

North Avenue Task Force Recommendations to the City of Burlington
Measuring Public Input from the New North End
January 10, 2016

In the “Resolution Relating to the North Avenue Plan” it states, on line 47 “By its nature as a pilot study, if public input from the New North End does not support its continuation, the City will restore the 4-3 lane pilot area to its original configuration...”

Task: Collaborate with the DPW as they measure community input. This document includes our initial recommendations for gathering and measuring public input from the New North End.

Goal: To Measure New North End Support of the North Avenue Pilot by Capturing Public Input and Experiences

Objective: To be as inclusive and accessible as possible in order to gather input from the vast majority of people who are from the New North End, whether living, working, or attending schools. This should have a higher response rate than the March 2015 voter turnout in Wards 4 and 7.

Strategy:

Our strategy is to create survey mechanisms that allow us to capture input and understand the degree of support from a broad segment of the Burlington population, living, working and attending schools in the New North End. This public input is being considered separate from the public comments that the city and DPW will receive throughout the project.

To reach a broad segment of the New North End:

1. We envision using both online and offline tools to gather input.
2. We envision tailored surveys for specific populations using North Avenue.

To understand the degree of support for the restriping and intersection changes:

1. We envision sharing the DPW’s and CCRPC’s quantitative data about the pilot project before measuring public input.
2. We envision creating surveys and questions that delve into the experience and feeling of using the North Avenue corridor by any mode of transportation prior to and during the pilot period.

To create adequate surveys and a successful effort to collect input:

1. We envision the input effort will run by the city and the Department of Public Works but will be a collaborative effort with different organizations.
2. We envision working with qualitative survey and outreach experts in Burlington, UVM and in statewide organizations to optimize the survey tools.
3. We envision working with city organizations, such as the Burlington office of Innovation and Information, IgniteBTV and CodeBTV.

4. We envision creating mechanisms to minimize the potential for abuse or “ballot-stuffing.”
5. We recommend doing a pre-survey in the spring before the pilot to establish a baseline and test the survey methods.

If successfully implemented, we view this public input mechanism as a pilot that the City of Burlington might use for future engagements.

Approach

The first question to address is how to define “public input” for the purpose of this measurement.

In its simplest form, we believe that “public input” should measure everyone and anyone who lives in the New North End and/or who uses North Avenue to access work or school in their everyday life. That includes people who drive on North Avenue, people who walk by and on North Avenue, people who bike on North Avenue, and people who take public transportation on North Avenue.

We also believe that we should measure public input from anyone who is capable of providing an opinion, no matter how well or ill thought out, no matter if they have light or heavy experience on the Avenue. Our viewpoint is: if they use North Avenue, we should listen to them.

The public input effort would specifically target:

- Residents of Wards 4 and 7, including retirees living in elder homes
- People working in Wards 4 and 7
- Children attending Burlington High School, Hunt Middle School, Flynn School and C.P. Smith School
- Children and their parents living in Wards 4 and 7 but using North Avenue as their route to other schools
- People of all ages using any mode of transportation, including driving, carpooling, walking, bicycling, and/or taking transit

Capturing Input

We recommend a multi-pronged approach for gathering input.

1. The first tool would be a paper-based input form. It would allow anyone with a pen or pencil to fill it in and easily drop it in a public, easily accessible collection box, placed in various locations throughout the New North End, or to fold it up and mail it in. Names and addresses would be required, and surveys without this information would be kept as general comments received but not counted to measure public input.
2. The second tool would be a digital-based input form. This form would be accessible on any Internet connected device, including computer, tablet or smart phone. People would access this digital form through a widely publicized and shared customized Web address. As with the paper survey, names and addresses would be required.

3. The third tool would use phone surveys or perhaps in-person, door-to-door surveyors. This would be conducted by a third-party and specifically target areas with low response rates (age demographics may play a factor here).

Verification

In both public input collection approaches, we recommended adding a security layer as much as possible. We know from long experience that it is easy to game a public opinion survey. In order to reduce opinion fraud as much as possible, we recommend the following:

The digital version should connect to city or public household data. Using that data, we would identify

- The participants' address
- The geolocation through reverse IP lookup
- The number of votes coming from individual computers

The paper version would have manual checks against digital version and against the same city lists to ensure that over-opinions are not coming from the same household.

Input Questions

Working with qualitative survey experts, we recommend crafting surveys about the North Avenue Corridor Pilot to elicit as much sentiment as possible about the actual experience of using the new street. Our intent is to create a maximum 10-question survey that goes beyond simple "Yes/No" answers but delves into more experiential measurements.

In that way, we will be able to measure input about safety, stress, comfort, convenience and neighborhood development.

Citizen Outreach

We recommend adjusting the survey distribution to reach specific groups. To that end, these specific surveys would go hand and hand with various outreach efforts.

- Ward 4 & 7 Residents – We would use various touch points, such as city bill stuffers, online media and public meetings to drive people to the online survey. We would also do in person drives, at Hannaford's or other public venues using iPads or paper surveys. We would explore using CCTA buswraps or advertising. As a last resort, we may go door-to-door or phone outreach during the last several weeks.
- Retirees – We would do targeted outreach and in person meetings at the various elder homes in the neighborhood, using iPads and paper surveys.
- Schools – We would work with school administrations and/or Safe Routes to School coordinators to do in-person outreach and provide parents, teachers and administrators with tools to drive student participation.
- Businesses and Employees – We would target workplaces and business owners with in-person meetings and signage to encourage people to participate. We would provide paper surveys to employees as permitted.

The separate outreach and surveys will allow us to segment different data inputs and sets and compare against one another.

There are about 10,500 residents in Wards 4 & 7. We assume that at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of them use North Avenue on a regular or semi-regular basis. When we add students and workers into the mix that might bring the total number of people we are targeting to about 8,000 in all. Our goal is to outperform voting participation from March 2015 when approximately 50% of the registered voters in 4& 7 voted (~3,700 votes).

Timing

We recommend initiating a survey in the spring to test the survey methodology.

We recommend DPW collect public comments for the entire duration of the pilot project and report the percent of positive, negative, and neutral comments at 3, 6, 9, and 12 months. This would supplement the other quantitative metrics being collected. We also suggest that we partner with a social media monitor to gauge positive and negative sentiment on Twitter and Facebook.

We recommend running the public input surveys after the pilot has run for 4-6 months (i.e. November 2016 – January 2017). If the pilot begins in June, this will ensure public input is collected when school has resumed in fall 2016. This will also allow enough data to be collected and shared before collecting public input.

We recommend running the public input collection for a total of six weeks (at least). Both of those will

- a) Give people time to test the pilot and to reflect on how it impacts them
- b) Ensure that we reach as many people as possible, giving everyone a good, solid chance to allow their voices to be heard.

We recommend the official report of public input be provided in February – April 2017.

Assessment

The survey questions will allow us to assess whether opinion supports continuation of the changes or demands rolling them back. Our position is that if a majority of targeted residents oppose the pilot it should be rolled back.

Data

We recommend collecting names, addresses and emails for verification purposes only. We recommend destroying all personal data associated with these surveys within 90 days of final assessment.