On May 28, 2020, America Walks hosted the webinar, “Research in Action: Trends in how Municipalities are addressing increased demand for Safe Public Space”, where presenters described various strategies communities are implementing in response to increased demands for safe public space for walking and cycling during the COVID19 crisis.

It featured Dan Gelinne, UNC Highway Safety Research Center Senior Research Associate, Dr. Tabitha Combs, UNC Department of City and Regional Planning, and Heyden Black-Walker, Director of Planning for Black + Vernooy. Our inspiring panelists and researchers at UNC’s Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center presented on an effort to collect and analyze data in regard to the aforementioned strategies in order to identify community-based factors related to their adoption, impacts, long-term viability, and potential unintended consequence.

America Walks received many questions and comments from attendees. Panelists took time to offer their expert answers, to continue the conversation and provide further insight on best practices they used for creating safe, accessible, and enjoyable walking conditions in their communities, so you can too. Visit the webinar recording page which includes a link to the YouTube playback and full list of additional resources.

**Are you seeing pushback on making street changes for pedestrians and bicyclist safe movement permanent where states are reopening local businesses and institutions?**

**Tabitha:** I have not been collecting data on pushback to COVID-related street space changes, but pedestrian and bicycle projects nearly always meet resistance by community members who do not feel their perspectives have been heard in the process of planning those projects. I suspect that the rapid and often top-down actions many cities are taking to respond to COVID19 will increase that resistance.

**Dan:** There have been some cases I’ve noticed where communities who didn’t previously make policy changes are now hesitant to do that as things "open up." There seems to be concern that traffic will pick back up, bicycling and walking trends will revert back to their pre-COVID state, and the policy or engineering responses won’t be necessary. This can be contrasted with other communities that are looking at using policy or streetscape changes to establish a "new normal."

**How are you considering the decrease in use of public transit?**

**Dan:** Decreased use of public transit will directly impact bicycling and walking, as trips by foot or bike tend to serve the first/last mile of any transit trip. If ridership goes down,
bicycling and walking may be impacted as well. I don't know that we've seen enough
information yet to know, however, whether those transit ridership trends will continue in the
long term or if transit use will rebound.

Do you have pictures of the final solution for the Pleasant Valley bridge?

Heyden: The city of Austin went through an extensive public engagement process that
identified five alternatives for the permanent bicycle / pedestrian bridge, as well as permanent
changes to Pleasant Valley over the dam. For the new bridge, Alternative B, which was put
forward originally by the community, is the preferred alternative. You can see all project
information on the city’s webpage here: https://data.austintexas.gov/stories/s/Longhorn-Dam-
Multimodal-Improvements/id6g-rfrm/

What would you say to organizations who are in touch with communities, particularly
BIPOC, who are saying this is NOT a priority for them right now?

Tabitha: This is a critically important question but it’s not a new one. Planners and other experts
in the BIPOC community have been addressing this question for years, and bike/ped advocacy
organizations need to do a better job listening to those voices. A good but by no means
sufficient list to start with: Tamika Butler, Keith Benjamin, Adonia Lugo, Lynda Lopez, Charles
Brown, Naomi Doerner, and Warren Logan.

Dan: I would say BIPOC and other communities who have been traditionally underserved should
be prioritized in decisions to make these sorts of changes. These aren’t always the perspectives
that are prioritized in decision making, and its often true that transportation agencies do a poor
job seeking out their opinions and feedback. Cities and towns should be making these changes
only after considering the feedback and perspectives of its community members.

Do you know of any U.S. cities that have made permanent policy changes as a result of street
interventions?

Tabitha: Many US cities have announced intentions to extend their interventions after the
immediate crisis; we are documenting them as we learn of them at
http://pedbikeinfo.org/resources/resources_details.cfm?id=5209

Dan: There are several examples documented at
http://pedbikeinfo.org/resources/resources_details.cfm?id=5209 of cities that have decided to
make street changes permanent (e.g. City of Seattle).

What are some typical funding sources to pay for road or lane closures? We are trying to
close down a lane to vehicles over a bridge and City staff is saying it will cost $64k.

Heyden: I’m not familiar with specific funding sources. Every city has a different structure for the
way they allocate funding. I would expect that your city does have budget funding that covers
closing off lanes when they need to for road repairs, utility work, etc. Sometimes we see city staff funding road work for drivers routinely, but not being willing to allocate money for similar projects that benefit people outside of cars. It may help to remind staff that generally about 1/3 of any population does not drive, and during this time there are likely even more people outside of vehicles.

*Are there community surveys that are already made and could be tailored to a different community to feel how the public feels, that can be used online and through paper copies?*

**Dan:** There is not one survey that I would recommend. The best way to develop yours is to look to other cities that surveyed their communities to see what questions they asked and how that information was collected and used. Consider how you ask your question and who you are directing it to (and reaching) and try to take every effort to make your survey as accessible as possible. Given the current climate and health precautions, it may be difficult to collect paper surveys, so online is likely one of the only options in the near term.

*Seeing as setting up street closures does come with costs, does anyone have input on how to deal with obstacles of reduced city funding in cities where the majority of money comes from tourism?*

**Dan:** There will be many battles for funding moving forward, as Cities and states will see their revenues impacted by the economic downturn. Budgets were already stretched for many State and local agencies. The best way to justify increased funding for making changes to streets for bicyclists and pedestrians is to collect data and community feedback that can help demonstrate widespread support for change.