



Smart Growth
A M E R I C A



National Complete
Streets Coalition

Observations and Next Steps

BEST/Eugene, OR

Prepared by **Smart Growth America**
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Memo

I. Introduction

A city's streets should serve the people who live there and help them safely reach essential destinations through whichever mode suits them best. [Better Eugene-Springfield Transportation](#) (BEST) is an organization dedicated to strengthening communities by bringing people together to promote transportation options, safe streets and walkable neighborhoods. They partnered with AARP and SGA to hold a workshop aimed at understanding current conditions as well as community experiences and perspectives about two important corridors in Eugene—Highway 99 and River Road. SGA team members Mehr Mukhtar, Chris Rall, and Dustin Robertson travelled to Eugene in November 2025 to help lead the workshop.

The workshop comprised multiple components including the following:

- A dinner with key stakeholders including Mayor Kaarin Knudson and other elected officials
- A walk audit on Highway 99 and town hall at Petersen Barn Community Center
- A walk audit on River Road and town hall at Howard Elementary School
- A debrief breakfast with BEST, SGA, AARP, and representatives from City of Eugene and Lane Transit District

This report contains the SGA team's main observations based on what we saw and heard in Eugene. This is not an engineering or traffic study, and we are not making recommendations about how the corridors should be changed. Instead it is a report of the conditions we experienced and heard about the two corridors.

II. Highway 99

A. Walk audit

Highway 99 is a large arterial route running North-South through Eugene. Our walk audit for the road began at [Lane County Parole and Probation](#), near the intersection with Roosevelt Boulevard and traveled north to Royal Avenue. There we crossed the street and traveled west to Fairfield Elementary School before returning on Highway 99 to the original starting location. Highway 99 in this area is large (four or five lanes), flat and straight. Overall, the pedestrian experience along the route was loud, uncomfortable, and unpleasant. Some of the observations from the walk audit include:

Noise—The vehicles traveling on Highway 99 create lots of sound, making the areas near the highway extremely loud and unpleasant. It was difficult to hear throughout the walk audit and we frequently had to shout to one another.



Many driveways—There are numerous business entrances (some active and some inactive) along the route, and many of them are very wide. This means that vehicles are able to enter and exit the highway at numerous points, and at relatively high speeds, creating hazardous conditions for anyone walking or biking along the route.



Transit infrastructure—Although Lane County Transit District has two bus routes that operate in this area (route [41](#) and [95](#)), the amenities at many of the stops are minimal. For example, as the picture shows, this stop has no seating, covering, or lighting. During the audit, we saw people waiting for buses and were told that many people in the area rely on transit.



Blight & lack of community feel—Walk audit participants shared that Highway 99 does not have a strong sense of place or community. Although the residential areas that branch off of the highway have more of a sense of place, the highway itself is an “in-between” place that does not feel inviting or welcoming. There are many derelict and unused properties along the route. Some participants shared that in recent years, businesses along the route have struggled.



Narrow sidewalks and obstructions—When the group turned on Royal Avenue, we observed that conditions were different from the highway, but there were challenges for pedestrians in this more residential area as well. For example, sidewalks were narrower along Royal, and there were some obstacles such as the utility pole in the photo.



Unhoused people—There are services and accommodations for unhoused people on both sides of Highway 99. For instance St. Vincent De Paul provides services for between 300-500 people per day. People that utilize these services often do not have vehicles and instead rely on walking, transit, and bicycles for transportation. They also often need to cross the highway. Any future plans for this corridor should carefully consider how this population will be affected by changes.

Speed of vehicles—Throughout the audit, participants shared that they felt vehicles were traveling too fast. This included along Highway 99—a large and wide thoroughfare that encourages drivers to exceed the 40 MPH speed limit. The speed limit on Royal Avenue is 35 MPH, but some participants felt this is excessive and asked if it is possible to reduce the speed limits in the area. Participants also pointed out that the highway’s road design fostered unsafe driving behavior. For instance, during the walk audit we observed one vehicle making a U-turn on the highway with traffic in both directions. A large truck coming from the opposite direction had to slam on its brakes to avoid a crash.



Few crosswalks—Because there are businesses, residences, community services, and other destinations on both sides of Highway 99, people frequently need to cross the highway. However, there are not many safe and convenient options for doing this. There are some protected crosswalks such as the one above (note that the railings are bent, possibly after being struck by vehicles), but there are long distances between them. One participant said the following “when I drive through the area and see people crossing, I think ‘why wouldn’t they just go to the crosswalk?’ But now that I’m standing here, I realize that the crosswalks are a lot farther away!”



B. Highway 99 town hall

Following the walk audit, a lunch and town hall event was held at Petersen Barn Community Center—located on Royal Avenue, less than a mile from Highway 99. There, around 30 participants reflected on the walk audit, heard a brief presentation by SGA, and then collaborated on a brainstorming exercise to identify the key challenges and potential solutions for transportation along the corridor. Mayor Kaarin Knudson also joined the event to hear from community members.



Participants worked collectively at tables to identify key challenges and solutions. These were then voted on by the entire group.

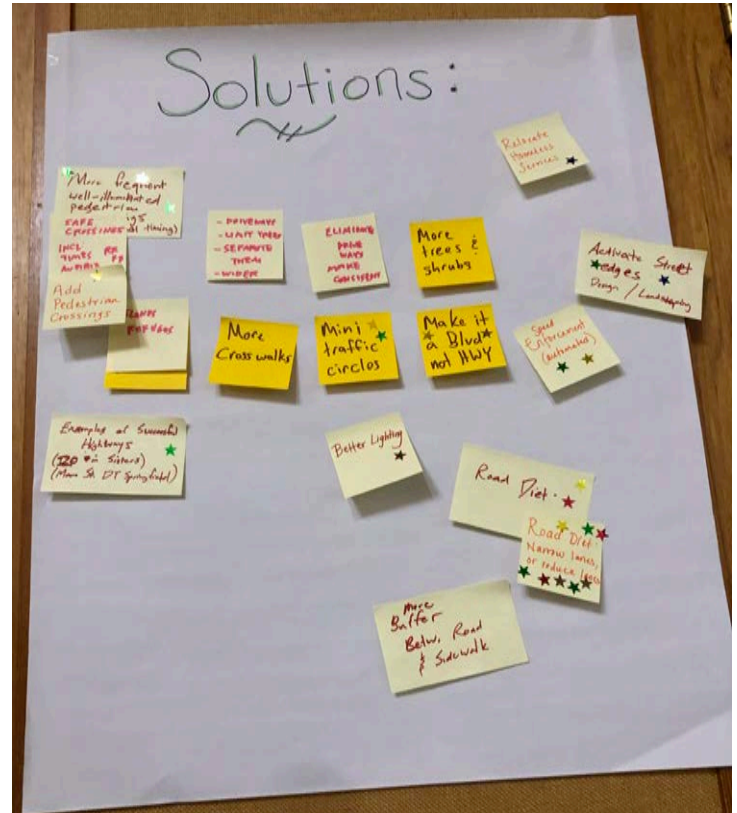


Mayor Knudson (right) listens during the town hall

Speed and noise—The top challenge identified through the exercise (indicated by number of stars) was high speed/loud noise caused by vehicles on Highway 99. This is a common challenge that we see in many places across the country, because many roads have been built to move vehicles as fast as possible. This not only creates uncomfortable and inhospitable places, high speed roads are also inherently dangerous, especially for people outside of vehicles.



Road diets—The most popular solution for the corridor was “road diet.” Road diets are considered a proven safety countermeasure by the US Department of Transportation, and a relatively low-cost solution that provides numerous benefits. The city of Eugene has recently created Complete Streets Design Standards that includes information and guidance about road and lane diets. Other relevant resources include the Federal Highway Administration Road Diet Informational Guide as well as SGA’s guidance about Complete Streets.



III. River Road

A. Walk audit

River Road is a large arterial road running North-South in northwestern Eugene. Our walk audit began at the [Grocery Outlet](#) before traveling several blocks in each direction to explore the conditions of the road from a pedestrian perspective. Similar to Highway 99, the walk audit revealed numerous factors that make travel along the corridor uncomfortable and dangerous, especially for pedestrians. Some of the observations from the walk audit include:

Important transit

corridor—River Road has many residents and important destinations such as restaurants, stores, and a nearby high school. During the walk audit, we observed many students waiting for and boarding LTD buses. How to adequately serve the local population and help them reach their destinations is an important question. A previous [proposal to implement an EmX on River Road](#) caused significant controversy and was ultimately abandoned. During the River Road walk audit and town hall, we heard some references to previous proposals for the route and hints at the types of sentiments that may exist for some residents.



Limited bicycle

facilities—Bicycle infrastructure along the route is minimal. There are unprotected shared bike lanes (aka “sharrows”) along the area covered by the walk audit. However, the volume of traffic, and high speeds create difficult conditions for biking. Bicycle advocates point out that these types of lanes [do not adequately protect cyclists](#). Several participants (including two who brought their bikes on the tour) shared that they feel very unsafe biking in the area. One participant shared that although she bikes a lot, she takes longer routes to avoid this area.



Drainage and debris along the sidewalks—There was some light rain at the beginning of our walk audit (not an uncommon occurrence in Eugene). Along the route we encountered numerous places where water was pooling on sidewalks, in the shared bike lanes, and vehicle lanes.



Poor sidewalk conditions—Along the route, there were multiple places where sidewalks were cracked or deteriorated, which creates difficulties for users, especially people with mobility challenges.



Numerous driveways—Similar to Highway 99, there are many driveways along River Road. This means that sidewalks are frequently interrupted by wide gaps that cars use to enter and exit the numerous businesses and residences on the route.



Sidewalk maintenance—The walk audit was conducted in November, a time when leaves happened to be falling. Some sections of the route were covered in leaves which creates challenges and hazards for pedestrians.



Limited crosswalks and short signal timings—Similar to Highway 99, crosswalks are sparse along the corridor meaning that pedestrians either must go long distances to reach them, or cross multiple lanes of traffic without one. In fact, some places have signs indicating that crosswalks have been closed. Even when one finds a crosswalk at an intersection, the signal timings are very short meaning that one has to scramble across. The walking tour groups were generally not able to entirely cross intersections within the time allotted by signals.



Limited protected crossings—Our walk audit found one example of a protected crossing indicated in the photo. However, there were no others along the portion of River Road covered in the walk audit.



B. River Road town hall

Following the walk audit, a town hall meeting was held at Howard Elementary School. Similar to the Highway 99 town hall, participants reflected on the walk audit, heard a brief presentation by SGA, and then collaborated on a brainstorming exercise to identify the key challenges and potential solutions for transportation along the corridor. Around forty people participated in the town hall and there were lively discussions at the tables and in the group as a whole.

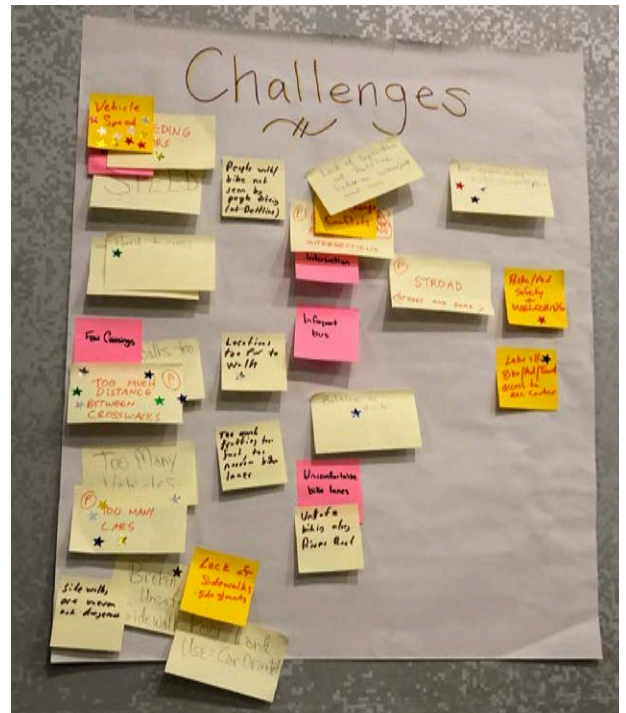


SGA team members present about Complete Streets at River Road town hall

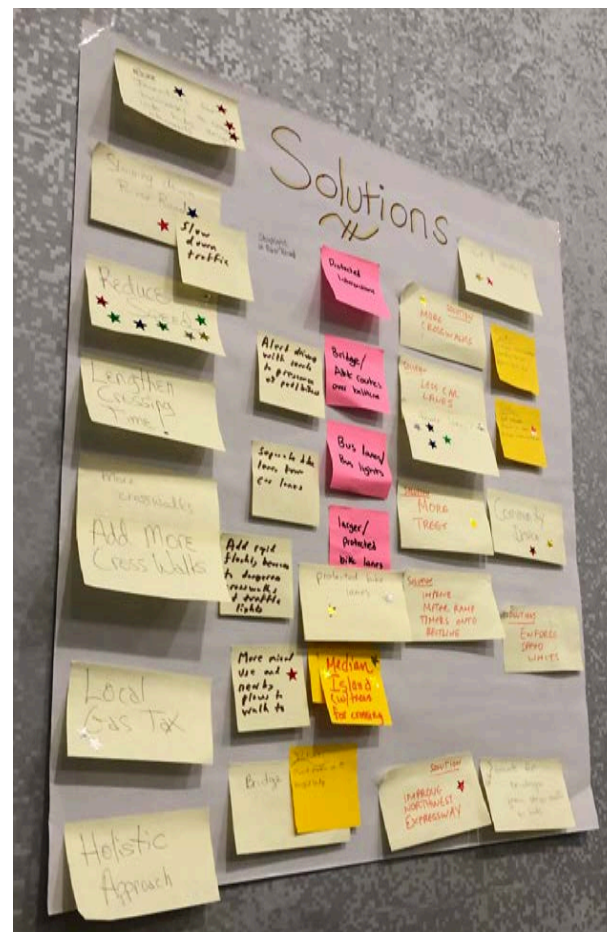


BEST director Rob Zako addresses River Road town hall participants

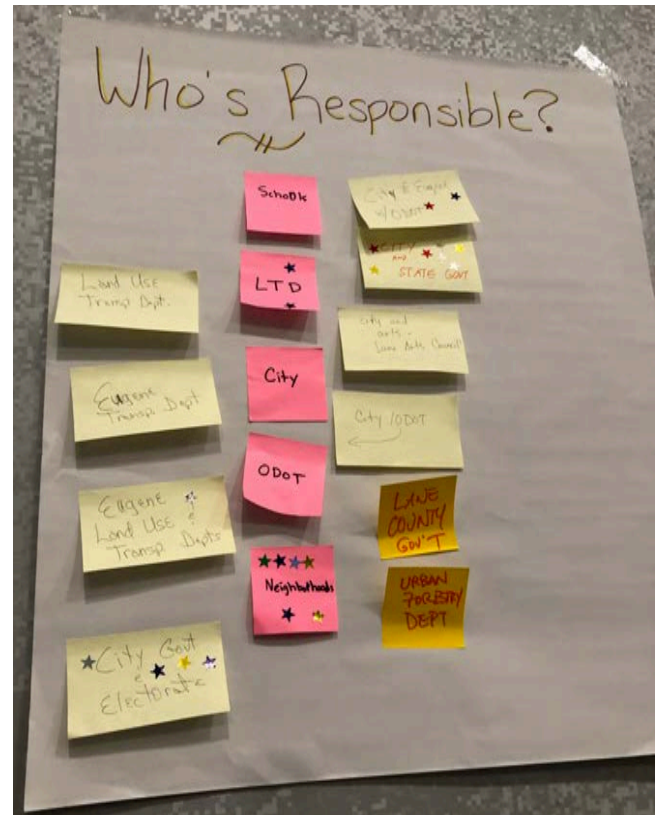
Vehicle speed—The high speed of vehicles on the road was by far the most popular challenge listed by participants. Even participants who voiced opposition to changes along the route agreed that the speed of vehicles was a major problem.



Speed reduction—Given the fact that vehicle speed was identified as the top priority, it is not surprising that reducing speed was the number one solution.



Government responsibility—Regarding responsibility for improvements to the corridor, the most popular response was “city & state government.” However, a number of participants also indicated that neighborhoods have an important role to play as well.



IV. Recommendations for BEST and other stakeholders

- A. **Build and strengthen the coalition**—BEST did a fantastic job of inviting and engaging stakeholders for this event. However, it is important to maintain interest and continue incorporating other groups along the way. They should keep up momentum with this group and add others to it (ideally with regular meetings and events). Branching out and involving more organizations and residents is crucial. For example, the BEST should make efforts to include stakeholders from faith communities, healthcare, education, businesses, people with disabilities, minority populations, and others.
- B. **Conduct more walk audits in different parts of River Road and Highway 99 and include diverse participants**—The audits illuminated many serious issues. However, they only covered small segments, and were not necessarily representative of all parts. Similar exercises should be conducted in different areas to understand their assets, needs, and challenges and include stakeholders such as community members, local elected officials, as well as the appropriate city staff. BEST created observation sheets specifically for these walk audits which may be useful for future exercises. Other resources are available from [AARP](#) and [America Walks](#).

- C. **Draw lessons from street treatments that have been effective in other parts of Eugene**—The city of Eugene has made changes to improve safety and mobility to other corridors in the city. During the visit, the SGA team observed other streets that featured Complete Streets elements.



Protected bike lane



Dedicated transit lane



Bike share

- D. **Consider quick-build projects along River Road and Highway 99**—Some of the safety and mobility issues identified in this memo are suitable for quick-build projects which can test solutions and raise awareness about alternative designs. Quick builds, also known as demonstration projects or tactical urbanism projects, are temporary, low-cost improvements that test changes to street design, allowing communities and city leaders to try new ideas and gather feedback about a tangible redesign concept before proposed changes are made permanent. For more information on how cities across the country have used this approach, refer to safety demonstration project case studies from Orlando, Lexington, and South Bend ([here](#)); Durham, Huntsville, and Pittsburgh ([here](#)); and [Washington](#).

Conclusion

Both Highway 99 and River Road have room for improvement to ensure that they adequately serve all road users, not just cars. The workshop described in this memo provided useful insights into the current conditions and challenges along the two corridors. However, the workshop was a starting point for the numerous conversations, events, and decisions that will be involved in improving them. We hope that BEST, along with its community partners and the City of Eugene can find solutions that meet the needs of all road users and adequately protect the most vulnerable groups. For more information about Complete Streets see the [Smart Growth America](#) website.

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