

# Appendix J: Students Speak Out Summary

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## SUMMARY OF PROJECT FINDINGS

As part of the Minnesota Pedestrian System Plan community engagement efforts, a [teen-focused conversation](#) was launched on the Citizens League's online civic platform, *Citizing!*, and teen-specific workshops were held.

Online and in-person conversations were designed to cover key topic areas to better understand the teen perspective about walking and walking environments.

## ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

A teen-focused webpage was developed to host an online conversation about walking in Minnesota. Six teen commentators were selected (from a pool of over 60 applicants). The commentators formed the core discussion group, however, all teens were welcome to participate. The teen commentators for this project were diverse in both race and geography.

Over the course of five weeks, one question per week was posed for students to think about, answer, and dialogue about with their peers and members of the project team. The following summarizes the discussion and highlights key themes that emerged. Teens were also encouraged to participate in the online surveys and their responses are included in the summary of overall community engagement events (Appendix D) and the Facility Comfort Survey results (Appendix E).

### Week 1

Teens were asked to take the Pedestrian Survey and answer: Where do you walk? Where do you like to walk? Where would you like to walk, but can't? Why?

Key themes:

- Teens enjoy walking in a natural setting that's peaceful. They depend on walk outdoors to relax and recharge.
  - Matthew: "I like to walk on paths that have things to look for or look at. Usually anywhere in a state park I like to walk and enjoy nature."
  - Somya: "I like to walk around the Mississippi River because it's so beautiful and how the sun goes through the tree or how the sunlight hits the river the birds chirping its peace and quiet and also the leaves changing colors it just incredible."

- Safety is priority #1. Dangerous walking conditions such as unsafe communities, paths/sidewalks that aren't well lit or are too car-centric are the top safety concerns mentioned. Traffic signs, guard rails and dedicated walking paths are the top recommendations for safety improvements.
  - Somya: "My mom prefers that I don't walk around the neighborhood or in some cases outside the neighborhood because of the craziness happening of people getting shot or killed."
- They see an emphasis on cars and infer that pedestrian needs are secondary.
  - Emilio: "[I can't walk in] some areas of Minneapolis, due to the focus on cars and not pedestrians ... those areas really don't feel friendly to walkers because they are missing some key features such as buffers and bike lanes."
  - Farley: "I would like to walk to the downtown area from my house. I can technically do this, but it is awkward to because the roads are very busy and some parts of the trip would not have sidewalks or marked walking/crossing areas."
  - Emilio: "It would be nice to see work done on putting pedestrians first, and the cars second."

## Week 2

The teens were asked to take the Visual Preference Survey and answer: What are some of the things that make walking easier, safe and more attractive for you? What are some of the things that make walking more difficult for you? Did you learn anything about walking in your community by taking the survey?

Key themes:

- Safe, clear paths/sidewalks are a key factor in determining where they walk.
  - Farley: "Personally, I consider how busy the road is and how available a sidewalk is... I really dislike having to walk along a busy road with no walkway, it's awkward and also feels pretty dangerous."
  - Ty: "It is nice knowing that some places take pedestrians into consideration when building."
  - Nico: "Bad drivers and icy sidewalks make walking difficult for me."
- They support shifting the focus from cars to pedestrians.
  - Emilio: "It would be great to see [a part of our city closed to cars and open only to pedestrians]. I particularly like to see... parking was transformed into walking/green space."

## Week 3

Teens were asked to read part of the *Minnesota Walks* document and weigh in on two of the four key themes: "Walking is Important" and "Walking Should be Easier". They were asked to share their reactions and if they agreed/disagreed with anything presented.

Key themes:

- Driving is "new" to teens so there is more interest in it.
  - Farley: "I know a lot of people who don't want to walk because it's cooler to drive – and I kinda understand that, a lot of us are getting our permits and licenses now and driving is interesting and fun for us..."

- Emilio: “[Driving] has a “coolness factor” since people are just getting their permits.”
- Communicate the benefits of walking in a way that connects with teens– billboards, wayfinding signs that tell you how long to key destinations if you walk, etc.
  - Ty: “I agree that billboards can interest teens and can be a conversation starter. I also think that graffiti and/or nice art work will interest teens.”
  - Farley: “My city of Duluth has recently put in some signs around town that tell you how fast you can to a certain area from where you are in both biking speed and walking speed... It’s actually a great idea and has even convinced me to walk to a few more places than I did before.”
- Communicate the recreational/health aspect of walking. Some teens knew that was an important benefit of walking and it’s a key motivator; others weren’t aware of all the health benefits.
  - Emilio: “Among my friends I would say that walking is certainly not “out of style,” though it’s not number one. This is because... ‘Walking prevents illnesses, a fact that we are well aware of.”
  - Nico: “[By reading *Minnesota Walks*] I learned that walking prevents a lot of illnesses.”

## Week 4

Teens were asked to read the second part of the *Minnesota Walks* document and weigh in on the last two of the four key themes: “It’s Harder for Some People to Walk” and “Minnesota Is On Track to Improve Walking”. They were asked to share their reactions and if they agreed or disagreed with what was presented.

Key themes:

- Teens felt Minnesota is on track to improve walking, but there is still room for improvement.
  - Farley: “I think that Minnesota is definitely on the right track. I am very impressed with the scale of the projects being made and the attention to detail... I’m impressed with the focus on community involvement and input, all the meetings that have been conducted to gather information from real citizens.”
  - Emilio: “I don’t disagree with the path [that Minnesota is on to improve walking, but] I feel that there needs to be even more alternatives.
- The walking environment matters to teens. Whether it’s the weather or a dirty, littered sidewalk – the nicer the conditions, the easier it is to walk.
  - Farley: “If I had a magic wand, my biggest concern would be dealing with Minnesota weather. Half the year it’s either mud or snow, and that can definitely put a damper on walking.”
  - Ty: “If I had a magic wand I would make it safer in neighborhoods by having signs and good walkways. I would also make the neighborhoods look clean and nice so that people would want to do their daily physical activities in that area. I think if the scenery is good then people will be more attracted to the area.”

## Week 5

Teens were provided with a short summary of what we’ve heard – from all the conversations, across the state – and asked if it reflected what they’ve had to say, if they’d add anything and what their first step would be if they were in charge of making Minnesota more walkable.

Key themes:

- Teens felt their perspective was represented in the draft findings.
  - Nico: "I think the findings are accurate and I can relate to some of them. I do see my perspective [represented]."
  - Ty: "The initial findings seem to be good representation from a variety of audiences and considers a number of factors."
- You are what you measure. Teens suggested measuring the extent to which the statewide pedestrian plan is being implemented and whether it's meeting the needs of Minnesotans.
  - Farley: "I would be sure to include regular input from the people under effect of the project."
  - Ivy: "If I could change anything, I would just add in statistics showing how many people called in on the issues per year on the topics listed and how many of those calls were resolved as well as include which areas got resolved sooner than others."

## PROJECT WORKSHOPS

Two in-person teen workshops were held in December with teens from the Twin Cities metro area. While over twenty teens registered for the workshops, turnout was lower than anticipated (n=8).

The workshops were structured as follows:

- Project introduction
- Overview of key pedestrian design features
- Walking workshop
- Small group discussion –
  - Key questions: Do you walk? Where do you walk? How would you make walking easier, safer and more attractive to teens?

Key themes:

- The majority of teens walk quite a bit. Primary destinations were friends' houses and school.
- Teens walk out of necessity (i.e., to school), but also for relaxation or exercise.
- Safety, safety, safety.
  - Teens recommended making walking safer through: better lighting/more "eyes" on pedestrian areas, well-marked and controlled pedestrian crossings, keeping sidewalks free from snow/ice, separate bike and pedestrian paths and "pedestrian only" areas.
- Visual interest is important to teens. Public art, nice landscaping, holiday lights and interesting shops were all mentioned as important aesthetics.