



**Monday, February 12, 2024
5:30 PM
City Council Chamber**

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION AGENDA

I. Call to Order

1. Roll Call
2. Pledge of Allegiance

II. Study Session: Study Sessions are less formal meetings of the City Council called to discuss broad policy themes and obtain input from the governing body about proposals and initiatives that are still being developed. No formal votes are taken at Study Sessions, and no informal directions expressed at Study Sessions bind the City Council, or its individual members, to vote in a certain manner at a future City Council meeting. Members of the public should limit their remarks to three (3) minutes after Council discussion.

Re-Thinking Local Transit

III. Appearance of Citizens

Policy relative to Appearance of Citizens:

A 30-minute time period is provided for citizens to appear and express their views before the City Council. Each citizen speaking will be limited to one appearance of up to 3 minutes. No immediate response will be given by City Council or City staff members. Citizens are to give their documents (if any) to the Police Officer for distribution to the Council. When the Mayor determines that all persons wishing to speak in accordance with this policy have done so, members of the City Council and key staff may make comments.

IV. Adjournment

City Clerk

DATE: 2/7/2024

MEMO:

TO: Mayor Julie Moore Wolfe
City Council Members

FROM: Scot Wrighton, City Manager
Lacie Elzy, Transportation Services Department Director

SUBJECT: Re-Thinking Local Transit

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION: See attached memo.

ATTACHMENTS:

Description	Type
Memo	Cover Memo
Backup Material	Backup Material

February 8, 2024

TO: Mayor Julie Moore Wolfe & Decatur City Council Members

FROM: Scot Wrighton, City Manager
Lacie Elzy, Transportation Services Department Director

RE: Study Session on Transportation

With few exceptions, the city's transit routes have not changed in over 30 years. The existing fixed routes reflect the needs of the city as they were in the last quarter of the 20th Century. The existing route map still leaves many parts of the city without public transit access; and the existing routes operate only 12 hours a day (some buses come every 30 minutes; buses on other routes come every 60 minutes). The existing system uses a single downtown hub on East William Street. The current arrangement limits transit options for citizens lacking access to private or alternative transportation means; and those who do choose to use city transit often find the system lengthens the times required to get to and from their destinations. These characteristics, in turn, reduce the system's ridership because it is difficult to use.

The staff and City Council over the last few years have made several forward-looking decisions which will, when fully implemented, modernize the Decatur transit system (cashless fare technologies, hybrid buses, Wi-Fi on buses, plans for an EV-oriented transit campus, expansion of school passes, vehicles with improved access for persons with disabilities, etc.). But bigger and more fundamental transit changes are yet to come. These involve route revisions, route eliminations, the deployment of Micro-Transit, decentralization of transfer nodes, efforts to connect transit services with the city's community revitalization/workforce development goals, and other strategies for expanding the transit system's geographic and demographic reach.

Because an overwhelming percentage of Decatur's transit funding comes from the State and Federal governments, the city needs to be attentive to the policy directions of these funding agencies as it modernizes and makes changes. A key policy theme used to evaluate funding proposals is adherence to "Transportation Oriented Development" (TOD) goals and objectives. TOD goals and objectives tie transit to community revitalization and are discussed later in this memo; but Micro-Transit is a key strategy for advancing TOD.

The city's consultants have made the following transit recommendations:

- a. Truncate and streamline routes to improve effectiveness and efficiency
- b. Focus fixed routes on key commercial corridors & enhance east-west connectivity
- c. Modify route alignments around at-grade rail crossings
- d. Create more decentralized mobility hubs to foster greater connectivity
- e. Implement Micro-Transit (also called mobility-on-demand) for the general public

Micro-Transit utilizes a range of smaller branded vehicles (sedans, vans, SUVs, shuttles, etc.) to pick-up riders from assigned stops and take them to assigned stops near their destinations in conjunction with the pick-up and drop-off of other riders in the same vehicles within the same time frames (think of a 'group Uber' approach). Micro-Transit will operate as a curb-to-curb service in defined zones for the general public and ADA eligible riders who are able to navigate a curb-to-curb trip without assistance. In addition, ADA paratransit will continue to provide door-to-door services for riders who cannot navigate a curb-to-curb trip without assistance (as it has in the past). When fixed route buses are in operation, the software app used for Micro-Transit will suggest the bus if it is the best option. Micro-Transit will connect riders with a bus at the nearest transit hub where they can ride a fixed route bus to complete their trip (e.g., to get downtown). If a trip request cannot be made by fixed route, then a Micro-Transit solution will be provided. Micro-Transit may be used to provide mobility to riders during times when fixed route buses are not operating as well (to be determined based on capacity). The objective is to provide increased mobility within the limits of the city, for more than just 12 hours, as well as allow new connections to neighboring communities that agree to participate in re-structured transit services with the city.

It is proposed that the number and extent of fixed bus routes be reduced (from 16 to 10) and replaced with Micro-Transit in areas where there is limited ridership and/or the cost of fixed route operations exceed the costs to provide the service with Micro-Transit. By reducing the number of fixed bus routes, the city can increase the frequency of fixed route buses that remain, and focus the bus network to serve key north-south and east-west corridors with high population and more commercial activity. The city's transit consultant has prepared proposed new fixed routes, and identified the locations of transportation nodes where most Micro-Transit riders would transfer to-and-from fixed bus routes (which will run more frequently). Maps showing both the existing routes and the proposed routes are attached. It is also proposed that Micro-Transit services be made available to the Mt. Zion area (transporting riders to a fixed route node near US 36/Ill. Rt. 121). Mt. Zion is willing to subsidize their portion of a Micro-Transit service.

By reducing the number of fixed routes, the city can divert a portion of transit funding from fixed route costs and shift ADA riders able to navigate curb-to-curb trips to Micro-Transit. This strategy will better target the type of transit service needed (bus, ADA paratransit, Micro-Transit) based on service area characteristics, rider capabilities, and cost of service delivery. The net cost impacts are intended to be sized to cover the cost of Micro-Transit vehicles, operations, technology, and still stay within the funding parameters available to the city from the State and Federal governments. The city would still run special routes for schools, and renegotiate existing agreements with DPS-61 and Richland Community College to allow students to use Micro-Transit and other transit services as part of their contracts.

This approach advances the consultant's recommendations, and TOD goals and objectives (below). We also believe it is a cost-effective way of bridging current gaps in service, that it reduces transportation barriers related to workforce development, increases rider

independence and flexibility, and that it could possibly lead to reducing the city's overall traffic volumes.

There are more details to work out, but if this new service concept is acceptable to the council, staff plans to begin implementing the new fixed route and Micro-Transit recommendations by the end of this year or (more likely) in the 1st quarter of 2025. The final routes will incorporate, or absorb, the downtown trolley. One variation could be to expand the downtown trolley's route to other important locations immediately adjacent to the Central Business District. The modified routing will be developed to work constructively with the restructured fixed route network and with Micro-Transit.

OTHER NON-MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

Going forward, it is also recommended that the Transportation Services Department have operational authority over:

1. EV planning
2. Developing and implementing proposals for public bike and scooter deployment in selected "pilot" locations
3. Administration of "Thriving Communities" and "Safe Streets for All" grant and assistance programs
4. Signing, marking and promotion of other non-motorized projects (e.g., off-road trails, raised crosswalks, etc.)

In some Decatur neighborhoods, thirty percent (30%) or more of residents do not have access to reliable privately owned motor vehicles. The city has already committed to expanding and improving non-motorized transportation corridors through the "2021 Regional Bicycle Master Plan." Consequently, new off-road hike/bike routes are being planned (the next being adjacent to Business Route 51 between Pershing and Eldorado).

The "2021 Regional Bicycle Master Plan" identifies preferred routes and trail profiles. It does not address whether the city should get involved in providing bike rental infrastructure, scooter rentals, or whether the city should subsidize private ridesharing during off-hour times when neither fixed bus routes nor Micro-Transit services are available. Some strategies for improving pedestrian safety can also be added to the ambit of the Transportation Services Department, especially concerning the use of raised crosswalks and shared mobility use paths in high volume pedestrian zones and on completely off-road hike-bike routes maintained by the city and the Decatur Park District. While not all parts of the city need to be made more "walkable" and pedestrian friendly, adding these features in certain areas would improve both safety and quality of life. See attached documents for more information about these options and how they could be integrated into future municipal services.

The Thriving Communities Program provides technical assistance, planning, and capacity building support for disadvantaged communities to further their economic development and

neighborhood revitalization initiatives, while recognizing that transportation is a key element of such initiatives (e.g., Jasper Street Corridor).

The city is the recipient of a “Safe Streets and Roads for All” (SS4A) grant. This is a component of the [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#) (BIL) provides \$5 billion in funding nationwide for discretionary programs over 5 years, 2022-2026. The SS4A program funds regional, local, and Tribal initiatives through grants to prevent roadway deaths and serious injuries.

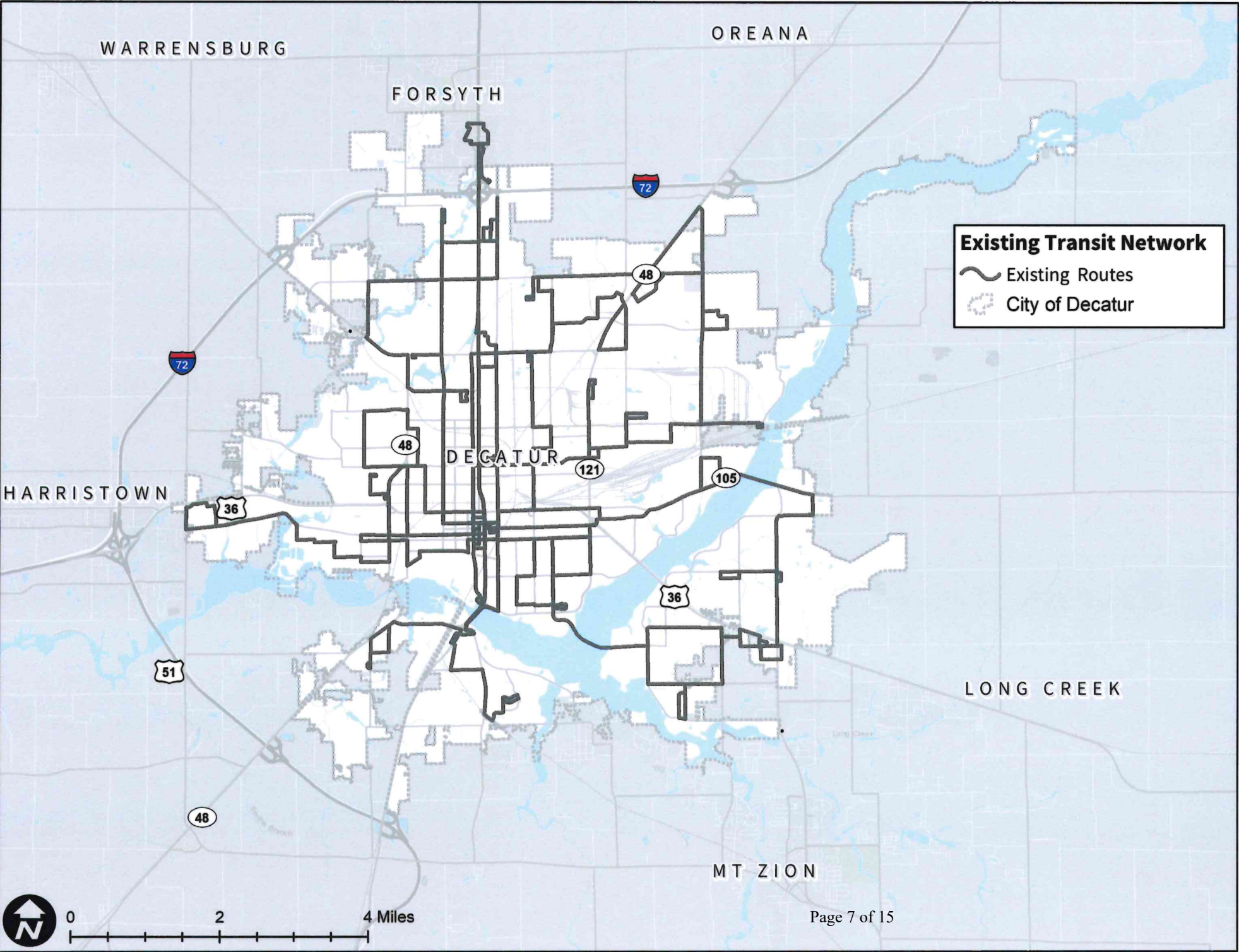
TRANSPORTATION ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT (TOD)

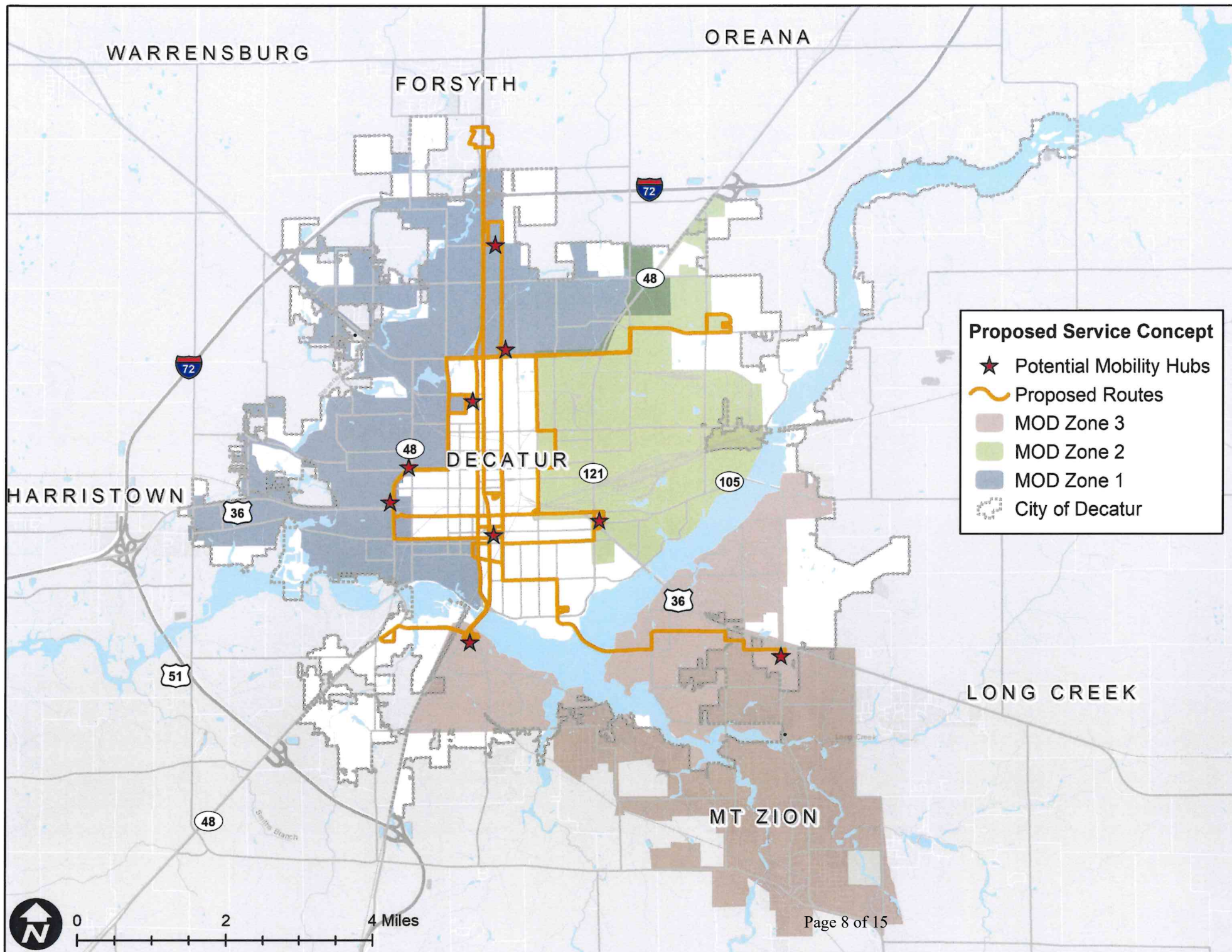
The city needs to better connect its transit initiatives to “Transportation Oriented Development principles. Broadly speaking, TOD seeks to integrate environmentally sensitive urban development strategies with public and private transportation to improve the local quality of life. TOD is also intended to reduce dependency on private motorized vehicles, better connect urban core and peripheral neighborhoods, improve access to jobs, and aid in the revitalization of distressed neighborhoods. Many of the Federal government’s TOD goals are not compatible with the pace and character of urban change and community revitalization in Decatur. In larger cities, TOD is equated with building affordable housing around commuter rail stations. With the help of our consultants, we have developed TOD strategies more closely aligned with the City Council’s goals (especially Micro-Transit). These include:

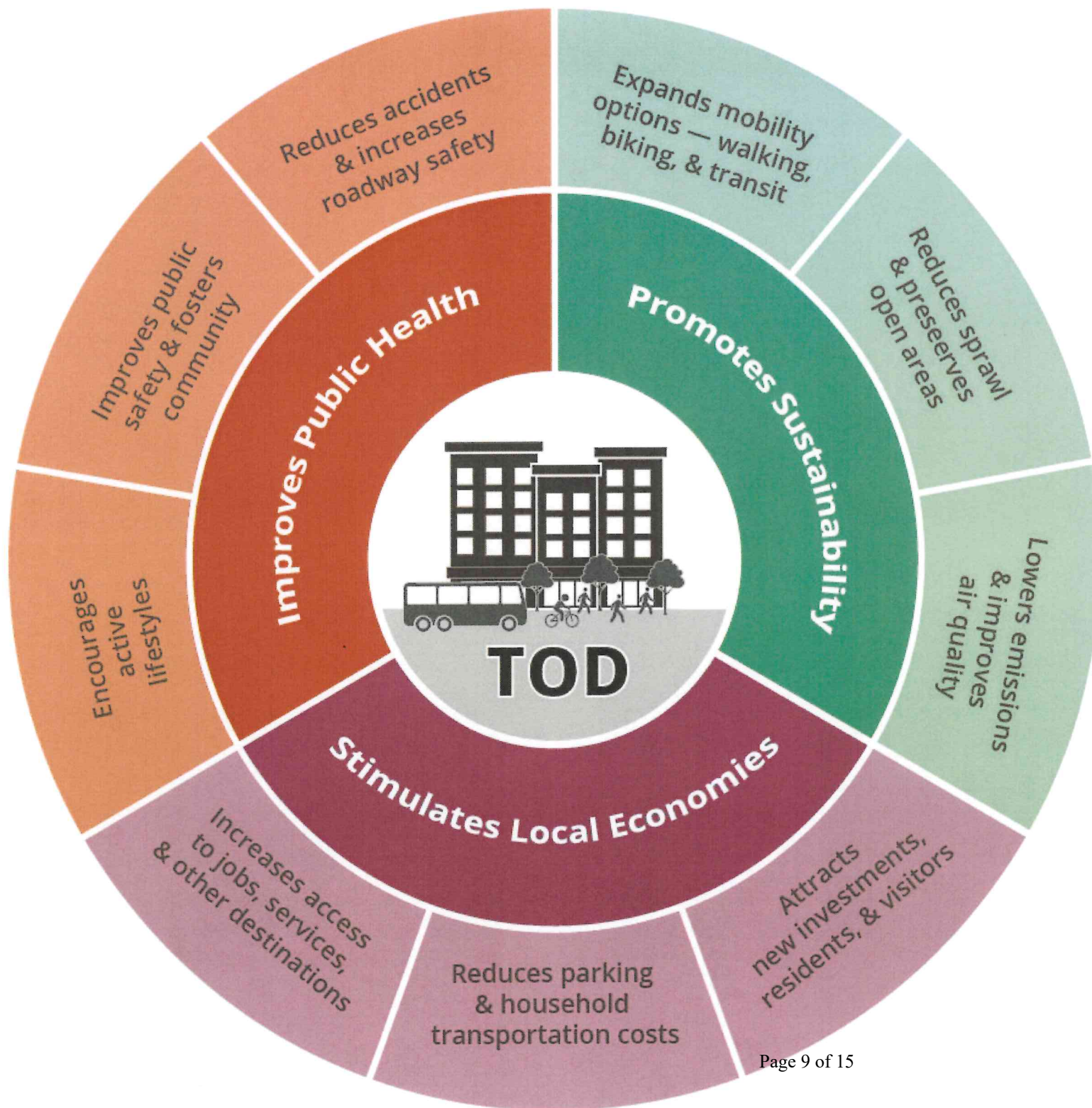
1. Increasing the number of persons who use public transit, thereby reducing the amount of household income spent on transportation
2. Improving public transit access, especially to persons with mobility concerns, and to those who need public transportation to travel to and from their places of employment, as well as serving low-income persons and others lacking reliable transportation alternatives
3. Decreasing average trip times and making other improvements in operational efficiency
4. Decreasing overall GhG (green house gas) emissions
5. Making the city’s transit system more compatible with walkable, pedestrian-friendly strategies, and allowing easier transitions between motorized and non-motorized transport
6. Increasing citizen control over their transportation, e.g., by moving more riders from paratransit to Micro-Transit, and strengthening neighborhood business zones through the placement of secondary transit nodes
7. Aligning the service with current Decatur needs and demographic shifts

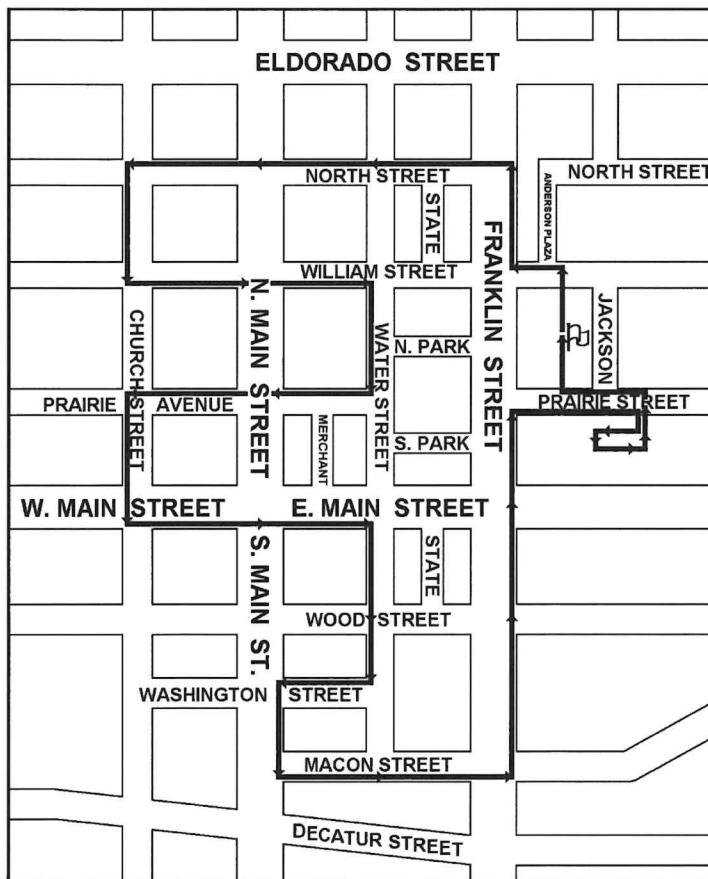
SUMMARY

At the conclusion of the study session, it is requested that the City Council will: 1) approve moving forward with the conceptual, routing and Micro-Transit elements broadly outlined here, or as they may be amended by the council; and 2) give the “green light” for the expanded list of responsibilities, projects and tasks assigned to the Transportation Services Department.









Circling Downtown Decatur every 15 minutes.

Monday thru Friday from 7:00 am to 6:15 pm; and Saturday from 8:00 am to 6:15 pm.

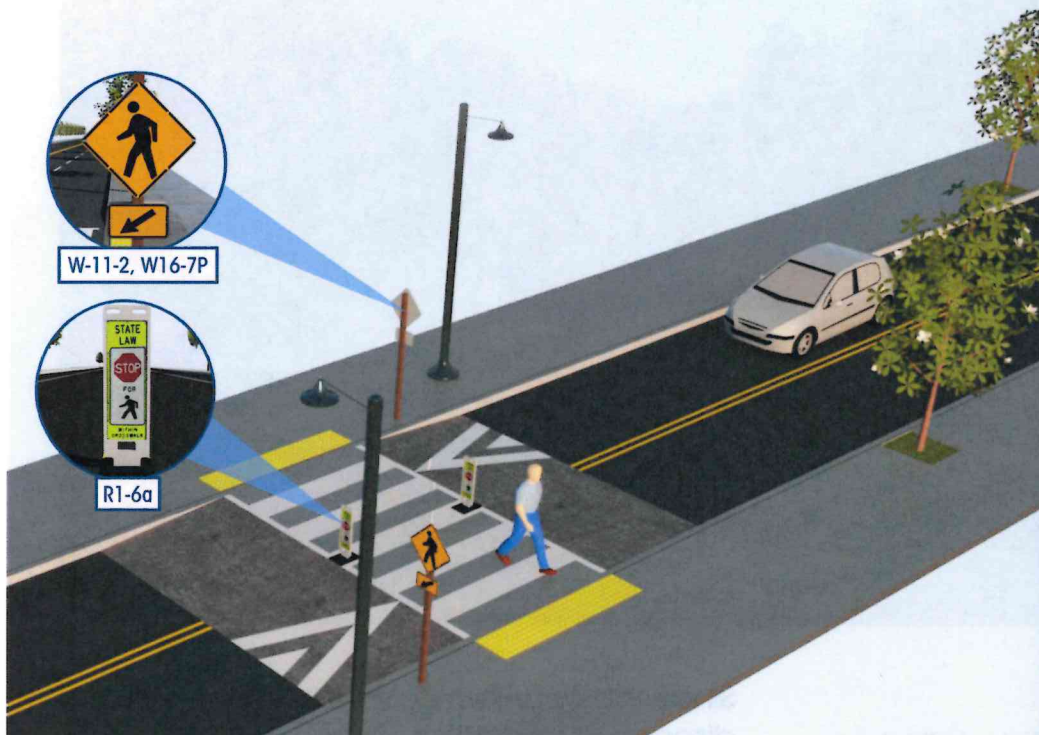
The Downtown Trolley is scheduled to be at the Transit Center (353 E. William Street) on the hour, at :15 minutes past, at :30 minutes past, and at :45 minutes past the hour, every hour, starting at 7:00 am weekdays and at 8:00 am every Saturday.

The last trip of the day will start at the Transit Center at 6:00 pm, Monday thru Saturday.

Raised Crosswalk

SAFE TRANSPORTATION FOR EVERY PEDESTRIAN

COUNTERMEASURE TECH SHEET



Raised crosswalks are ramped speed tables spanning the entire width of the roadway, often placed at midblock crossing locations. The crosswalk is demarcated with paint and/or special paving materials. These crosswalks act as traffic-calming measures that allow the pedestrian to cross at grade with the sidewalk.

In addition to their use on local and collector streets, raised crosswalks can be installed in campus settings, shopping centers, and pick-up/drop-off zones (e.g., airports, schools, transit centers).

Raised crosswalks are flush with the height of the sidewalk. The crosswalk table is typically at least 10 feet wide and designed to allow the front and rear wheels of a passenger vehicle to be on top of the table at the same time. Detectable warnings (truncated domes) and curb ramps are installed at the street edge for pedestrians with impaired vision.

⚠ Local and collector roads with high speeds pose a significant challenge for pedestrians crossing the roadway.

💡 A raised crosswalk can reduce vehicle speeds and enhance the pedestrian crossing environment.

Raised crosswalks can reduce pedestrian crashes by

45%



FEATURES:

- Elevated crossing makes the pedestrian more prominent in the driver's field of vision, and allows pedestrians to cross at grade with the sidewalk
- Approach ramps may reduce vehicle speeds and improve motorist yielding

OFTEN USED WITH:

- Crosswalk visibility enhancements

Raised Crosswalk

EDC-4 STEP: https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/innovation/everydaycounts/edc_4/step.cfm



Boston, MA. Photo: Peter Furth / nacto.org

CONSIDERATIONS

Raised crosswalks are typically installed on 2-lane or 3-lane roads with speed limits of 30 mph or less and annual average daily traffic (AADT) below about 9,000. Raised crossings should generally be avoided on truck routes, emergency routes, and arterial streets.

Drainage can be an issue. Raised crosswalks may be installed with curb extensions where parking exists. They may also be used at intersections, particularly at the entrance of the minor street.

Since this countermeasure can cause discomfort and noise (especially with larger vehicles), it may be appropriate to get public buy-in. Raised crosswalks may not be appropriate for bus transit routes or primary emergency vehicle routes. For States that experience regular snowfall, snowplowing can be a concern.

COST

The cost associated with a raised crosswalk ranges from \$7,110 to \$30,880 each, with the average cost estimated at \$8,170.

References

- Federal Highway Administration. (2013). "Raised Pedestrian Crossings" in PEDSAFE: Pedestrian Safety Guide and Countermeasure Selection System. Available: http://www.pedbikesafe.org/PEDSAFE/countermeasures_detail.cfm?CM_NUM=7
- Thomas, L., Thirsk, N. J., & Zegeer, C. (2016). NCHRP Synthesis 498: Application of Pedestrian Crossing Treatments for Streets and Highways. Transportation Research Board, Washington D.C.
- Bushell, M., Poole, B., Zegeer, C., & Rodriguez, D. (2013). Costs for Pedestrian and Bicyclist Infrastructure Improvements: A Resource for Researchers, Engineers, Planners, and the General Public. Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center.
- Elvik, R., Christensen, P., and Amundsen, A. (2004). "Speed and Road Accidents An Evaluation of the Power Model." Transportøkonomisk Institutt, Oslo, Norway.





