



Every Place Counts Leadership Academy

STORIES FROM COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION LEADERS



LEARN • ENGAGE • MAKE A DIFFERENCE

 U.S. Department of Transportation

Stories from Community Transportation Leaders

These stories highlight members of public like YOU and the impacts they had on transportation in their communities. Each storyteller describes how a transportation plan or project has increased the community’s access to opportunities including work, school, transportation and recreation. These individuals saw a transportation problem in their community, got involved in the decision-making process, rallied their communities, and created change. We hope these stories inspire you to read the *Transportation Toolkit* and get involved in transportation in your community!



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 LADDER^{STEP}

 EVERY PLACE COUNTS DESIGN CHALLENGE

 EVERY PLACE COUNTS LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

 FTA BUS AND BUS FACILITIES LADDERS OF OPPORTUNITY INITIATIVE

 FTA TOD TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The Pulse of Greater Fulton



Rosa Coleman

When campuses were still segregated, Rosa Coleman was not allowed to attend school in Fulton Hill. Years later, the first time she set foot in the school was as a participant in a community charrette to help decide the direction of a transportation project called the Pulse Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). Her childhood experiences built her interest in bringing Greater Fulton's neighborhoods together. Today, Rosa is President of the Greater Fulton Hill Civic Association.

Rosa remembers a time when a person could get everything they needed in the neighborhood, from groceries to medical appointments. That all changed when she was a teenager and those opportunities started leaving the area. After the nearby James River

PROJECT INFO:

- Name of project: Pulse BRT
- Project Sponsor: Greater Richmond Transit Company
- DOT Support: FTA Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Technical Assistance Program
- City and State: Richmond, Virginia



flooded in the early 1970s, many residents accepted money for relocation from the city, and the vibrancy of Historic Fulton faded to the point that eventually there were nearly no traces of the former community.

Recently, the Greater Fulton area, which includes the neighborhoods of Historic Fulton, Fulton Hill and Montrose Heights, has seen benefits from community engagement. For example, Greater Fulton's Future, a community effort led, guided and implemented by residents, convened eight groups to discuss and formulate the development desires of the community. Rosa participated in the group that discussed housing issues and then became its chairperson, which then led to her taking a leadership role in the civic association. She saw this as the perfect opportunity to "bridge the gaps" among the neighborhoods of Greater Fulton.

Greater Fulton's Future got involved with the Pulse BRT project and the transit agency began incorporating their suggestions into the group's suggestions into their planning. Technical assistance provided by the USDOT Ladder^{STEP} program supported project planning and community engagement efforts. One of the most notable engagement efforts was a three-day charrette (interactive stakeholder planning meeting) where Rosa played an important role. She and other community members identified the need for a bus stop on Admiral Gravelly Boulevard with easy access to Orleans Street to

“It felt really good to know that they listened to us and we saw at least a couple of our suggestions in the plans.”

– Rosa Coleman

provide a link from Historic Fulton to Montrose Heights and Fulton Hill. Rosa was really excited about this contribution because “so many people depend on public transportation and this will give them better access than they have had before.”

Rosa shared her thoughts about engaging communities, especially about communicating in plain language. She wants to encourage transportation planners to come up with a more user-friendly name for a charrette. “It felt really good to know that they listened to us and we saw at least a couple of our suggestions in the plans.”

Community engagement is sometimes described as though it entails just one meeting or one project. But if you look closely at Rosa Coleman's journey, you can see that she participated early and often, and that her community involvement has grown over a number of years. Being persistent and focusing on her overall goal of bringing the Greater Fulton neighborhoods together enabled her to contribute more meaningfully over time.



Community engagement and participation can lead to benefits for the entire community, from economic development to access to education to a stronger sense of community. It isn't always clear where the process will lead but over the long term community engagement can pay off. The Greater Fulton's Future planning initiative took place over four years beginning in 2009, and provided infrastructure that allowed the community to respond when Stone Brewing was considering Greater Fulton for its East Coast brewery and restaurant.

Rosa's story also shows how small individual actions can blossom in to a new economic opportunities. Businesses have started to set up new locations in Greater Fulton and have taken active steps to engage the community because this has become a neighborhood norm. A company like Stone Brewing, a large California-based brewer, is a great example. They saw the desires of the community laid out in the priority list document that Greater Fulton's Future created. The CEO of Stone Brewing attended a City Council meeting about setting up their facility in the area and quickly decided that they should actively engage with the community. They quickly hired Juliellen Sarver, a local resident familiar with planning, and made use of her professional skills and local ties to create a community engagement office. Juliellen indicated that even though she had years of community planning experience, she was humbled and learned so much through the community participation efforts in Greater Fulton.

Increasing Opportunities to Work and Play by the Chicago River



Margaret Frisbie

PROJECT INFO:

- Name of project: Chicago Riverwalk
- Project Sponsor: Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT)
- USDOT support: \$99 million Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) Loan
- Other support: \$10 million State of Illinois Loan
- City and state: Chicago, Illinois



“It’s important for people to get near the river,” said Margaret Frisbie, a Friend of the Chicago River, “and the Riverwalk provides a way for people to get down to the water.” Supported by a \$99 million TIFIA loan from the US Department of Transportation in 2013,

the Chicago Riverwalk project has created new economic, educational, health and cultural opportunities for hundreds of thousands of people who live, work and shop in the heart of downtown Chicago.

Margaret explained, “In the past, this river was abused – reversed, straightened, dredged, and made part of the sewer system. Now it’s important for people to understand that it’s a living natural resource, to experience the pageantry and magic of a river.”

The City opened Phases I and II of the project in 2015 and 2016, and is nearly finished with Phase III. The Riverwalk is a car-free, 1.3-mile corridor along Wacker Drive that also functions as a public, linear park. It provides space to walk and bike on the south bank of the river, and to enjoy a picnic, sit on a bench to watch the river and the boats, or visit a restaurant. The Riverwalk links downtown to the 18-mile Chicago Lakefront Trail.

This project “gave the river to everybody,” said Margaret. “Everybody can come and feel welcome in a place that nobody could get to before.”

In years past, the walkways along the river were not united; to stroll along the water, you had to go down a set of stairs at the beginning of each block and then back up a set of stairs at the end of the block. Now, a 20-foot wide Riverwalk is built out into the 200-foot wide river, and the walkway is continuous thanks to under-bridge connections. The Riverwalk connects to Lake Shore Drive and the Chicago Lakefront Trail. At the confluence of the North and South Branches of the Chicago River, the Riverwalk is built out 50 feet into the river.

“Everybody can come and feel welcome in a place that nobody could get to before.”
– Margaret Frisbie

Public engagement: The Chicago Riverwalk Development Committee, formed in 2007, was comprised of city and park district employees, community groups, recreational user groups, and river-based businesses including water taxi and tour boat companies and building managers. The Committee spent several years envisioning the Riverwalk, and considering how it could celebrate the unique spirit of Chicago. After participating on the Committee, Margaret Frisbie remembers the first time she stepped foot on the Riverwalk. “It was like being in a painting that you’ve looked at a million times, and then you’re standing in it. It came to life! We are literally touching the water in a way that was never possible before.”

Connectivity: From a commuting point of view, the Riverwalk increases connectivity and access to transportation. Many folks walk and bike along the river instead of on city streets, using the Riverwalk as a first- and last-mile connection to their offices along Wacker Drive and North Michigan Avenue. The Riverwalk increases access to Metra commuter rail stations, Chicago Transit Authority buses and trains, Divvy bike share stations and water taxis.



Economic opportunity: When Phase II of the project opened, the restaurants along the water became an anchor of activity. Gross revenues from the restaurants increased from \$4.6 million in 2015 to \$8.5 million in 2016. This growth created economic opportunity for employees, business owners and the City. Building owners are now negotiating three to ten year leases to make the economic base more stable and sustainable.

Educational opportunity: The Riverwalk is encouraging folks to get outside to learn about science and nature. For example, two employees from the Environmental Law and Policy Center, which is located on the Riverwalk, go fishing during their lunch break and talk with passersby about improvements in the water quality.

Further down the river, the Chicago Park District has installed a jetty featuring wetlands with water level and underwater habitat and a riparian zone. The District educates students and families about the river, native plants and climate change.

Health opportunity: In addition to walking or biking along the river, it's also possible to kayak down the river. Phase III of the project will include a zero-depth fountain where kids and people with disabilities will have access to play in the water.

Cultural opportunity: Tour companies located on the Riverwalk offer opportunities to learn about architecture, birds and other wildlife, and the McCormick Bridgehouse and Chicago River Museum explains the history of the area. In the summer months, the Riverwalk is home to concerts, lectures and wine tasting events.

Get on the Bus



David and Darius Young

Like a lot of people in Detroit, David and Darius Young ride the bus everywhere they go: to school, to work, to visit family and friends. And until recently, it was common for them to experience long waits for the bus. “The old buses kept breaking down,” said David, a 17-year-old football player at Cass Tech High School.

Then their commute times changed for the better. In May of 2016, the City received a \$25.9 million bus grant through the Federal Transit Administration’s Ladders of Opportunity Initiative to purchase hybrid and clean diesel buses.

PROJECT INFO:

- Name of Project: Hybrid and Clean Diesel Buses
- Project Sponsor: Detroit Department of Transportation
- USDOT support: \$25.9 million FTA Bus and Bus Facilities Ladders of Opportunity Initiative Grant
- City and State: Detroit, Michigan



“I’ve seen a really big change,” said David. “I’ve been taking the bus a lot more. A few years ago it used to take me an hour or two to get home from school. Now it takes me like 20 or 30 minutes.”

That extra time is really useful for David. Not only does it give him time to complete his homework, but he now has time to hang out with friends and apply for college and scholarships. David wants to study accounting and become a CPA. “I’ve always liked numbers,” he said. He explained that the bus service is much more reliable and frequent, which has greatly improved his quality of life. “It really helps out with stress to be able to rely on the bus to get you there on time. Before, you had to worry about explaining why you were late. I feel all around happier that I can just get on a bus.”



David's older brother Darius remembered that school would get out at 4:15pm and he and his brother would sometimes wait for a bus until 6:30 or 7:00pm. "That took a lot of time away from working on school assignments." Darius is a 19-year-old 3-D modeler and animator; he is studying animation at the University of St. Francis in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Back in high school, "when the bus would pick me up at an

Before, you had to worry about explaining why you were late. I feel all around happier that I can just get on a bus.”

– David Young

absurd time, I would get home late. We still stayed up late doing homework – that didn't stop us – but I couldn't work on my animation as much. But when we got home on time, it gave us time to relax."

This past summer, Darius came home from college and worked with the Motor City Grounds Crew and used the bus system to get back and forth to his job. “The buses got me where I was supposed to go in a timely manner and I made a decent amount of money,” he said. “Since I’ve been back, the buses seem like they’re working pretty effectively. I go outside for a few minutes and the bus comes and takes me where I need to go. They have a better system going that helps people get from point A to point B.”

Darius agreed that Detroit's improved bus service helps with stress. "We used to see buses drive down the street but they weren't in operation. They didn't pick anybody up. Then it changed -- they have a lot more buses to run now. Any bus I see now is fully functioning and moving. I think the money really did help with that. Things absolutely changed."

Darius also sees the bigger picture; he mentioned that the bus improvements are important to many people in Detroit who ride the bus to get to their jobs. “Car insurance is ridiculously expensive in Detroit and a lot of people are not that well off financially,” he said. “If you can’t get to work, you can’t get paid, and if you can’t get paid, you can’t live.”

Bridging the Divide: Fulton Avenue as a Gateway



Denise Johnson

PROJECT INFO:

- Name of project: Re-Connect West Baltimore
- Project Sponsor: City of Baltimore
- USDOT support: Ladders^{STEP}
- City and state: Baltimore, Maryland



“Remembrance, Healing, and Celebration” is an effort to move West Baltimore forward in a number of ways. It was created out of an abroad public engagement effort that gathered community members from West Baltimore to hear their stories about the impacts of the

Highway to Nowhere project. Nearly 30 years after that bisected West Baltimore, Culture Works gathered as many people as possible who had experienced displacement. Denise Johnson, who was born and raised in West Baltimore, manages Culture Works, an organization that

enhances the identity of West Baltimore by highlighting its residents and what's important to them culturally. Denise is an organizer who builds community capacity advocates on various projects and developments affecting West Baltimore.

Denise's own family was personally impacted by the Highway to Nowhere when her father, who lived in the path of the highway, was displaced. As Denise tells it, "People had very strong feelings about what occurred during that period and felt the neighborhood lost its place." That loss and the need to acknowledge and heal from it led Culture Works to gather people from West Baltimore to hear their stories about the impacts of the Highway to Nowhere. This was a formal opportunity for the community to get together to talk about this loss.

Culture Works created space for remembrance through storytelling and art by setting up a temporary gallery for community residents who didn't necessarily identify as artists to visually express what's important to them in their community. Those efforts led to a five-day learning exchange in 2011 and a two-day national festival with celebrations held on the pavement of the Highway to Nowhere. Denise highlights that "most people see West Baltimore as a crime ridden part of town – but on that particular weekend, the festival attracted over 10,000 people into West Baltimore and there were no reports of any crime!"

This is the cultural piece of West Baltimore that we want to highlight in terms of its people and assets. I hope that other things will be manifested as a result of honoring this space.”
– Denise Johnson

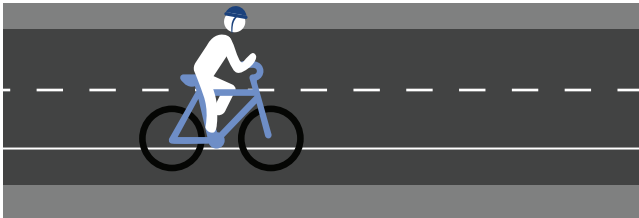
In December of 2016, Culture Works put on a theater performance about Baltimore's Highway to Nowhere. The performance highlighted West Baltimore's history, the residents and cultural attitudes of the community. The performance was a way to help people not to focus away from deficits and instead on resident's cultural sense and how this shapes the place in which they live.

Acknowledging the past and learning from it is part of what Denise Johnson sees and honors in efforts around restorative justice in West Baltimore. In late 2016, she spoke on a panel that focused on Ladder^{STEP}. She is excited about Ladder^{STEP} and appreciates that US DOT is willing to step outside the box and share the impact of transportation through stories instead of only focusing on data.

The Ladder^{STEP} approach demonstrates to Denise that restorative justice can play a significant role in increasing transportation options, housing opportunities, community safety, workforce training and a sense of hope.

She looks at the bike lanes being planned for the Fulton Avenue Bridge as an opportunity to connect two sides of the community and to provide an amenity that is rare in West Baltimore: bike lanes. Increasing transportation options, including bike lanes and sidewalks, can increase access to basic daily needs and recreation. In addition, the benches and other place-making aspects of the Fulton Avenue Bridge project will create a nice public space for the community to gather.

people who have decided to stay and honor the place have everything to do with how people relate to each other and care about each other and the remembrance of what the community used to be. This is the cultural piece of West Baltimore that we want to highlight in terms of its people and assets. I hope that other things will be manifested as a result of honoring this space.”



In many ways, housing restoration efforts that are intertwined with the efforts to address transportation issues can have major positive impacts on the community, including older and younger residents who experience healthier housing through renovation and restoration, which can “decrease health problems, like respiratory disease and stress.” It also can provide “an opportunity to work, learn and develop skills and make the environment healthier.”

Denise appreciates the restorative justice approach that is being demonstrated in West Baltimore. “It’s important to get other people to learn about the history of West Baltimore. The

A Tale of Three Cities



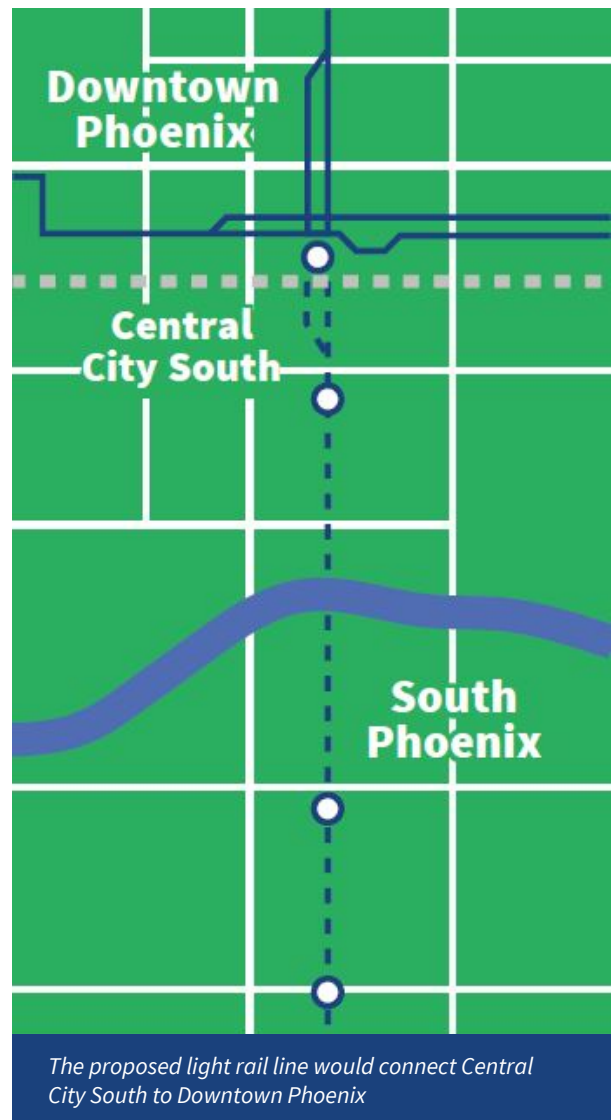
Eva Olivas

Eva Olivas traveled from Phoenix to Washington, DC to attend the launch of USDOT's Every Place Counts Leadership Academy, an experience that trains community members to engage effectively in transportation decision-making. "The first thing that I felt was hope," she said. "We had this massive department actually caring that people want to contribute and telling us that we have a responsibility!"

Eva said the Academy was valuable not only because it exposed her to the curriculum in the Transportation Toolkit, but also because she met people from communities all across the US. "At the grassroots level, sometime you can't see what's happening at the grassroots level in

PROJECT INFO:

- Name of project: South Central Light Rail Extension Project
- Project Sponsor: City of Phoenix
- USDOT Support: Ladder^{STEP} and Every Place Counts Leadership Academy
- City and State: Phoenix, Arizona



The proposed light rail line would connect Central City South to Downtown Phoenix

another part of the country. Comparing notes is really good when you're at this stage."

When the Transportation Toolkit was published, Eva shared it with the transit agency and with the Sustainable Communities Collaborative – a group of residents, businesses, government entities and other key partners – so they can use it to train folks in Phoenix to discuss the light rail project. When it comes to transportation, “every system at every level is so complicated. But the Toolkit is presented in such simple lay language,” said Eva.



Eva is a native of Phoenix who lives and works in Central City South, an historic community cut off from downtown Phoenix by railroad tracks to the north and separated from South Phoenix by the Salt River to the south. Her neighborhood is home to a large Latino community, a growing Asian community, a Somalian immigrant community and longtime residents of many races and backgrounds, as well as two-thirds of the city's public housing.

For many years Eva's neighborhood has been distressed and neglected, but in recent years, the community has taken strides toward equitable development. In 2010, residents, stakeholders and businesses from Central City South and South Phoenix worked together to create a Quality of Life Plan which declared

Residents didn't know what they could have or what they should have. By involving the community in the planning process, we have broadened residents' view on what transportation can do."

– Eva Olivas

support for transportation including an extension of Phoenix's light rail system down Central Avenue. "This committee was ahead of the game," said Eva.

The light rail project has since been embraced by the City and was the recipient of a \$1.6 million Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant from the US Department of Transportation in 2014. The City plans to open the South Central Avenue light rail extension in 2023, partially funded by Phoenix’s voter-approved sales tax referendum, which was supported by DOT as part of Ladder^{STEP}.

Eva said that residents along the planned light rail corridor have a very low rate of vehicle ownership. This transit-dependent population will benefit greatly from access to light rail. The project will expand transportation options in the community and also provide a connection to grocery stores, health care, jobs, schools including Arizona State University, and downtown Phoenix. “Hopefully a lot of

development will happen as result of the light rail, making the transition from Downtown to Central City South less dramatic and disconnected,” she said.

“Now that we have a lot of people who are engaged and trying to give ideas and direct the development, I hope the light rail system will help us connect everyone in a much stronger way than ever before,” said Eva. “Connectivity is the priority. Development and investment will no longer leapfrog over our community. You will have to improve our community. We’re using the light rail to really push equity. We’re hoping to be a hub for employment. Also, light rail will bring a diversity of people to the neighborhood and I would assume that the quality of education will improve.”

As the Executive Director of the Phoenix Revitalization Corporation, Eva has recruited City of Phoenix staff to meet with residents and businesses along Central Avenue. “Our goal is to give feedback to the City to minimize the impact of construction, which we saw had a big effect on local businesses during construction of the existing light rail system,” she said. To provide additional support to the community, the organization publishes a newsletter to keep the neighborhoods and business informed of project updates. Eva credits the City of Phoenix with being very open to providing information to the community and genuinely listening to the needs and desires of local residents. As she explained, “We need to bring that education to the grassroots level and to people’s front doors,” she said.

Eva is very committed to involving the community in the transportation decision-making process to create development that is inclusive. “We are trying to stop using the word gentrification. We want to maximize the benefit to neighbors instead of having them pay the price,” she said. “Residents didn’t know what they could have or what they should have. By involving the community in the planning process, we have broadened residents’ view on what transportation can do.”