

# Dodge Street Sidewalk Assessment

Compiled by Mode Shift Omaha Walkability Team

January 2021



Anecdotal evidence suggests people do not enjoy using sidewalks on Dodge Street in Omaha because they are unsafe and unfriendly. Mode Shift Omaha explored the validity of this perception. Volunteers used a checklist-type assessment tool and examined blocks from 10th Street to Westroads Mall. Findings include intimidating traffic, inconsistent conditions, crumbling infrastructure, obstructions to mobility, lack of maintenance, lack of clear consistent pedestrian path, inadequate crossings, poor timing on lights, and poor access for individuals with varying disabilities. Some stretches are designed well and we recommend building on their examples by implementing recommendations that require consistency, funding, and maintenance.

One reason Mode Shift chose to study the Downtown - Westroads section of Dodge Street is the implementation of the new ORBT Bus Rapid Transit service in November 2020 and the discontinuance of the Route 2 Dodge St. local bus service. Route 2 bus stops averaged about 1/8-mile apart; ORBT stops are spaced an average of 1/2-mile apart. The adjacent 49th St. and 62nd St. stops are over a mile apart. Thus many Dodge St. transit customers must walk farther to their nearest ORBT stop, often using sidewalks along Dodge St.

### **Methodology**

The Mode Shift Omaha Walkability Team, which includes a member who interns with the UNMC Munroe-Meyer Institute, assessed sidewalk conditions on Dodge Street, Omaha's primary east-west artery. Members used a checklist-type assessment tool adapted from the National Highway Safety Association and informed by advocacy efforts of Mark Fenton (See Appendix A and B). Blocks from 10th Street to Westroads Mall were sampled. Ten segments ranging from two to nine blocks were assessed for a total of 25 blocks and their intersections out of approximately 100 blocks of Dodge Street from 10th Street to Westroads Mall. Teams completed the checklist, took photographs, filmed segments, interviewed pedestrians passing by, and spoke with business owners and managers. The teams were diverse in terms of abilities, ages and type of mobility, and this range of experience provided insights that might have otherwise gone unnoticed. After completing the assessments, the teams met via Zoom to discuss their experiences.

# Findings (Photos Document Findings via Google in Appendix C)

## **Traffic Is Intimidating**

Without setbacks or with inadequate setbacks (less than 6-10 feet), many sections of Dodge Street are intimidating to pedestrians. Traffic moves between 40 and 45 mph in 35 mph zones. Traffic becomes even more intimidating when traveling with your back to traffic, walking in groups of people including small children, having to pass other pedestrians, and even being forced out into the street by closed sidewalks and construction. In many stretches, there are no buffer zones to protect from vehicular traffic and vehicle overhang, such as mirrors. This is especially dangerous in winter when pedestrians are faced with sidewalks covered with snow, ice and debris just inches from speeding traffic.

## **Conditions Are Inconsistent**

While some of the sections of the Dodge Street sidewalk corridor are rated pleasant, the overall conditions are so inconsistent that the inconsistency is in itself a danger. Within one block you can have adequate conditions but then be forced too close to heavy traffic in front of the next business whose sidewalk is different or even nonexistent as in the case in front of Wendy's on 43rd and Dodge Street. Additionally, the conditions vary from block to block, with a highly-rated block right next to a lowly-rated block. For example, just west of 44th Street on the south side of Dodge there is the rebuilt King Kong restaurant and a new hotel immediately west that fronts on the street to the south. These new developments included new 7-foot-wide sidewalks with a setback from the street that ranged from 7 to 8 feet compared to nearby sidewalks only 3 to 4 feet wide with no setback. The wide setback is important not only to provide a safe distance between pedestrians and motor vehicle traffic, but as a place to hold plowed snow in the winter.

## **Obstructions Are Innumerable**

Obstructions of the sidewalk make planning a safe route difficult. Obstructions range from electric poles in the middle of the sidewalk, construction signs directing drivers, raised manhole covers, parked cars, permanently placed advertisements and multiple 90 gallon trash cans. We couldn't possibly identify all the obstructions, but offer descriptions of several examples we experienced.

At 42nd and Dodge surveyors found debris on the sidewalk, materials that flew out of the back of people's pickups, as well as gravel and debris from stone walls. The team was forced to

constantly maneuver around construction signs that were placed on the sidewalk to alert drivers of something, and all the signs had tipped over. It is a hilly section and the sidewalk slopes were a problem. Surveyors encountered a raised electrical box and a lip at the bottom of a slope capable of causing a wheelchair to tip. Throughout the study surveyors found construction and a lack of detours created difficult conditions. We recognize those may be temporary obstacles, but they continue to cause difficulties. Even in places where the sidewalk conditions were rated generally very high, obstructions abound. Consider the area of 62nd and Dodge streets. On the south side of Dodge Street from the 62nd Street Sidewalk to the corner west of the ORBT station has a sharp turn with no ramp; the ramp has sand and debris (apparently from water flow). The entire sidewalk from ORBT Station at 62 Street should be replaced. There was debris, exposed wires, trash, large cracks and uneven sidewalk in front of Eppley Administration Building and Rosken at UNO (about 61st Street) facing east. Between the parking lot at Rosken and the sidewalk there are large rocks that are tumbling onto the sidewalk. Sidewalk to the traffic signal narrows to 36" with weeds and cracks.

Sidewalks are often cracked, crumbling, too sloped, or simply missing wide sections. Take for example the area of 76th and Dodge, where entire sections of the sidewalk have been destroyed by semi trucks rolling over the sidewalk. The damage limits the pedestrian use of the sidewalks, making it difficult to pass others, and that is especially dangerous in areas without setbacks or with inadequate setbacks. The opening to get to the parking lot between Hobby Lobby and Burger King is cracked and uneven.

### **Curb Cuts and Tactile Strips Need Replacements or Improvements**

Curb cuts were found to be problematic. Many of them were too steep for wheelchair users. For example, the intersection on the southeast corner of 78th and Dodge has a steep curb cut, and the curb cut to enter the Stanton Optical parking lot does not have a smooth transition to the street. Tactile strips were often found in disrepair with corners torn up, domes worn down, or completely missing. For example, there is no tactile pattern at the curb cut crossing at University Drive East heading east along Dodge Street. Most problematic is when the domes are lined up facing the wrong direction. Domes should line up square with the crossing. Brand new tactile strips and curb cuts are laid in ways that direct a visually impaired person relying on environmental cues to navigate into the middle of intersections or into parking lots. Examples of these can be found at the intersection near the newly built ORBT Station at Westroads Mall.

### **Daily Maintenance**

The sidewalks are littered with mud, sand, crumbling cement, and trash. While adjacent landowners are required to maintain the sidewalk and keep it in working order, few appear to be engaged in this kind of daily maintenance to keep the sidewalk in good working order. Some businesses plow their parking lot snow onto adjacent sidewalks.

### **Lack of Clear, Consistent Path**

There are many places that lack a clearly defined path.

Oftentimes parking spaces are substituted for a defined path, but these conditions create confusion for pedestrians and drivers alike. One example of this is at the Southeast corner of 50th and Dodge streets. There is no sidewalk or curb cut going southbound for half a block. The southside of Dodge Street is problematic because while there are curb cuts it is really a parking lot not a sidewalk.

All along the route crosswalks are either unmarked or are marked poorly. Without a clear expectation of where pedestrians are crossing, drivers and pedestrians become confused and pushed out into intersections by drivers who don't know exactly where to stop.

### **Crossing Opportunities are Inadequate, Timing On Lights is Poor, and Bus Platforms Block Through Pedestrian Traffic**

It is difficult to cross Dodge Street as a pedestrian or wheelchair user. In one section, pedestrians go six blocks without an opportunity to cross at a traffic light. It would be helpful if there was a way across Dodge between 78th and 84th streets as the current situation incentivizes people to dart across Dodge in fast and wide areas. Additionally, the time allowed for many crossings is only adequate for the most spry of pedestrians. This is the case between 42nd and 46th on Dodge Street where surveyors timed the lights at 22 seconds to cross five lanes of traffic.

There are several of the ORBT stations that require through sidewalk traffic to use the station platform which could be blocked by passengers waiting for, getting on or off buses. A good example is the ORBT stop located on the northwest corner of 72nd & Dodge. Ideally, a sidewalk for through traffic should pass behind the station as was done at the westbound 84th St. Station.

### **Sidewalks Are Abandoned**

Many sidewalks are uncared for with run-off, pooling water, debris left behind from landscaping, trash, and construction debris present. Although it may seem that only abandoned properties have abandoned sidewalks, this is not the case. There are places that are the responsibility of the city (e.g., the Dodge Street bridge over Saddle Creek) as well as many businesses or property owners who do not maintain their sidewalks.

### **Access Is Denied For Persons With Disabilities**

The access to sidewalks and crossings for persons with disabilities is subpar at best. Many examples are described throughout the report and these problems contribute to making access to Dodge Street and its intersections scary and dangerous. Additionally, the prevalence of poles in the middle of sidewalks, the narrowness of the sidewalks, the lack of setbacks, the use of inappropriate setbacks, the heavy traffic, and the poor sidewalk conditions make navigating Dodge Street sidewalks harrowing for many, but especially for those with disabilities. A member of our team and a Munroe Meyer Institute intern described a situation in which a person in a wheelchair had to wait six hours for the police to come help them navigate an obstacle in the sidewalk. Once into a situation you may not be able to get out. Currently the city considers the landowner responsible but creating a citywide snare for the disabled amounts to a violation of the spirit of non discrimination in public accommodations a major component of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

42 U.S.C. §2000a (a) All persons shall be entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, and accommodations of any place of public accommodation, as defined in this section, without discrimination on the ground of race, color, religion, or national origin.

### **Some Stretches Are Designed Well**

The south side of Dodge Street just east of 84th Street is pedestrian friendly. Trees were planted between the pedestrian and the street, the sidewalks are wide and smooth and there is landscaping to make it more pleasant. The new sidewalk near King Kong at 44th and Dodge is another excellent example of how sidewalks should be: 7-foot wide pavement and 7- to 8-foot setback from the street with vegetation. Another great location is the northwest corner of 50th Street, where the sidewalk widens and businesses engage with pedestrians. Most notably, there is plenty of room between parking areas and the designated sidewalk, so pedestrians are not endangered by drivers trying to park.

## **Recommendations**

1. Change Omaha municipal codes to define sidewalks as major modes of transportation and fund their care and maintenance to ensure equal access to economic opportunity for all residents.
  - a. Change the way sidewalks are funded and cared for so that a consistent vision and continuous maintenance can be established. This provides for sidewalk maintenance even when residents or property owners are absent or negligent. Construction and maintenance of sidewalks becomes the responsibility of the

City, not adjacent landowners. The City must allocate sufficient resources for infrastructure and maintenance including a liaison to create quality contiguous pedestrian infrastructure (see Appendix D).

- b. The city becomes responsible for cleaning the sidewalks and maintaining the right of way clear of snow, sand, mud, overgrown landscape throughout the city.
  - c. Require minimum setbacks and planting strips. Setbacks are critical for protecting pedestrians from heavy traffic including large trucks and buses. Setbacks with landscaping delineate the sidewalk from the street as well as protect pedestrians from the splash zone and create a place for plowed snow from the street, absorb water, and beautify the neighborhood. Every part of Dodge Street and eventually every sidewalk should have one.
  - d. Do not allow any entity to block access to 36” of sidewalk as part of the right of way.
2. Create a social and capital investment campaign to convert the Dodge Street corridor into a pedestrian and biking friendly environment. Prioritize the Dodge Street corridor to ensure the success of ORBT and influence the greatest number of people. Build out and connect the infrastructure from there to the rest of the city.
    - a. Collaborate with neighborhood associations, seek grants, engage philanthropists, City officials, Chamber of Commerce, residents and property owners to develop a pedestrian friendly economic corridor on Dodge Street.
    - b. Ask the Omaha Chamber of Commerce to commission a study of the Dodge Street Corridor landowners asking about their sidewalks and the obstacles they face in maintaining them, and then assist the Chamber and City Council in creating incentives and policies that improve conditions.
    - c. Create an educational campaign based on research that shows the more walkable the neighborhood the more money people spend.
  3. \$30 million has been invested in launching the new ORBT bus service on the Dodge Street Corridor. Omaha Metro Transit and the City need to take responsibility for its success by working together to maintain good pedestrian access to ORBT stations.
  4. Capitalize on ORBT to continue improving multi-modal transportation, such as implementing road diets, increasing pedestrian and bicycling traffic, efforts that offer an economical boost to areas such as 50th and Dodge that could be turned into slow-paced “small towns” within the city. Stop expanding Dodge Street for cars and start looking for ways to increase multimodal transportation to increase economic growth and differentiate Omaha from the rest of the Great Plains.
  5. Change the materials used to create sidewalks to improve the value of the area. There are options for constructing sidewalks other than concrete. For example, a flagstone path can last a hundred years, while sidewalks begin to crumble immediately and have to be replaced within twenty years. While this has the potential to be done poorly, it can also be

done well. Initially more expensive, it is more affordable overtime. For an example of an accessible Flagstone project, view the Martin Luther King Jr. National Memorial. Flagstone and other materials should be researched and piloted in Omaha (see Appendix E).

6. As improved conditions increase need, add a bus line stopping every  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile to improve accessibility.
7. Adopt sidewalks and right of ways as part of a micro city park system. Insist on beautification and expansion of small parks with shade, shelter, benches, and public restrooms as part of a pedestrian friendly corridor along Dodge Street this will ensure economic growth.

## Conclusions

Omaha is the heart of the silicon prairie, a center for intellectual and medical advancement for the entire Great Plains. Imagine a new city that embraces a walkable, low-stress environment accessible to all creating both a high quality of life and economic growth. Walkability equals economic success. Redirect resources toward building pedestrian and biking infrastructure. Ensure that the infrastructure is available to everyone, and reimagine an urban space that is a 15-minute walk/bike to work and play. The city of the future is mobile, clean, quiet and brimming with the opportunity to meet each other as passersby interwoven by relationships and economic activity for everyone.

## More Information

[How '15-minute cities' will change the way we socialise](#)

[Mark Fenton: Public Health Planning and Transportation Consultant - Walk. Bike. Save Yourself. Save the World.](#)

[NHTSA | National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#)

[Walkable City Rules by Jeff Speck](#)

[New 'Pedestrian Pound' Report Shows Economic Benefits of Walking for High Streets \(PDF\) Economic Value of Walkability](#)

[How treating pedestrians better will boost the economy](#)

[The Economic Benefits of Sustainable Streets](#)

[Our Pathway Materials are Sustainable & Attractive](#)

[Natural stone creates iconic public spaces - Construction Specifier](#)

[Three parts of Martin Luther King Jr. National Memorial were hewn from one stone](#)

[14 Oct Designing Outdoor Walkways for Mobility Issues](#)

[Understanding Tactile Paving at Pedestrian Crossings](#)

**Appendix A: Assessment Tool**

**Assessing Omaha Sidewalks**

Thank you for sharing your impressions and stories about using Omaha sidewalks. Please tell us where you were, rate your experience on a scale of 1 to 10, and use the checklist to identify problem areas and examples of good design. Please use the back side of this sheet to add comments, questions, ideas and recommendations.

Also, tell us about yourself, especially if you'd like to get more involved in advocating for pedestrian safety. Please use the back to describe specific needs you might have or be aware of for others, such as wheelchair accessibility, ensuring the safety of visually impaired pedestrians and the like.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Route/blocks covered: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of day: \_\_\_\_\_ Weather conditions: \_\_\_\_\_

Please rate your walk on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is dangerous/very unpleasant and 10 is safe, pleasant and enjoyable.

Walkability score: \_\_\_\_\_

Please check all that apply and share your impressions, ideas and recommendations on the back.

**Problem areas:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Vehicle traffic
- \_\_\_\_\_ Vehicle traffic too fast, truck traffic
- \_\_\_\_\_ Low curbs
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lack of setback
- \_\_\_\_\_ Narrow sidewalk, condition of sidewalk
- \_\_\_\_\_ construction blocking path

**Good design elements:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Adequate setback
- \_\_\_\_\_ Plantings of trees and flowers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mix of business and residential properties
- \_\_\_\_\_ Clear of litter/debris

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| _____ obstructions, such as poles, signs, plants                     | _____ Walk signals automatic   |
| _____ parked cars blocking path                                      | _____ Light vehicle traffic  |
| _____ lack of crosswalk signal                                       | _____ Narrow vehicle lanes   |
| _____ lack of marked/painted crosswalk devices                       | _____ Effective traffic calming (speed bumps, roundabouts, pushouts) |
| _____ sidewalk   | _____ sidewalk traffic observed                                      |
| _____ walk signal too brief  | _____ Interesting/varied architecture                                |
| _____ visibility limitations (construction, overgrown plants, signs) | _____ Seating/patio areas  |
| _____ lack of curb cuts, ramps or tactile panels                     | _____ Access to public transit                                       |
| _____ litter/debris, trash receptacle available                      | _____ Access to BCycle   |
| _____ other: _____   | _____ Access to Scooters   |

Please use this space to describe your experience and make notes of particular problems or good design elements you noticed. Also, please include information about concerns related to accessibility, such as wheelchair/powerchair accessibility or including safety measures for visually impaired users.

---



---



---



---

This Mode Shift Omaha Walkability assessment has been adapted from National Highway Safety Association and informed by advocacy efforts by Mark Fenton ([markfenton.com](http://markfenton.com))

## **Appendix B: Protocol**

### Walkability Assessment Protocol

Teams of 2-3 people each will choose a 1 block segment of Dodge Street to document the sidewalk conditions. Each team will complete a Walkability Assessment and take photographs. Please be aware of your surroundings at all times. It is extremely dangerous to be distracted from traffic while walking on Dodge Street.

Assignment example: Move westbound Dodge Street at 13th Street to 14th Street cross to eastbound side of Dodge, move eastbound Dodge Street 14th Street to 13th Street and cross back to westbound side. Please note this is an illustration, not an instruction. When choosing your route be sure to choose a place to work and cross safely.

Tools Needed: A clipboard and pencils, the assessment, a camera preferably linked to a google account making it easier to fully document and share the photos, a tape measure, a stop watch or phone with stopwatch app.

1. Begin on the northeast side of the intersection assigned. Walk the route and make notes of areas to report -- blockages, sidewalk damage or other hazards, or examples of well designed clear paths. Each team should make a complete square.
2. Please feel free to take notes on your route if you need more room to document your observations.
3. When finished you can take photos of your assessment and notes and submit to
4. Submit your photos of the conditions to
5. Next month the teams will reconvene for a research focus group discussing the major issues facing the people of Omaha as it pertains to their sidewalks. September 9th 6:30 p.m. This session will be recorded and if you give us permission anything you say may be used as part of a sidewalk promotional campaign.

Thank you for your help, be safe, and we look forward to learning from your work!

## Appendix C: Photos Documenting Sidewalk Conditions

### [Dodge Street Sidewalk Photos Document Conditions](#)

## Appendix D: Sustainable and Equitable Funding for Pedestrian Infrastructure Maintenance

The organization finds sidewalks in poor neighborhoods are often in worse condition than those in more wealthy neighborhoods and their recommendations are as follows.

**Recommendation:** Cities take responsibility for maintaining sidewalks, ramps, and curb cuts.

**Definitions:** Curb cut is the terminology for the paved driveway leading from the street, passing across the sidewalk, providing access to the home or business. A ramp is that common sidewalk feature at many intersections connecting the sidewalk and the street, usually with tactile surfaces to warn sight-impaired pedestrians.

**ADA Standards for Sidewalks: Sidewalk width** requirements exist to make sure sidewalks are accessible for use by wheelchair-bound individuals. The minimum width for an ADA-compliant sidewalk is 36 inches (3 feet), though sidewalks can be constructed wider than this. If sidewalks are less than 60 inches (5 feet) across, passing spaces must be constructed at set intervals. These passing spaces must measure at least 60 inches on all sides, and must be located at least every 200 feet. **Sidewalk gradient** should not exceed 1:20 (5%) if physically possible. The side-slope of the sidewalk should not exceed 1:50 (2%).

**Surface textures** are important to ensure disabled individuals with mobility devices can safely traverse the sidewalk. The texture of a sidewalk must be firm, stable and slip-resistant. Care should be taken to ensure any concrete finishing meets these requirements. Additionally, any grates inset into the sidewalk must comply; to ensure that mobility devices do not get stuck, any openings in the grate can be no larger than ½ inch across.

**Curb ramps** are required wherever a sidewalk crosses a curb. This is particularly important at street intersections, where individuals will interact with traffic. These ramps must have a slope of less than 1:12 (8.3%), must be at least 36 inches wide and must contain a detectable warning device with a raised dome surface and contrasting color (tactile surface). Ramps must not project into the street, and

where there is a marked crosswalk, the ramp must be contained entirely in the width of the crosswalk.

**Sidewalks may be located near obstructions**, such as telephone poles, traffic signal cabinets or other utilities and infrastructure. Where such obstructions exist, the sidewalk must be constructed to allow the minimum width requirement of 36 inches between the edge of an obstruction and the edge of the sidewalk. In some cases, if a sidewalk cannot be constructed to comply with this guideline, the obstruction may need to be removed or relocated.

#### **Appendix D: How To Mitigate Problems for Mobility Devices When Using Flagstone:**

First, ensure the pavers are laid on a firm, stable foundation. This will reduce the risk of pavers coming loose or tilting down the road. Second, make sure the pavers are laid close together. Don't leave large gaps in between where someone could catch a toe. Third, spread dry polymeric sand between the pavers. Wet it down and let it set. Not only will this reduce the amount of weeds that can spring up, but it fills the gaps. Finally, you can add edging to the side of the walkway. This can help keep the pavers from sliding off to the side.

[14 Oct Designing Outdoor Walkways for Mobility Issues](#)