



## 2015 Walk Bike Nashville Metro Council Candidate Questionnaire

Name of Candidate: Elizabeth Dachowski

Office Sought (Vice-Mayor, Metro-Council): Metro-Council

District (if applicable): At large

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1. If (re)elected what would you do to promote walking and biking in Nashville and ensure all Nashvillians, regardless of who they are and where they are trying to go, have access to real transportation options?

*Infrastructure is key to walkability. Nashville needs to incorporate sidewalks into all new development and to retrofit established neighborhoods for sidewalks. Bike routes and bike lanes are also key. There are already many biking and walking options for recreation, but Metro needs to have a coherent plan for safe bicycle and pedestrian commuting (for work, shopping, and socializing) throughout the city. It is not enough merely to have sidewalks and lanes. There needs to be a coherent plan to create a network of routes (including safe road crossings) that would allow people to move around without cars with the same freedom that people in cars enjoy. Non-vehicular traffic should not be an extra, added on after all vehicular conveniences have been engineered in; pedestrians and bicyclists need to have their needs considered from the very beginning of the planning process. When vehicular and pedestrian/cyclist needs are at odds, vehicles should not automatically have precedence.*

*Funding is always central to planning and implementing widespread changes. Bike lanes and sidewalks are (compared to roads) surprisingly inexpensive, but they are not free. Much of the cost can be covered by including upgrades as part of routine maintenance. Sidewalks are planned for many areas of the city, but future sidewalk plans are largely ignored by developers (who often include parking, fencing, and other landscaping that will have to be relocated or destroyed when sidewalks finally arrive); requiring developers to add sidewalks to new development as it is built should be as much a requirement as bringing new construction up to current codes; this may give a patchwork of sidewalk*

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*segments in the short term, but will make upgrading to sidewalks a less painful process in the long term (and in some areas with heavy development may provide continuous sidewalks well in advance of city-led upgrades).*

*Once we have a good network of sidewalks, there will be indirect savings in many other areas. MTA will probably see increased ridership as people can get to bus stops more easily. Wear and tear on existing roads will decrease as more people walk or bike. These do not include less direct benefits, such as better fitness and health and more people using scheduled bus routes instead of the more costly AccessRide or businesses needing to provide less parking.*

2. The [Strategic Plan for Sidewalks and Bikeways](#), which prioritizes where to build new sidewalks and bikeways, was last updated in 2008- before Nashville began experiencing explosive growth. The plan was slated to be updated every 5 years, and thus is due for an update. What should our priorities for walking and biking be in the next version? How would you go about updating the plan?

*The strategic plan already has a ton of great ideas, but the implementation has been painfully slow and often not accompanied with public education and signage so that motorists understand the needs of pedestrian and bicyclist (both legal requirements and safe driving practices) and pedestrians and bicyclists often don't know how to make the best use of existing infrastructure to get where they need to go safely. Repaired sidewalks need to incorporate construction standards for new sidewalks whenever possible. (Recent repaving of sidewalks on 40<sup>th</sup> Ave North, for example, did not widen the narrow sidewalks at all and did not relocate utility poles from the middle of sidewalks. Thus, although this route has sidewalks, it is not fully usable by someone in a wheelchair or with a walker or by a parent with a stroller.)*

3. In 2014, 18 pedestrians were killed, and many more injured, on the roads of Davidson County. Nashville is currently ranked the 15th most dangerous city in America for pedestrians, according to [Dangerous by Design](#) (Smart Growth America). [Vision Zero](#) is an international effort dedicated to the belief that even one preventable pedestrian injury or death is too many. Streets should be engineered to protect all road users – especially pedestrians, who are most exposed to dangerous conditions on the road. How can we apply Vision Zero policies in Nashville? What can we do as a city to increase safety for all road-users in Nashville?

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*We need to design intersections for pedestrian safety and convenience. There is a whole range of options that have been proven to help elsewhere (bulb outs, timing of lights, better marking of crosswalks, closer placement of crosswalks along transit routes and busy thoroughfares, restrictions on turning traffic, etc.). We have a talented team of people in the planning department who are up on most of these; ask them to look at "best practices" in comparable cities with low rates of pedestrian injuries and fatalities, and then listen to them. We should make it easy for individual neighborhoods to become laboratories for various traffic calming measures, including the "20 is plenty" movement that began in England and is gaining ground here.*

4. Where do you think Metro should construct sidewalks first? How should Metro prioritize sidewalk projects?

*The easy answer is "everywhere, immediately." As a council person, I would favor postponing most other roadwork until we have brought our sidewalks up to speed (something that should have been done decades ago.) Realistically, however, some projects will have to come before others. Busy streets in densely populated areas and/or areas with a lot of shops should be the first priority. Areas heavily used by young people (middle-school through college), senior citizens, and poor people should also be a high priority. Sidewalks should always be added whenever major work is done (even if the stretch of road is not at the top of the sidewalk priority list).*

5. As part of the [Nashville Next](#) process, the Planning Department has collected public input to create a long-term transportation plan called [Access Nashville 2040](#). The plan recognizes that our citizens do not desire, nor can our city afford, expensive new roads. Rather than pursue costly widening projects that provide a temporary solution to congestion and a permanent maintenance burden, we must operate our existing street network more efficiently by expanding access to multimodal transportation. Do you support this conclusion? What would you do to ensure Nashvillians can use walking and biking as real transportation options, and not just forms of recreation?

*People will leave their cars behind (or at least reduce driving) if they believe that the alternatives are (1) affordable; (2) time-efficient; (3) comfortable (both socially and physically); and (4) convenient. The first two of these are easy to measure. Walking and biking costs are small and well-studied. Traveling within a neighborhood on foot or on a bicycle requires safe routes (sidewalks and dedicated bike lanes in more heavily traveled areas; wide shoulders and good*

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*lines of visibility in less developed areas). For longer distances, good public transportation (including buses and trains that can accommodate bicycles) is essential. Bus fares are well known (and Metro controls level of subsidy); distances and fuel costs for car trips are relatively easy to calculate. For time efficiency, Metro can easily map distances to bus routes, speed of travel along routes, and frequency of buses; similar metrics can be generated for pedestrian and bicycle trips. Making walking, biking, and busing affordable and time-efficient options is well within Metro's capability if we decide to make that a priority. The harder part is not just making alternative transportation convenient (again, not hopelessly difficult if Metro wishes to make it a priority), but making people who have grown up driving everywhere in Nashville feel comfortable walking, biking, or taking public transit. This will require massive community outreach, going into neighborhoods and listening to what people have to say about non-car options, and then acting on public feedback. Too often public meetings have seemed to be attempts to lecture the public about the benefits of what the planning department has already decided upon; making immediate, small symbolic concessions to community desires, even if not strictly within the priorities of the master plan (a crossing light near a school or park, for example), will do wonders to gain trust and buy-in for larger changes down the road.*

6. Studies consistently show that the greater the population density in a given neighborhood, the more walkable that neighborhood will be (e.g. walking to grocery store, work, transit). What are your thoughts about density in Nashville and how it relates to transportation challenges?

*Implementing denser zoning in new neighborhoods (especially those close to the urban core) should be relatively easy. More difficult is deciding on what is appropriate for existing neighborhoods. People move into a neighborhood because they like the housing and because they like the feel of the neighborhood. Subdivision of existing single-family lots and addition of larger housing than previously allowed or customary will meet with resistance. Measures that would allow greater population density must be combined with protections that preserve the character of the neighborhood. Scale also needs to be considered. A densely populated area might still be unwalkable if the development consists of large houses, towering fences, or monolithic apartment buildings with little or no visual interest to make a stroll to the corner pleasant.*

*Meanwhile, much of Davidson county has a genuinely rural character. Places where farming (either commercially or for family consumption) is still possible*

*need to be preserved. For those areas, plans that encourage clustering housing and businesses at small cores or along major thoroughfares would better serve the community than rules designed for urban or suburban development.*

7. There is clear support in the Nashville community for spending more money on sidewalks, but the source of funding is always the major question. Do you think the city should spend more, less or the same amount on sidewalks and bikeways? If more, what policies or initiatives would you propose to increase funding for sidewalks and other pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure projects? If less, what would you opt to not fund and why?

*We should spend more on sidewalks, bikeways, and mass transit. I would suggest reducing future subsidies of large private or semi-public projects (sports venues, convention centers, etc.); unfortunately, previous governments have somewhat tied us down with large obligations to such development projects of questionable economic and community benefit. We need to re-prioritize our road budget, not embarking on new projects that will primarily facilitate car travel until we have adequately met the needs of those who travel by other means.*

8. While our sidewalk, greenway and bikeway networks are expanding, there are still many gaps in connectivity that rule out biking and walking as real transportation options for many Nashvillians who would otherwise be interested in biking or walking to work, school, the grocery store or to community events. What initiatives or policies would you propose to bridge the gaps that separate walkable and bikeable areas from adjacent communities?

*New development should always include provisions for walkability. Metro should work with developers not just to create innovative streetscapes that promote walkability but to create marketing plans that will sell new buyers and renters on these features before they even move in.*

*In more developed areas of Nashville, the street grid is often an impediment to connectivity (and hence a limit to walkability). The 28<sup>th</sup>/31<sup>st</sup> Avenue Connector proves that these barriers can be overcome. Where extension and rerouting of the road is not possible, however, well-designed pedestrian/bike bridges over heavily traveled roads can be a viable alternative. Priority for these should go to routes with heavy vehicular traffic that create barriers between residential and commercial centers. These need to be more than just functional, however. They*

*should be pleasant and inviting (a good place for public art or pockets of green space) and easy to access (avoiding long flights of stairs, for example).*

9. Everyone wants to be able to get across the city quickly, yet roads designed to carry cars as quickly as possible are usually the most dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists. Do you support adding traffic calming approaches (example: [bulb outs](#); [road diets](#); [slow zones](#)) along Nashville's major pikes and arteries? When are these projects appropriate?

*Traffic calming is something that Nashville needs to do more of just about everywhere in the city. The trick is to get buy-in from businesses (which often equate automotive access to customer access) and residents (who often fear that traffic calming will lead to more traffic/longer commute times). Whenever there is community demand for traffic calming, we should support that demand and make the community part of a public relations campaign to sell other parts of the community on traffic calming. In addition, we need to focus on the poorest parts of the city (where residents often don't have political clout and are also more likely to need alternatives to cars) and areas where pedestrian/bicyclist injuries/fatalities are higher than average.*

10. Nashville is currently a Bronze [Bicycle Friendly Community](#), as determined by the [League of American Bicyclists](#). What would you do to move us towards becoming a Silver Bicycle Friendly community?

*Moving to the silver level would be a great thing for Nashville (particularly as the most bicycle-friendly states are outside of the deep South; this is a chance to be a regional leader rather than a follower). Bicycling is cost-effective for commuters and a healthy activity for almost everyone. When I look around the city, I see need to do a lot more work on all 5 of the "E's" identified by the League of American Bicyclists (Engineering, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, and Evaluation/Planning). Metro's council, as keeper of the purse strings, can advocate for better policies and appropriate expenditure on infrastructure. Council members, as public figures, can make sure that bicycle-friendly ideas are part of the public discourse on where Nashville is going.*

11. Are there any specific bicycle or pedestrian infrastructure projects or initiatives that you would work to complete during your term?

*Over the next four years I would like to accomplish several things. (1) I would like to see the rate of building new sidewalks double in the next four years. (2) I would like to see the addition of safe crosswalks (well-marked and light*

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*controlled) at all bus stops along major streets. (3) I would like to see a restructuring of MTA's fares to make traveling by bus more economical; this might include adding more transfer options (rather than paying full fare every time a rider had to change buses) and an installment plan for monthly bus passes (currently the most affordable option on a per trip basis, but a large down payment for those with limited cash flow). (4) I would like to see a reworking of MTA's routes to include more cross-town buses.*

*Elected or not, I plan to continue to blog about non-car transportations alternatives. Check out my site at [volunteergreen.wordpress.com](http://volunteergreen.wordpress.com).*