



ONLINE ENGAGEMENT:

The Downtown Winnipeg Bike Lane Study

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ABSTRACT

Based out of the clearly defined need for cycling infrastructure renewal in downtown Winnipeg, WSP was tasked with engaging the public on their needs, desires and visions pertaining to the Fort- Garry bike lanes and the Assiniboine- Forks connection. In efforts to create a holistic and detailed consultation package several tools were employed to reach respondents and gather useful data for shaping these capital investment projects. One tool in particular used online engagement to collect, organize and display data so that respondents could provide meaningful comments through an interactive tool to really reach the core purpose of their feedback. This case-in-point will explore the background behind the Downtown Bike Lane Study, the methods of public engagement used and what can be learnt from online consultation.

1.0 / INTRODUCTION

A transportation system that emphasises “moving people, goods and services in a way that is socially, environmentally and economically sustainable” (Sustainable Transportation Plan) is becoming an increasing priority of our city. This priority along with the details of how they will be achieved are interwoven in the City of Winnipeg’s network of policy and planning documents. Rooted in the vision of **OurWinnipeg**, the City of Winnipeg has outlined Direction Strategies to address in specific details four key areas of planning: **Complete Communities, Sustainable Water and Waste, Sustainable Winnipeg and Sustainable Transportation.**

It is from the Sustainable Transportation Direction Strategy that the city was tasked with developing and passing a Master Transportation Plan (TMP) which was approved by council in November of 2011. The city’s TMP states the following Six “Strategic Goals”:

- 1) A transportation system that is dynamically integrated with land use
- 2) A transportation system that supports active, accessible and healthy lifestyle options
- 3) A safe, efficient and equitable transportation system for people, goods and service.
- 4) Transportation infrastructure that is well maintained
- 5) A transportation system that is financially sustainable
- 6) A transportation system that reduces its greenhouse gas emissions footprint and meets or surpasses climate change and emissions reductions goals set by the city and the province



FIGURE 1 | Sustainable Transportation Direction Strategy

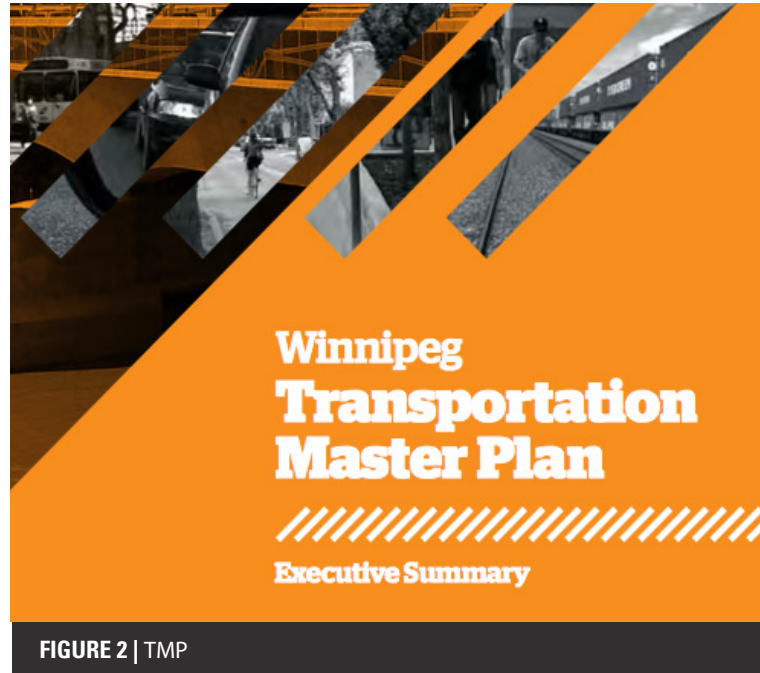


FIGURE 2 | TMP

Guided by the strategic goals the TMP directly calls for the development of a Pedestrian and Cycling Strategy. Following extensive consultation and research, in July of 2015 the city adopted the Winnipeg Pedestrian and Cycling Strategies which identified high priority areas and routes through consultation and data analysis and recommends the yearly production of a Pedestrian and Cycling Action plan for designating upcoming projects. The downtown was identified as a key priority area and the Downtown Bike Lane Study, with its focus on Garry and the Assiniboine-Forks connection, was approved as part of the annual capital spending on walking and cycling projects. This case-in-point will look at the development of Downtown Bike Lane System, with specific attention on the how consultation was designed and implemented to meaningfully incorporate the public’s vision.

2.0 / BACKGROUND

Through the plans mentioned cycling has been identified by the city and by researchers at-large, as an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable method of transportation. In Winnipeg’s downtown in 2012 alone you had over 6,200 commuting to our core which can reasonably be considered to have increased in the last five years. Within the downtown 21% of all trips are made by cycling which is fairly

significant when comparing that to 11% of trips city-wide. Although these numbers are promising there is still a large segment of the population that is not being reached or fully engaged in cycling. A recent population count put Winnipeg's downtown at 18,000 people residing in the area and over 69,000 people commuting to our cities core every day, including the 24,000 students coming to learn (Stats Canada, 2016, Bike Winnipeg, 2015). When surveyed the Pedestrian and Cycling Strategy discovered that a majority of riders are male (72%) and between the ages for 25-55 (71%), leaving potential to attract an entirely more diverse crowd of females, seniors and youth. Even still our downtown is overwhelmed with automobile centered infrastructure with 3,757 metered parking spots and 35,526 parking lot spots, many of which acting as dead space after key business hours have past.

The Need Downtown

Winnipeg's downtown is identified as a priority area in the Pedestrian and Cycling Strategy based off several indicating factors. It was found that the bulk of bike activity took place in concentrated or dense neighbourhoods mostly located in Winnipeg's core. A majority of this activity was in the form of small trips and primarily for the purpose of work then entertainment or retail, specifically listing the Forks as a key destination. Unfortunately, even with this concentrated usage, the downtown still experiences the majority of cyclist collisions that unsurprisingly mainly occur on roads without designated bike ways (Pedestrian and Cycling Strategy, 2015, pg. 64). In addition to protecting vulnerable bikers

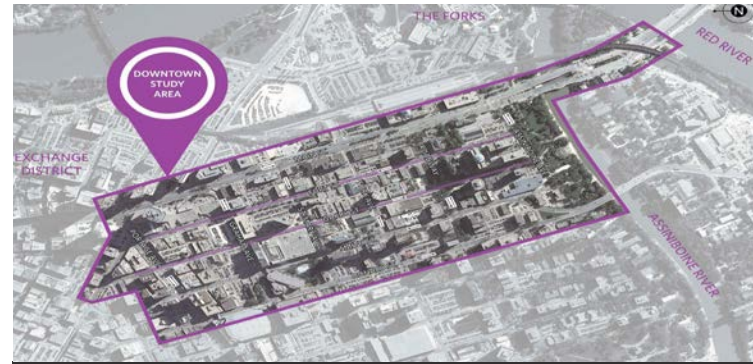


FIGURE 4 | Downtown Study Area

in a high need area, adding to Winnipeg's 8 kilometers of bike trails increases ridership, engaging the missed population motioned above (Bike Winnipeg, 2015).

3.0 CONSULTING ON THE DOWNTOWN BIKE LANE STUDY

Now that the priorities, vision and need behind a Downtown Bike Lane System have been established, this case-in-point will examine the process of public engagement involved in informing this plan. With a new era of transparency and accountability being promoted at the city through initiatives such as the opening of the Office of Public Engagement, gaining public insight for capital spending on active transportation is crucial for its perceived success.

"They will improve transportation options for citizens of all ages and abilities, while ongoing public consultation will ensure the input of local stakeholders will be taken into account in the design of each project."

- Scott Suderman, Transportation Facilities Planning Engineer

In September of 2015 the city announced the beginning of its public consultation on three separate pedestrian and cycling projects identified in the Pedestrian Cycling Action Plan approved earlier that year in May. WSP bid on and won the contract to conduct the consultation on both the Downtown Bike Lane System and the West Alexander Pedestrian and Cycling Corridor.

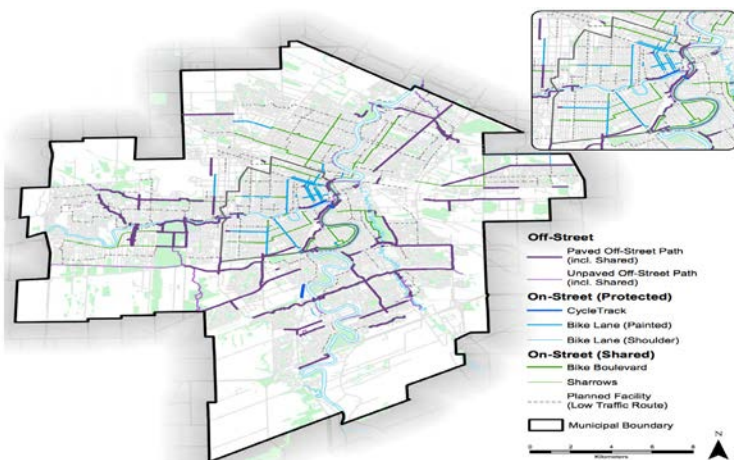


FIGURE 3 | Downtown Winnipeg Bike Lane Network

WSP

WSP has a long-standing history here in Winnipeg getting involved in many types and sizes of projects. From the development of Water Treatment Plants in Morris to consultation on localized bike lane networks in Winnipeg's core, WSP prides itself on "providing multiple services across all major market sectors". For this project a team of planners was assembled to address the consultation needs of the city, ensuring they employ a diverse use of engagement tools and methods. To gain context on WSP's role in the consultation I spoke with planners Ryan Segal and Brittney Shewchuk about how they contributed to the project and what they learnt from conducting this public engagement.

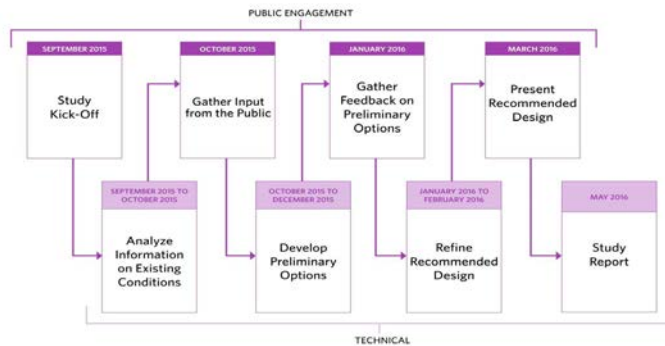


FIGURE 6 | Consultation Timeline

town by connecting two of Winnipeg's prominent neighbourhoods; The Forks and the Exchange District.

6) Engage citizens and receive input that will be considered in the final design.

While general questions directed at gathering information on the downtown bike network overall were part of the initial phases of consultation, the focused end deliverable was directed at developing a design plan for the Fort and/or Garry bike lane and the Assiniboine Avenue –



FIGURE 5 | WSP Logo

4.0 / THE PROCESS

As mentioned above the consultation was focused on two specific locations and interventions that are part of the downtown bike lane system. The overall goals of the study were to:

- 1) Develop a plan to upgrade the existing pedestrian and cycling facilities downtown while renewing the roads.
- 2) Enable people of all ages and abilities to feel safe and comfortable walking and cycling downtown.
- 3) Improve the vibrancy of downtown by providing improved walking and cycling opportunities and by enhancing the area as a destination.
- 4) Contribute to quality of life and community well-being through an enhanced pedestrian realm.
- 5) Support reinvestment in Winnipeg's down-

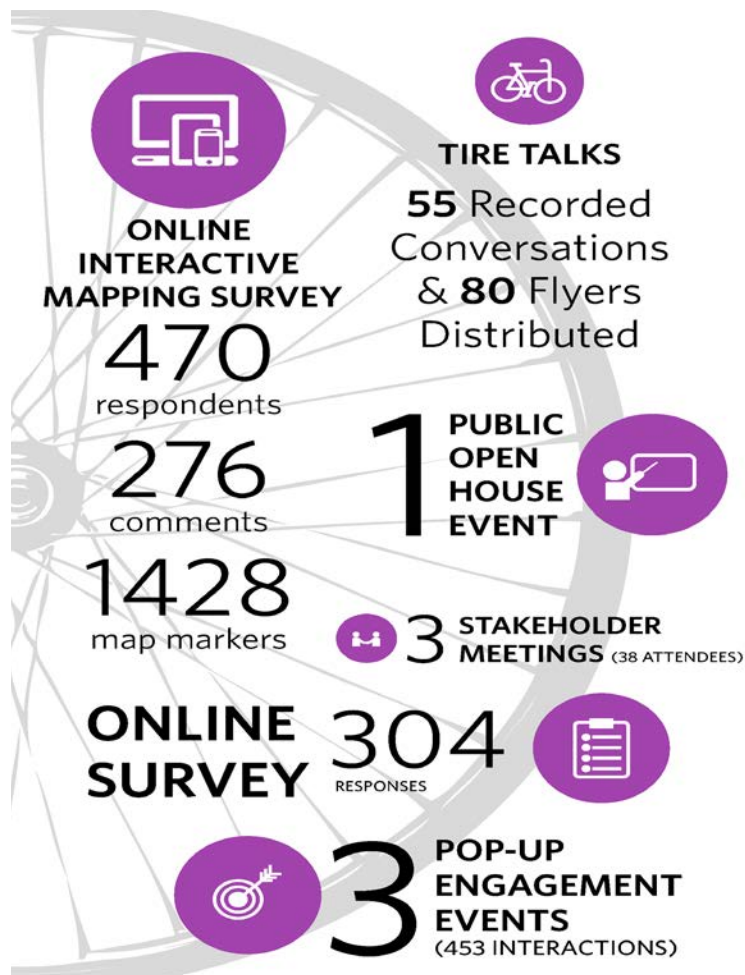


FIGURE 7 | Engagement tools and events

Forks connection. A separate website was developed to house all public engagement materials and methods ranging from open houses, pop-up events, street-side engagements named Tire Talks to online surveys, forums and interactive mapping software.

5.0 / ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

On of the most notable aspects of the consultation was the online interactive software used to allow participants to visually and spatially engage with identified areas of need and comment on the most preferred style of intervention. MetroQuest, the software used to house the interactive mapping and survey questions, is comprised of a series of 4 to 5 standardized screens that guide participants through the process of learning about the project and providing input. Originally software was designed over 18 years ago by university students and has gained traction and popularity, especially with the City of Winnipeg, since its inception. The software provided useful feedback with 470 respondents, 276 comments and 1428 map markers input by participants. The feedback responds to three general inquiries provided by MapQuest. First,

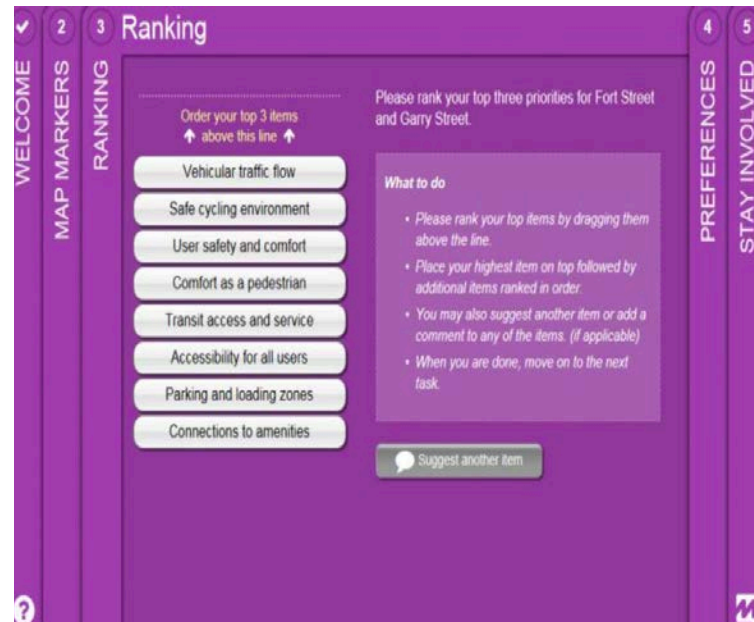


FIGURE 9 | MapQuest

respondents were asked to drop markers on a map of the downtown identifying issues and areas of enjoyment, allowing them to add specific comments where necessary. Secondly, a list of priorities for Fort and Garry cycling were provided and respondents were tasked with ranking them based on importance. Finally, pictures

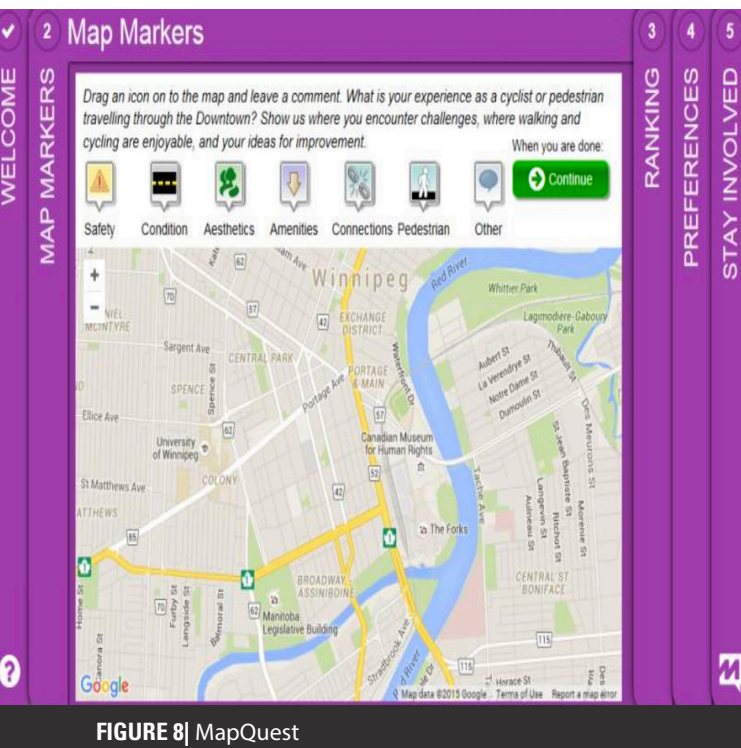


FIGURE 8 | MapQuest

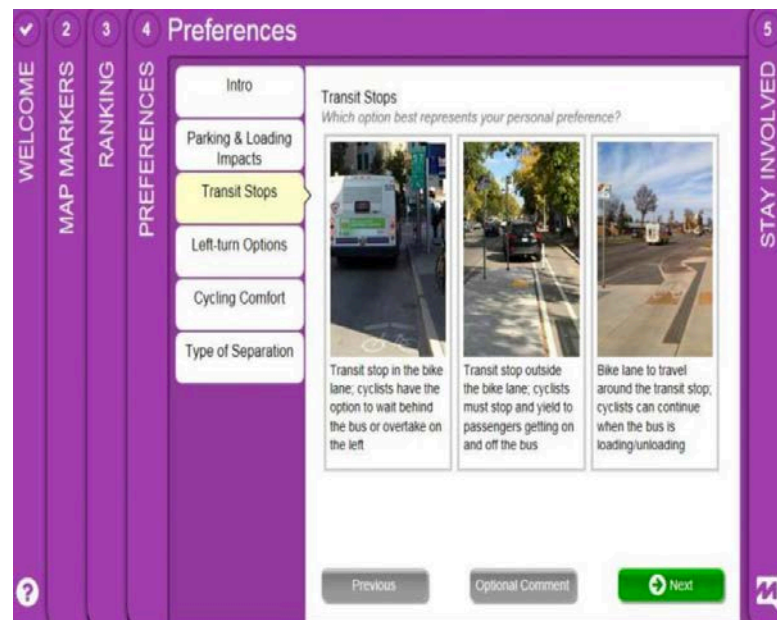


FIGURE 10 | MapQuest

were displayed on various issues such as left-turns and transit stops and respondents were tasked with selecting their preferred option. Although this method provided an interactive and successful method for consulting the public on the design of new bike lane infrastructure in

the downtown, there were still comments made on how this system can be improved that will be discussed in the Lessons Learnt section of this report.

6.0 / LESSONS LEARNT

While an online forum was available for respondents to provide comments and feedback on others comments, there was still a general sentiment that more conversation amongst respondents would have enriched the dialogue. It was expressed by the planners involved in the project that opportunity to comment within the MapQuest forum would have provided a stream of valuable information. Certain individual points garnered heightened attention and benefit from conversation amongst respondents to clarify and provide depth on the popular issues. Another avenue for generating more conversation through the existing forum offered was by prompting respondents to clarify comments or to provide more details on their experience. This method however mimics less the organic type of conversation that can happen between respondents but also requires less monitoring by planning staff.

The final lesson learnt is one that can be applied to most public consultation events or interventions. Being aware of who may have been missed during your process is essential for claiming adequate representation of the population you are tasked with engaging. While these online engagement tools were used for providing broader and more detailed feedback, a planner still must ask themselves who is unable or unlikely to access online tools. For instance, people without a computer or computer skills may be less inclined to engage with MapQuest. Although tablets preloaded with the MapQuest survey were offered at the open house to try and mitigate this issue, further avenues for sharing and utilizing online tools can be explored.



FIGURE 11 | Assiniboine Bike Lane

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