Findings from I-70 Crossings Walk Audit

Introduction
This report identifies key findings from a walk audit conducted on Friday, June 3, 2022. The purpose of the walk audit was to identify the good, bad, and challenging aspects of the multimodal user experience along the numerous crossings of I-70 in Kansas City between The Paseo and US 40. The findings from this walk audit should inform the development of proposed improvements to crossings along the corridor, specifically for the benefit of multimodal users. BikeWalkKC organized the walk audit in conjunction with TREKK Design Group, Parson & Associates, Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT), the City of Kansas City, and Councilwoman Melissa Robinson of the 3rd District.

This memo covers three topics:
1. High-level observations regarding the street, sidewalk, lighting, and intersection conditions of crossings along the corridor;
2. Summaries of crossing observations from walk audit leads; and,
3. Recommendations for future considerations.
1. High-Level Observations

The walk audit groups gathered information on various aspects of the built environment for the crossings along the segment of I-70 between the Paseo and U.S. 40. Key takeaways include:

**Streets**
Most auditors noted that street conditions were relatively good. The most common issues reported included potholes and cracked or crumbling pavement. When comparing roadway conditions to sidewalk and crosswalk infrastructure, there is a discrepancy in the level of maintenance (i.e., the roads are usually better maintained). Driver behavior was also an observed problem in many groups. Auditors noted that poor or nonexistent infrastructure for pedestrians, combined with unsafe driver behavior, puts multimodal users at greater risk.

**Sidewalks**
Sidewalk barriers must be more frequent, especially for crossings over the highway. The addition of some sort of vertical separation between the street and the sidewalk provides both real and perceived improvements to safety for multimodal users. Most auditors noted that landscape overgrowth and a general lack of maintenance made even newer sidewalks unpleasant, narrow, or unusable. This issue was especially pronounced for places like the pedestrian crossing on Cypress. Maintenance of existing and future crossings and bridges should be a priority. BikeWalkKC recommends working with the City of Kansas City to establish maintenance and upkeep procedures of MoDOT facilities.
**Lighting**
Foliage overgrowth that obstructed lighting was frequently noted. This could be best addressed by strengthening maintenance schedules or planting trees farther away from light posts. Spacing between lighting was also inconsistent, which could contribute to visibility issues at night or in inclement weather. In most locations, the lighting system appeared to be designed for automobile safety, not for pedestrian safety or comfort. Prioritizing the installation of smaller, pedestrian-scaled lighting would improve visibility and pedestrian comfort and safety. There is a good example of this type of installation at the Paseo crossing where additional lighting is present under the bridge.

**Intersections**
Auditors consistently noted poor quality and availability of intersections and safe crossings. In many locations, pedestrians must walk long distances to get across the street, making them highly vulnerable. The degraded or complete lack of pedestrian signage, crosswalks, and traffic calming leading up to the crossings creates a dangerous environment. Driver behavior was also noted as a threat to pedestrian safety. Auditors observed drivers not stopping even if a crossing was present, and speeding were consistently noted. Visibility of pedestrians must be improved through context-sensitive crossing infrastructure and with overall traffic calming to alert drivers that there are other users on the road.
2. Summaries of Crossing Observations

The walk audits were conducted by ten groups of volunteers looking at the various crossings over and beneath this segment of I-70. The segments were grouped together based on proximity via walking. As a result, there were several crossings which had to be audited by themselves.

_Paseo/Woodland_
Auditors for the Paseo/Woodland segment began by heading east on 14th Street, south on Woodland, west on Truman, and finishing on the Paseo.

The street and sidewalk conditions for much of the segment were subpar, with cracks and crumbling portions frequently found along Woodland and Truman in particular. Due to the lack of paint and signage for multimodal users, intersections also felt dangerous to cross as a pedestrian. This was especially true along Woodland and Truman as well; Truman alone has seven lanes that someone outside of a vehicle would need to traverse to get across the street.

The segment on the Paseo under the highway offered clear examples of shortcomings, but also a good opportunity to incorporate good design. Trash buildup is a serious problem on both sides of the underpass. The sidewalks on both sides had areas of cracks and uneven placement, but the bigger concern was with sediment around it. Especially on the east side of the underpass, the lack of sediment is especially burdensome for people with disabilities and could pose a risk of bodily harm. Auditors noted that the unique lighting is a bright spot of sorts. In addition to adding more lighting under the overpass at night, it also helps to aesthetically connect the underpass with some of the other decorative and historic elements found on either side of the underpass. MoDOT should strive to preserve this lighting and incorporate it elsewhere.
**Brooklyn**

Auditors walked this linear segment starting at 14th Street on the south side of I-70 to 14th Street on the northside of I-70, before turning back to walk the opposite side.

Sidewalk conditions ranged from poor to dangerous. There were inconsistent grades, landscape overgrowth, and crumbling/buckling that would render most portions unusable for those with mobility challenges. The sidewalk segment on the east side of the I-70 bridge was in relatively good condition. However, with no buffer between the street and sidewalk, it is still dangerous. Auditors witnessed speeding drivers during the walk audit which made the conditions even more inhospitable.

Inconsistent lighting was noted on either side of I-70, with multiple lights along the bridge itself. There was one painted crosswalk leading to the I-70 bridge that was visible; however, the paint was faded at other locations and was difficult to see. South of I-70, there were no crosswalks in any direction.

This roadway was recently paved and thus the streets were in like new conditions.
Prospect/Chestnut

Auditors for this segment went north on Prospect, east on 13th, south on Chestnut, west on 14th, and through the McDonald’s parking lot on Montgall because of the impassable nature of a key segment of 14th Street.

The Prospect/Chestnut auditors included two neighborhood residents, advocates from The Whole Person, and representatives from MoDOT, TREKK, and Parson + Associates.

The I-70 crossings at Prospect/Chestnut are on the Prospect MAX BRT route, but the sidewalk and street conditions are inconsistent and neglected. Auditors struggled to cross over the highway because drivers were impatient at the complicated on-ramp/off-ramp intersections, and slip lanes allow drivers to enter the street without slowing.

On the Prospect bridge, the accessible pedestrian signals were not functioning properly. The sidewalks are not wide enough for two people to pass each other comfortably, and the only controlled intersections are directly at the on ramp/off ramp. On the Chestnut bridge, the sidewalks are not separated from the street, and the bridge is overly wide for two lanes, which encourages two auto-related businesses to store cars on the street despite “No Parking” signs. The sidewalks and curb cuts are in poor condition through the industrial area on the south side of the highway. Short sections of sidewalk and pavement in the area appear to have been repaired relatively recently. The disconnected nature of these newly repaired sidewalks is problematic. Pedestrians, especially people with disabilities, are led from a nice sidewalk to one that is crumbling and impassable.
Benton/Indiana

Auditors for this segment began at the corner of Truman and Benton heading north to 13th Street, east to Indiana, south to Truman, and then back west to Benton.

The street condition on Benton contributed to constant speeding from drivers, which created an unpleasant and unsafe experience for pedestrians crossing the bridge heading north towards 13th Street. Many of the sidewalks were cracked along this route, but the biggest issue was the complete lack of sidewalks on much of the west side of Indiana. Lighting seemed to be most challenged on 13th Street and Indiana, due in large part to overgrowth from the branches of nearby trees.

Among the intersections examined on this segment, 13th and Benton stands out as a serious concern. The crosswalk on the exit street towards the highway on the east side is largely blocked by a gateway landmark and brush vegetation. A driver heading south on Benton who merges on eastbound lanes is unlikely to see a pedestrian trying to cross. Additionally, there is no crosswalk paint or signage across Benton at the intersection of 13th Street. Given how fast drivers were observed speeding, this portion of the segment appears dangerous and feels very unsafe for anyone outside of a vehicle.
Indiana/18th Street

The auditors walked east along 18th Street from Askew to College before turning west on 18th to retrace their steps on the opposite side of the street. They walked north on Indiana then back south to see the I-70 crossing from both sides of the street.

The auditors were immediately struck with a cacophony of cars and engines of oversized pickups making their way through the cross streets. The noise pollution made it difficult and unpleasant to talk or listen to one another. While the condition of the roads was adequate, auditors noted a lack of curbs and very few appealing green spaces. What green spaces existed were filled with poison ivy.

The auditors in this group concluded that they had lucked out with the “best” infrastructure of all the groups, but they noted it was far from perfect. Crumbling sidewalks and little to no separation between the sidewalks and street exposed pedestrians to traffic and made mobility difficult and uncomfortable.

Faded crosswalks, excessive litter, and the behavior of some aggressive drivers also contributed to a dangerous and unsafe environment for pedestrians. It was observed that vehicles were moving with relative efficiency. The auditors in this group encountered only one pedestrian who remarked about the heat. This comment prompted the auditors to observe the lack of shade available for pedestrians along 18th Street.
Auditors began this segment heading west from Indiana. After crossing the bridge to Askew, auditors crossed the street and walked back to Indiana.

Looking at the two portions outside of the bridge itself, the western portion was more cause for concern than the eastern portion. Due in part to a combination of the hill, as well as the width of 23rd Street itself, drivers appeared to speed down the hill towards the bridge. There are no painted crosswalks or signage across this portion of 23rd Street either, which makes it feel all the more harrowing to cross. The eastern portion allowed for closer examination of sidewalks, which were largely cracked except for a new portion on the north side. Speeding drivers were more of a concern on the westbound lane as they neared the exit ramp to the highway. The island in the middle of the street could be improved to provide dedicated refuge for pedestrians; in its current form, it feels more like an obstacle than an assistive measure for multimodal users.

In terms of the bridge crossing itself, there were several elements which contributed to an unpleasant pedestrian experience. The street condition along the bridge was of particular concern because the pavement was discolored and uneven, with several chunks of curb missing and portions of rebar exposed. Much of the sidewalk infrastructure for this segment was cracked or faded, and the width of the sidewalk appeared unlikely to safely accommodate someone walking, or someone using an assistive device like a wheelchair. The overhead lights seemed to be deteriorating rapidly as well.
27th Street/Cleveland

Auditors for this group walked east on 25th Street, south on Myrtle, west on 27th, north on Cleveland, then back east on 25th Street.

Overall, landscaping maintenance was problematic for sidewalk infrastructure. Even relatively new sidewalks, like those along the east side of Myrtle, were degraded from landscaping encroachment and overgrowth. An overall lack of maintenance was apparent by the debris and trash build up.

Several obstructions were observed, primarily parked trucks and trailers. Lighting was spaced relatively well throughout this area, with only a handful of light posts obscured by trees.

Intersection quality was sporadic. Some intersections, like 27th and Cleveland, had relatively new crossing infrastructure in two directions, but nothing in the others. This was a consistent trend throughout the 27th/Cleveland walk.

Street conditions were relatively good. The most noteworthy issues included illegal parking that obstructed driving lanes, potholes, and landscape encroachment onto the road. Overall, certain streets were noted as unnecessarily wide, including 27th Street and Cleveland, particularly over the I-70 crossings.
Jackson

Auditors for this segment began by walking south on Jackson from 27th Street to E. 29th Street before crossing Jackson and returning to 27th Street.

This crossing shared similar characterizations as the others, with high-speed travelers, large turning aprons for cars, and limited pedestrian protections. Auditors observed a pedestrian in a wheelchair who chose the street over the sidewalk because the sidewalk was not traversable in the mobility device. The trek in the street was made more difficult with dangerous street conditions along parts of Jackson where there were no curbs to protect those using the sidewalk from vehicular traffic. Some segments of sidewalks along Jackson were in good condition, particularly under the bridge. However, even among these good segments, there was a buildup of trash and unmaintained landscaped buffers that devalued the pedestrian experience. Lastly, there were no crosswalks along any stretch of Jackson.
Cypress/Lister

The auditors began their walk at the intersection of 30th and Cypress to tackle the 500 feet of unmaintained road in order to access the Cypress pedestrian bridge crossing. This portion of our walk was the most problematic. The auditors had to physically duck and maneuver in order to force their way through honeysuckle and volunteer tree growth. Auditors noted several abandoned homeless camps and piles of refuse. The bridge was not ADA compliant and was extremely narrow. Access from the north side of I-70 was also non-ADA compliant and overgrown.

Sidewalks were not separated from the street during any part of the walk. Sidewalk conditions varied, with a patchwork of new sections interspersed with segments in disrepair, or with sections of nonexistent sidewalks. Crossing the bridge at Lister, there was a sidewalk on the East side of the road that was impassable because of the piles of dumped trash. Overall, the auditors did not have many vehicle interactions. When vehicles were encountered, the drivers were courteous and operated their vehicles safely. Auditors noted that there are many opportunities to improve intersections with refreshed crosswalk markings and ADA ramps.
Van Brunt/Oakley

The auditors of this segment walked west on 30th Terrace, then north on Van Brunt, east on 29th, then south on Oakley, before heading west on 30th Terrace once again to complete the loop.

Van Brunt itself was in relatively good shape with decent sidewalks. Crosswalks were starting to fade. Several of the tactile strips were missing or coming apart. It appeared the tactile strips had been retrofitted on existing concrete, and not included when the concrete was first poured. It seems like this type of treatment does not last as long and needs to be monitored more closely for maintenance and replacement.

The sidewalk connecting to the northern end of the pedestrian bridge was notably in bad shape and there was a lot of poison ivy. The bridge itself was in good shape, though auditors noted that its narrowness made them feel uneasy so high above the highway. The enclosed nature of the fencing made some auditors feel claustrophobic, though others who were afraid of heights appreciated the extra fencing. The auditors talked to a resident who lives next to the northern end of the pedestrian bridge, who said it is well-used, especially with a church next to the southern end of the bridge. The resident did note concerns that people riding motorcycles and ATVs use the bridge as a shortcut across the highway, which is especially concerning since the narrow bridge is barely wide enough for a pedestrian. There were no barricades to prevent vehicles from accessing the bridge.
3. Recommendations of Future Considerations

**Incorporating Walk Audits More Frequently**

The consensus among the auditors was that this firsthand experience helped them to understand the multimodal-user experience in a manner they simply could not grasp otherwise. Beyond the forms themselves, the audit requires a level of analysis and empathy which can create a stronger incentive to invest in the built environment in a way which truly supports the needs of people living with disabilities, as well as pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users. Such an approach should be used more frequently. Given the number of current ongoing highway projects in the Kansas City area, BikeWalkKC encourages MoDOT to collaborate on walk audits for the crossings along these segments as well.

One auditor and local resident, Jamie, shared her thoughts. She has been bicycling to work while her car is being repaired. “I didn’t realize how hard it is for people to walk or ride across the highway until I experienced it for myself,” she said. “I came out today because I want safer streets for my neighbors.”

**New Aspects of Data Gathering**

In conducting the walk audits, it was clear that there were additional opportunities for data gathering and analysis that could not be sufficiently addressed during these walk audits. While speeding was a clear observation, auditors didn’t have tools to measure the average speed of drivers. Another common finding among walk audit groups was the level of noise, which not only contributed to an unpleasant pedestrian experience, but somewhat hindered communications between groups during the audit as well. These issues warrant further study in order to improve safety, and to help document health impacts.
Accessibility Accommodations

A common issue each group encountered was rundown or broken infrastructure for people living with disabilities. This included broken or missing tactile platforms, quiet or inaudible crossing signals, landscape overgrowth, and missing curb cuts which would force wheelchair users into the street. While ADA considerations are a requirement, we strongly encourage MoDOT to embrace an emphasis on universal design to create greater comfort and ease of use for people living with disabilities. And, as the aging population increases, so too will age-related mobility challenges and disabilities, making a universal design approach even more important. Such an approach can be further strengthened by working closely with organizations representing these populations, such as The Whole Person, the local chapter of the National Federation of the Blind, and the local chapter of the American Association of Retired Persons.

Universal design restores human dignity for pedestrians. One of the auditors, Tony, is a nearby resident who uses a wheelchair. Tony said that dangerous intersections and neglected sidewalks around I-70 are a major barrier for him: “It doesn’t just prevent me from getting to the store, it also prevents me from living life to the fullest and being independent, which for me is very important as a person with a disability who is a wheelchair user.”

“Fix It First” Approach

Earlier planning discussions regarding walkability considerations for the I-70 crossings took place within the context of proposed new pedestrian crossings instead of existing crossings. BikeWalkKC’s primary concern, and the impetus for these walk audits, is that the new crossings are coming at the expense of the old ones.

If one of the main goals of the broader “Improve I-70 KC” project is to improve connectivity, there must first be an emphasis on improving existing connections. Further, this approach should apply equally to bridge crossings over the highway, as well as the underpasses beneath them. The 10-foot side-use paths with vertical separation over the bridge should be recommended, designed, installed, and maintained in both instances.
**Systems Approach**

The evaluation of crossings cannot be done in isolation. They must be evaluated using a systems approach. The highway crossings provide important access for all users, but those are just one component of the experience. As witnessed on the walk audits, the streets, sidewalks, and infrastructure leading to these crossings were consistently in fair or poor condition. BikeWalkKC believes the burden of responsibility extends far beyond the improvements to existing crossings and the addition of some new crossing options.

The construction of the I-70 highway has had a devastating impact on the local neighborhoods. BikeWalkKC believes that MoDOT has a responsibility to these neighborhoods. To only address certain crossings is to miss an invaluable opportunity to help mend neighborhoods and restore human dignity to residents.

Overall, the system is only as good as its weakest link. Residents need more than better crossings - they need better access to, from, and beyond these crossings. BikeWalkKC recognizes the hurdles to implementing our recommendations, but we firmly believe that it is the right thing to do.
4. **In Conclusion**

We are thankful to MoDOT and its consultants for their willingness to participate in this audit so late in their project’s timeline. In the future, we hope that walk audits are incorporated at the beginning of the process so that future projects can fully benefit from the on-the-ground conditions and lived experiences of residents, neighborhood leaders, and other community stakeholders regardless of their preferred mode of transportation.

We highly encourage that walk audits and other pedestrian-focused evaluation activities be incorporated as a standard practice for MoDOT, especially where its facilities intersect and interact with local street grids. MoDOT’s *Engineering Policy Guide* may be a good starting point to develop policies and procedures that give its engineers and consultants clear direction for future projects.

Walk audits and similar activities also provide opportunities for new and creative ways to engage the community, especially with the neighborhoods that are located closest to, and most impacted by, the facility. Getting residents, stakeholders, consultants, and MoDOT staff together in person to experience the infrastructure firsthand would be a powerful way for MoDOT to collect highly valuable qualitative data and community input. It would also provide MoDOT with new tools and opportunities for communicating with the public about its process, constraints, and trade-offs. At the end of the day, this type of engagement and data collection can help deliver stronger projects that better balance the needs of all users.

**Prepared by BikeWalkKC**

*Redefining our streets as places for people to build a culture of active living.*

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