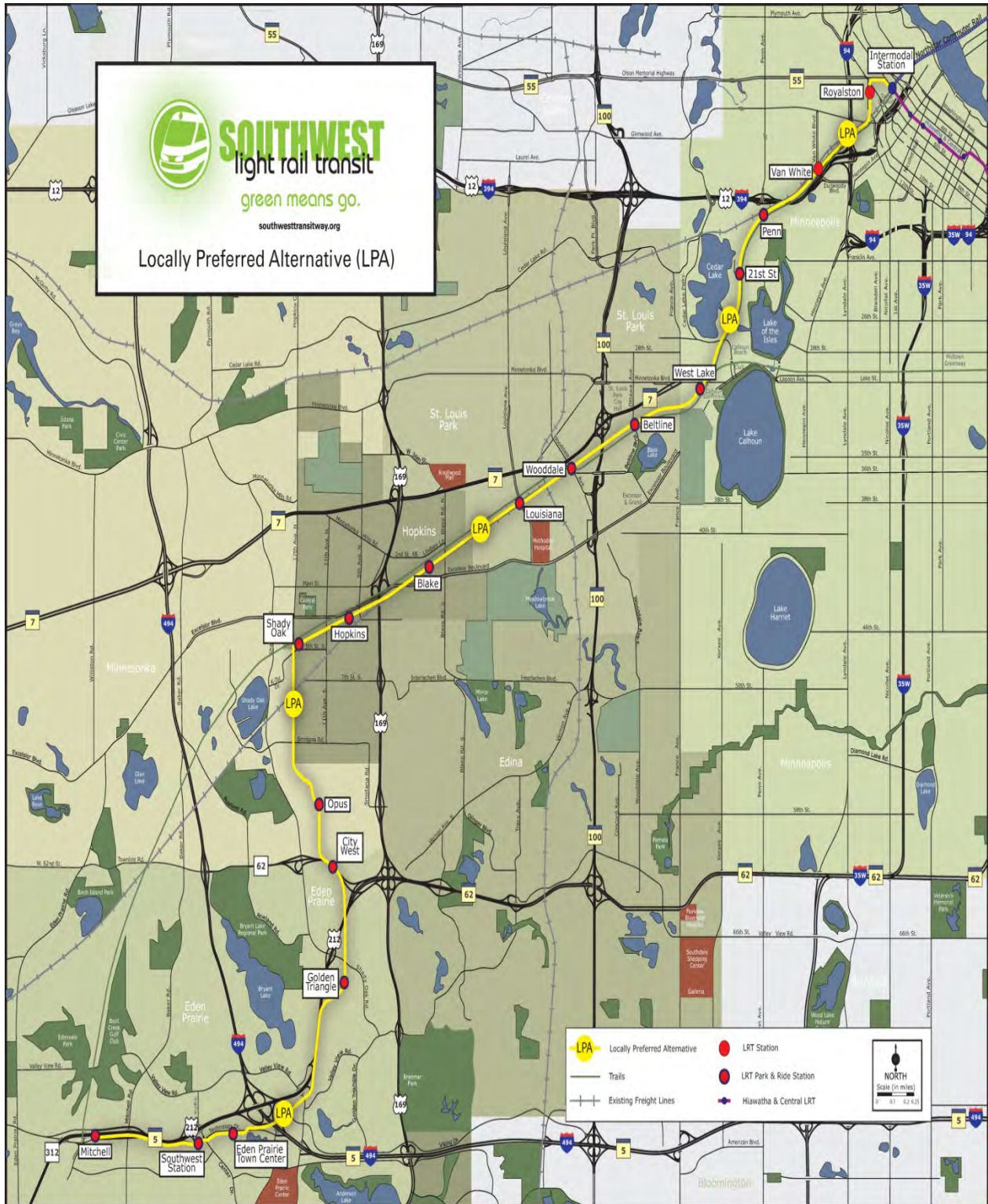
If you do bike or walk in the neighborhood, where do you walk or bike to (check all that apply)?

- Work
- School
- Shopping
- On the bike trails
- Other _____

What transportation concerns do you have in the Blake Road neighborhood (check all that apply)?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation is expensive | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know where places are located |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't feel safe walking/biking | <input type="checkbox"/> I can't figure out the bus times or stops |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The bus is inconvenient | <input type="checkbox"/> I can't get where I need to go easily |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't have access to a car | <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough parking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Distances are too far to walk | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

Appendix 2- Southwest Transitway Locally Preferred Alternative (www.southwesttransitway.org)




SOUTHWEST
 light rail transit
 green means go.
 southwesttransitway.org
 Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA)

 Locally Preferred Alternative
 Trails
 Existing Freight Lines
 LRT Station
 LRT Park & Ride Station
 Hiawatha & Central LRT
