Transportation Demand Management

Grand Rapid’s Michigan Street Corridor Existing Conditions

2013

Transportation Reform Demonstration Project:
Creating jobs and economic development in Michigan by removing barriers to coordinated federal, state and local public transportation investment and management
In collaboration with the City of Grand Rapids, Michigan Department of Transportation, Michigan Economic Development Corporation and Michigan State Housing Development Authority.

Purpose

This existing conditions report provides an overview of studies, the systems in place along Michigan Street, efforts of stakeholders to manage their internal transportation demand, and issues and opportunities facing the corridor today. It is a component of a collaboration between Governor Snyder’s Sense of Place Council and the six regions of the state that have received Sustainable Communities Challenge Grants or are working on regional revitalization initiatives. These existing conditions are a starting point for dialogue in developing an effective and implementable strategy for managing transportation demand to support and enable the economic development and livability goals of the communities.
Context Overview

Downtown Grand Rapids has seen a resurgence somewhat unique in the state. The past two decades have been tough for Michigan. The national recession hit the state earlier, longer and deeper than most – at its height, it was estimated the state lost one family every 12 minutes.

While every city in the state saw some level of economic contraction, Grand Rapids still saw significant growth along the “Medical Mile” – a half mile stretch of Michigan Street NE extending from College to Division Avenues. Major health institutions have grown and risen on “The Hill” including Spectrum Health and Butterworth Hospital and the facilities of Michigan State University (MSU) and Grand Valley State University (GVSU). Scarcely a block away is Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) and a mile west, across the river, is the major urban campus of GVSU – an institution that just two decades ago was a college in a corn field, now a prominent university in the state. Just to the southwest, the historic (and modern) downtown continues to grow and expand as a major civic, cultural, and employment destination while neighborhoods north and south emerge as some of the most attractive communities in the state.

Michigan Street is one of several major east-west thoroughfares through Grand Rapids. The arterial parallels I-196 and provides access to some of the largest employers in Western Michigan. East of the bridge (where it becomes Bridge Street) to College Avenue, Michigan Street is a very hard working four- (sometimes five-) lane multimodal corridor through an intensely urban segment. East of College Avenue, the street gives way to lower scale horizontally mixed development patterns – some with attractive sidewalks buffered from traffic with landscaped strips, often with narrow sidewalks barely distinguishable among the multiple curbcuts and lacking any buffer from the auto traffic. Barely a half a mile on, at Eastern Avenue, the glassy modern towers on The Hill can almost be seen from the parking lots of the strip retail, gas stations and car repair shops lining the corridor -- reminders of the economic challenges the state, and city, continue to face and the opportunities for restoration still ahead. Just a mile east of the intensity of the Medical Mile, The Rapid transit service departs the corridor for destinations north (Route 13) and south (Route 19).

The only constant is change. Development and new investment are beneficial changes, but like any adolescent after a growth spurt, it can also be uncomfortable adapting to a new self. On the city-wide level, Grand Rapids has instituted a number of policies to manage growth to promote and sustain a multimodal city. The master plan encourages compact, mixed-use development, adds requirements for sidewalks and bicycle parking to the zoning ordinance, and diversifies the transit system with the exciting introduction of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT).
“You aren’t in traffic, you are traffic!” is a true but worthless observation to commuters without efficient, effective, and affordable transportation alternatives. Major institutions and employers along Michigan Street have instituted some transportation demand management (TDM) measures. However, these TDM practices are independent and isolated from one another, limited in scope and effect, and lack consistent measurement and evaluation.

Existing Studies and Efforts

A number of studies have been conducted or are currently being conducted specifically along Michigan Street and in Grand Rapids in general.

Michigan Street Corridor Plan

The Michigan Street Corridor Plan is a holistic planning effort linking transportation, land use, environment and housing to achieve a unified vision and sustainable future for the corridor and surrounding area. Transportation concepts to expand travel alternatives and relieve congestion include bicycle boulevards, two-way conversions, and transit gateway park and ride lots are potential strategies to enhance travel alternatives for downtown-bound employees and congestion relief.
**Michigan Street Project**

This transportation modeling program report ranges in scale from big picture moving regional traffic to local street focus of refining future land uses. Modeling the trip reduction includes enhancements of adding streets, restricting turns, and distinct sub-zones within the Michigan Street Project. The study has calculated alternative plans for new ramp configurations, additional housing in the downtown and AM and PM traffic affects on the educational and medical institutions.

**Figure 3   Michigan Street and Network Alternatives**

![Michigan Street Alternatives](source)

**Figure 4   Silver Line Alignment**

![Silver Line Alignment](source)
Grand Rapids received a federal New Starts grant to implement north-south bus rapid transit (BRT) along Division Avenue from the southern Grand Rapids region community of Wyoming/Kentwood into downtown. The BRT links St. Mary’s campus to the Medical Mile at its western edge before looping back south again through the civic core to the main transit terminal, Rapid Central Station (Figure 4).

Construction of the stations and infrastructure is slated to begin spring 2013, with operations beginning in 2014.

The 9.6 mile Silver Line BRT features pre-pay fares, level boarding, real-time arrival information, and very high frequency. Eighteen stations along the corridor will be served by 33 independent platforms to minimize boarding time.

The buses will have dedicated lanes during weekday peaks as well as signal priority. Stakeholders interviewed reported that at present there are no designs nor plans for park and ride lots associated with the Silver Line project.

**Existing Travel Conditions along Michigan Street**

**Automobile Traffic**

Traffic along Michigan Street is congested at peak hours. The average daily traffic (ADT) along the corridor range from 19,000 vehicles per day crossing the Grand River to a high of just under 30,000 at the DeVoss Children’s Hospital to less than 14,000 at Lafayette Street back up to 21,000 at College Avenue. The past 15 years have seen wide variation in traffic levels on Michigan Street (Figure 5). The swings reflect the changing economic conditions – both up and down – over that and the significant disruption of the “Fix on I-196” that closed the highway for 8 months in 2010. While the corridor as a while

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TRANSPORTATION DEMAND MANAGEMENT
Michigan Street Corridor Existing Conditions

generally operates satisfactorily, some intersections, experience a level of service (LOS) as low as F at peak commuting hours.

Figure 5    Michigan Street Traffic Trends

Source: Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (GVMC)

During reconstruction of I-196, Michigan Street served as the local alternative route for interstate traffic. I-196 typically carries 78,000 vehicles per day, and during construction, Michigan Street saw ADTs of close to 40,000. The City’s engineering department instituted several changes to Michigan Street to accommodate the traffic, including adjusting signal times, adjusting striping, and removing on-street parking demonstrating the effectiveness of coordinated management solutions.

Parking

A large number of parking facilities – surface lots as well as above and underground ramps, and free and metered on-street parking – are available along Michigan Street and the greater corridor area (Figure 6). Despite some staggering of shift times for employees along the street, especially at Spectrum Health, parking remains a dominating issue for all stakeholders and their affiliates. The type, location, and price of parking add to traffic volumes:

- All of Spectrum’s parking facilities are located east of the Spectrum campus; therefore, all staff driving to work from the north, south, or west drive past their work site to park, then take the shuttle back to Spectrum.
- Students at GRCC queue to park at ramps closest to campus, even when advised by parking attendants that DASH lots are more available.
- GVSU faculty and staff park anywhere for free, and students receive a number of free day passes during the year, regardless of the convenience of the Route 50 bus routes or the reality of downtown real estate markets and values.

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The downtown has a number of major parking facilities and all city-owned/operated lots have automated payment systems. Despite this, the perception persists that Michigan Street, and indeed the whole of the downtown, is under-parked.

Currently, employees, students, and other affiliates of many institutions utilize peripheral streets in residential neighborhoods for parking. Grand Rapids does not generally (at present) have a residential permit system. The city has initiated its first residential pilot project in one adjacent neighborhood, Belknap in just the past few weeks. The Belknap neighborhood, directly across I-196 from Michigan Street, has consistently complained of employee parking intrusions.

**City of Grand Rapids Parking Facilities**
The City of Grand Rapids Parking Authority is responsible for all on-street meters and for enforcing parking regulations. The Authority owns and/or operates over 8,600 parking spaces in and around the downtown, including several large commuter lots.

The Parking Authority is an enterprise fund that covers all costs of operating and maintenance from revenue collected. For lots owned by the Downtown Development Authority (DDA), but operated by the Parking Authority, 12% of revenue is returned to the DDA.

The Parking Authority contracts with The Rapid to operate the Downtown Area Shuttle (DASH) to provide “last mile” connections for commuters that utilize outlying park and ride lots (Figure 7). The shuttle is free for anyone parking in city-owned lots and operates between 7:30AM and 5:00PM on weekdays. The Authority provides alternative transportation arrangements to ensure that DASH users can safety get back to their vehicles after the bus stops running.

Bicycle lockers are offered for $4.00 per month at three locations while bicycle parking is provided in all ramps.

Free and reserved spaces for Rapid Van Pool parking are set aside in four locations accommodating a total of 11 vehicles.

**Transit**

Several transit services operate along Michigan Street. The Interurban Transit Partnership (known as The Rapid) is the primary transit provider for the region. The Partnership includes the six municipalities of East Grand Rapids, Grandville, Grand Rapids, Kentwood, Wyoming, and Walker. Primary services include the traditional public transit service of The Rapid, park and ride service contracted by the parking authority known as DASH service, and independently contracted employer shuttle service.

**The Rapid**

In 2012, The Rapid ridership exceeded 11.9 million. The Rapid’s total operating budget in 2010 was $35.6 million. A single ride is $1.50, and an unlimited monthly pass is $40.
Five routes operate along Michigan Street:

- Route 11 Plainfield - operates primarily north-south, but runs along Michigan Street between Monroe Avenue and Lafayette Street, continuing north through Creston
- Route 13 Michigan/Fuller - one of the longest bus routes along Michigan Street, operating between Ottawa Avenue and Fuller Avenue, continuing north to 3 Mile and the veterans facility
- Route 14 East Fulton - operates primarily parallel to Michigan Street on Fulton Street, but runs along Michigan between Plymouth Avenue and Lakeside Drive
- Route 19 Michigan-Fuller South - one of the longest bus routes along Michigan Street, operates between Monroe Avenue to Fuller Avenue, continuing south through East Hills, Eastown, and Baxter to Madison Area
- Route 51 GVSU Health Sciences/West DASH Lot (aka DASH to the Hill) - operates between the GVSU lot and Health Sciences building, along Michigan Street between Highway 131 and Lafayette Avenue

The Rapid has instituted a number of improvements and special programs, including Next Bus technology and bike racks on all buses.

**Monroe North Business Association Contract**

The Rapid created a shuttle service for the Monroe North Business Association in December 2012. The service uses the smaller DASH vehicles to serve the Monroe North neighborhood where a number of students and downtown employees live. The route serves the DASH North lot, which is a smaller lot than those in the south or west. The service is a partnership between The Rapid, the DDA, and the City’s parking authority; service is funded through the Monroe North TIFA.

**Ridesharing and Vanpools**

The Rapid offers a vanpool service through employers called RapidVan for groups of no fewer than four individuals. The Rapid provides the van, maintenance, fuel, and insurance, as well as roadside assistance. Individuals supply the driver and fees. Costs vary between $100-$200 per month per person.

Ridesharing is also offered through Western Michigan Rideshare for individuals looking to carpool.

**Bicycle Facilities**

Bike volumes are generally low along Michigan Street. While Western Michigan has an organized and avid bicycling community, the general absence of cyclists on the corridor is likely due to the high speed and high volume automobile traffic. A bi-directional cycle track
is planned for Lyon Street – a westbound street to the south – which provides a safer and more comfortable route for the “interested but cautious” cycling market.

The City has ramped up its efforts to become a more bike-friendly community and is continuing to add tens of miles of bike facilities to its network each year. The City is in the process of completing a bicycle master plan.

Institutions of higher education along Michigan Street provide bicycle racks for students, and at least one employer has on-site bicycle amenities for cyclists such as bike lockers and showers.

**Pedestrian Facilities**

The pedestrian experience along Michigan Street is compromised by high automobile volumes and speeds and limited sensitivity to design with many sidewalks lacking much, if any, buffer from traffic. The corridor is not the pedestrian friendly street it once was when small neighborhood retail lined the street providing a consistent and frequently animated streetwall. While the new developments provide new economic vitality to the area, they also represent more auto-oriented buildings and site design. A number of surface parking lots occupy space once held by commercial buildings. The existing zoning ordinance requires sidewalks to be included in development, and these sidewalks must reach the building front. However, many new buildings are set back behind parking lots, forcing pedestrians to traverse large and intimidating lots to access their destination.

Maintenance of pedestrian infrastructure along the corridor is a concern. Sidewalks are in disrepair, especially on the lower end of the street, and some are too narrow for comfortable or accessible use. In the winter, sidewalks become impassable as snow and ice create hazardous conditions.

Some intersections lack crosswalks completely while several lack pedestrian walk signals. The corridor is a mix of pedestrian actuated and automatic signals further confusing legibility of the corridor to the average traveler. Buttons are hard to find or out-of-reach, especially for pedestrians who are visually impaired, and sidewalk curb ramps are lacking making the corridor a challenge for individuals using strollers or mobility devices.

**Employer-Based Transportation Programs**

The major institutions along Michigan Street and extending to the south (St. Mary’s Health Center and St. Mary’s Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital) represent over 20,000 downtown workers and 22,500 students. U3 Ventures has estimated that of these, only roughly 3.5% live within the Michigan Street Corridor area meaning that the vast majority of the workforce and student population must commute from more distant areas.
While there are cultural, historical, infrastructure and service challenges, several institutions along Michigan Street have some early forms of TDM in place.

**Spectrum Health**

Spectrum Health is the largest employer in Western Michigan, with a total of 19,000 employees, approximately one-third of which work in the Michigan Street corridor. The complex of four hospitals draws a huge volume of patients and visitors to the corridor.

Shift times at Spectrum are slightly different from the typical morning and evening rush hour peaks of most other employers along Michigan Street. Shifts are from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM which inherently assist in promoting non-peak hour travel.

**Parking and Shuttles**

Spectrum has three off-site parking facilities and operates free shuttles to and from the facilities for staff that park there. Sites are shown in the figure below and include:

- The closest is .25 miles to the main Spectrum Campus. About 300-325 staff park there.
- The next is just under 2 miles away. About 200 staff park there.
- The furthest is 2 miles away. About 600 staff park there.

![Figure 8 Spectrum Health Parking Facilities](image-url)

Spectrum operates three shuttles to these lots and one cross-campus shuttle to connect the Michigan Street hospital site to the Mary Free Bed location two miles away. At peak times, there are seven 25-passenger buses on the road for the largest parking lot. Spectrum spends about $70,000 per month for the shuttles, not including the lease payments for one of the lots. As mentioned, all off-site parking is to the
east of the Spectrum campus, so anyone traveling from the west, north, or south, has to drive by the campus, board a shuttle, then ride back to get to work.

The shuttles are popular but do not operate at full capacity. Spectrum would like to create schedules in order to maximize use of the shuttles.

**Contract with The Rapid**
Spectrum contracts with The Rapid to provide free rides to its employees. Employees are given a pass, which can be used on any route in the system. The Rapid tracks the number of rides, and Spectrum pays $0.95 per ride on a monthly basis, typically about $4,000 each month.

In October 2012, 276 different Spectrum employees used The Rapid. Ridership tends to fluctuate with the cost of fuel.

**Bicycle Amenities**
Spectrum provides a shower facility for cyclists and is currently moving it to a more convenient location for bike commuters. They are also adding more bike lockers and bike parking.

**Future Initiatives**
Spectrum is interested in influencing its employees to change their travel behaviors and is considering an incentive program. The company would provide a set amount of funding in paychecks. Employees could use this money to offset some commuting costs. Spectrum would take out more for parking, less for carpooling, and the least for walking and cycling.

Beyond this short term measure, Spectrum’s property managers are looking for parking lot space along existing Rapid bus routes to ensure employees have transit options for getting to work.

**Grand Valley State University**

Grand Valley State University has a main campus in Allendale, about 13 miles from Grand Rapids, and a downtown Grand Rapids campus. They contract with The Rapid to provide service between campuses to their students and offer a few other transportation options. Grand Valley is perceived as a local leader in promoting alternative transportation modes through its shuttle contract and its prioritization of pedestrians on campus.

**Contract with The Rapid**
GVSU has had a contract with The Rapid for 10 years, and the contract is set to be renewed this year. GVSU has four dedicated routes serving only its affiliates:

- Route 51 GVSU Health Sciences (aka DASH to the Hill)
- Route 37 North Campus Express
- Route 48 South Campus Express
- Route 50 GVSU Connector
GVSU pays The Rapid $55.40 per hour per bus for this service. At the peak on the primary route between Allendale and Grand Rapids—Route 50—approximately 10-12 buses are in operation. The contract is about $2.5 million annually and serves approximately 3 million trips. Students can use their pass to ride on all Rapid routes. GVSU does not track the other routes individually, though The Rapid does; about 10,000 rides each month are taken by GVSU on other routes. Passes are built into the cost of tuition; there is no separate transportation fee. Operating an in-house transportation system would be much more expensive for GVSU, and they report having a great working relationship with The Rapid.

GVSU does not require riders to show ID or pay a fare on the routes it sponsors through The Rapid; checking ID or requiring members of the public to pay a fare would take too many minutes at each stop, and the university considers the time savings worth any cost they may incur of carrying non-university affiliates. The university assesses ridership periodically, and more than 97% of riders on Route 50 are affiliated with the university. Although 3% of the riders are not university affiliates, GVSU considers the benefits of time savings outweigh the costs of free riders.

Parking on Campus
GVSU has several layers of parking policies depending on the type of affiliate and location of parking. Faculty and staff do not pay for parking at either campus.

Parking permits for full-time students are $340 per year and for part-time students, $176 per year. Students may also receive a number of free day passes each year. Over the past few years, the number of annual permits purchased has been going down, but utilization rates in the lots have remained static. GVSU speculates that this is because students have started using the buses more and walking to stops, some park in free lots along the bus route, some park for free in nearby residential neighborhoods, and housing is being built closer to the bus lines.

Route 50 passes two large, free parking lots on the way from Allendale to Grand Rapids. One of these lots will be expanded this summer. On the Grand Rapids campus, there are approximately 1,705 student spaces, 634 faculty/staff spaces, and 230 residential student spaces.

GVSU is planning to try differential pricing for some of its lots, offering less expensive parking further out from the center of campus, but it has not made any formal proposals yet.

The major problem for the Grand Rapids campus is parking for special events and speakers. Typically, the university requests that faculty and staff not park at downtown GVSU parking facilities so the lots an accommodate guests, but they are not able to enforce this.
Car Share and Carpooling
In late 2012, GVSU started a car sharing program for students and affiliates through Enterprise called WeCar. Two cars on campus are rentable by the hour. No usage data is available yet.

GVSU pays dues of $500 to participate in Western Michigan Green Ride, a rideshare program that aims to match commuters with similar routes. The university was part of the system several years ago but stopped subscribing because utilization was low; they have renewed their participation, but utilization is still lower than they would like.

An internal carpooling system is operated by the GVSU marketing department for faculty and staff; this too has low utilization rates of only about 10 rides posted.

Bike Rental Program
GVSU repaints abandoned bicycles and rents them on an annual basis to students for $25 per year. They have discussed creating a bikeshare program for using bikes on campus, but will not be discussing implementation for this project for several more years.

Advertising
GVSU includes information about all transportation options in an annual direct mailing to the entire study body, amounting to about 26,000 mailings each year. New faculty and staff receive information about options during their new staff orientation.

Grand Rapids Community College
Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) is a regional institution with a large commuting student population. GRCC has approximately 20,000 students per semester, most of which come in and out of its primary campus in downtown Grand Rapids. In 2009, GRCC expanded two blocks away, created a non-contiguous campus.

The college is very aware of being car-centric and creating a lot of automobile traffic on Michigan Street, and is interested in shifting away from cars as the dominant mode. Without a wider-reaching regional transit system, however, mass transit is not an option for many students commuting from other counties. Still, to help spur thinking about other modes, the school held a competition in 2012 to solicit ideas for reducing the number of vehicles brought to campus.

The Silver Line BRT route will serve GRCC campus starting in 2014, and the school expects a positive impact on reducing automobiles in downtown.

Parking Facilities and Management
GRCC owns and operates two parking ramps and charges students a rate of $2.50 per “gate swipe”, so if the car moves during the day, the student is charged an additional swipe fee. This rate is much cheaper than most other parking options available downtown; most public parking downtown is $1 per half-hour. Students can use their student ID card to pay. The gate swipe fee is assessed every year, though it was not increased last year.

A new alternative students have is to pay a fee ($200/semester) to have a parking spot reserved in one of the DASH lots, then ride the DASH for free to campus. This service costs GRCC approximately $50,000 per semester, in partnership with The DASH/The Rapid. The funds come from the parking fees collected; there is no designated transportation fee within the student fee structure. The DASH lots are becoming a more popular option for students; approximately 100 students are taking advantage of the program.

As of this year, GRCC is also charging employees for parking, though the fee is nominal.

GRCC has encountered no problems with overbooked parking lots or ramps; since students, faculty, and staff all come to campus at different times throughout the day, the number of spaces is adequate.

**Contract with The Rapid**

GRCC contracts with The Rapid for a number of services:

- Reserved DASH parking spaces
- Shuttle between campuses
- Discounted bus passes for students
- Future partnership on BRT station and service

The shuttle is paid for from parking fees, and students consistently give positive feedback about the service. Most students are very pleased with service on The Rapid and DASH, as well; most students who use The Rapid passes are from Grand Rapids proper and are already accustomed to riding the bus.

**Bicycles**

GRCC has several designated bicycle parking areas on campus, and with the coming BRT station, more bike parking will be built. Staff have discussed launching a bikeshare program, and the school supports the City of Grand Rapid’s efforts to improve cycling city-wide, including the cycletrack along Lyon Street.

**Rideshare**

GRCC participates in a rideshare program that is advertised on the DASH and GRCC websites.
Future Plans
The school is aware of their contribution to congestion along Michigan Street and briefly considered using demand-based pricing for its classes. However, that measure would be extremely politically difficult to receive approval for, and GRCC did not pursue it.

GRCC would like to offer parking incentives for people who carpool, such as a closer parking space, but they have no staff available to monitor such programs.

Advertising
Staff in the Student Life Department is responsible for communicating alternative transportation options. Parking is the number one complaint they receive every year.

St. Mary’s Health Center

Although over three-quarters of a mile away from the Michigan Street corridor, as a major downtown employer, St. Mary’s Health Center is a significant stakeholder in the revitalization and operations of the corridor area. St. Mary’s employs about 2,800 people in addition to the thousands of daily patients and visitors that travel to their site. The Health Center has a 344-bed acute care hospital in addition to multiple outpatient and community health services.

The health center is a growing institution, as is its neighboring, but separate, institution of Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital.

Parking Facilities and Management
The Heath Center has two parking ramps, one recently completed in 2009, in addition to several surface lots on Jefferson and Cherry Streets (Figure 9).

Parking is free and in heavy demand. Some parking is reserved for physicians, emergency room parking, and women in labor.

There have been complaints from the adjacent Heritage Hill neighborhood of employees parking on community streets. Residential streets are presently unrestricted for general use.

**Contract with The Rapid**

St. Mary’s does not presently have any contracts with The Rapid, but the center has partnered with The Rapid in the past, particularly when parking was temporarily reduced for the construction of a new building.

Stakeholders characterized The Rapid as generally good bus service and confirmed that some staff do routinely use this service, however, at present, the Center does not offer any type of employee pass program for its use.

**Issues and Opportunities on Michigan Street**

Traffic congestion is perceived as a major current and growing future challenge on Michigan Street and for the continued expansion or the revitalization zone for the city. A majority of stakeholders understand that shifting commuters to other modes is critical to the continuation of development in the area and essential to its viability as a choice place to work and play and valuable to their own competitiveness and sustainability. Beyond traffic congestion, Michigan Street has a number of challenges to address as well as several encouraging opportunities that could provide the foundation for a robust transportation demand management system.

**Limited Mode Choices**

Automobile traffic accounts for the majority of travel along Michigan Street, with a minority choosing to use transit, walk, or bike. While transit service on The Rapid is perceived as
good, accessing bus stops as a pedestrian is a challenge. Some stakeholders suggested that more frequent service would make The Rapid a more appealing choice for downtown workers. Further, information on transit benefits is limited from some employers and institutions.

For bicyclists, Michigan Street is not a comfortable alternative due to high speeds and high traffic volumes. The City is planning to provide a new facility along Lyon Street as an alternative, but this still leaves a gap in the bicycle network for direct access to employment and other destinations along Michigan Street. A few institutions are improving their bicycle amenities, such as on-site showers and bike lockers, which are very important for making cycling a viable commute option.

Pedestrian infrastructure along many portions of Michigan Street is riddled with gaps and maintenance challenges. Though some blocks are pleasant to walk along by themselves, the lack of crosswalks, curb cuts, and pedestrian signals at some intersections make crossing streets difficult. Combined with a lack of smooth pavement in many areas and the high volume and speed of traffic, walking is not perceived as a safe or desirable mode of travel.

**Marketing and Incentives**

Many institutions along Michigan Street have TDM programs in place, and stakeholders have made laudable efforts to create programs tailored to their employees and students. However, many do not actively advertise the programs beyond annual announcements, and almost none truly incentivize their use.

Consistent and active advertisement reminds individuals regularly that other options for their commute exist. Monetary incentives for using other modes and disincentives for those that create more automobile traffic, such as parking prices, are some of the most powerful methods for changing mode share.

**Cooperation**

A number of TDM strategies are currently being deployed by institutions along Michigan Street. Some partnerships between institutions do exist. The Rapid, especially, was consistently cited as a helpful partner agency for several organizations.

On a corridor level, however, no group exists to address the shared transportation issues along Michigan Street. Individual strategies on an institutional level are important building blocks for an area TDM strategy, but establishing corridor-level goals is essential to achieving any type of change in travel patterns and modal splits corridor-wide.

No formal group exists to formulate goals for Michigan Street, but nearly all stakeholders expressed enthusiasm about working together to make changes. Most, while invested in
their current programs, are open to making adjustments and even large-scale changes in order to create a better commuting experience for their employees. Many, too, are also thinking of what is best for the corridor and for all travelers along Michigan Street, beyond just their own affiliates. This openness to cooperation is the most important strength in the current TDM system on Michigan Street.

**Duplication of Service**

Several layers of transit service exist along the corridor, including several privately-operated shuttles. The four Rapid routes serve different markets and neighborhoods, and most only serve Michigan Street for a few blocks. Private companies operating transit vehicles along Michigan Street may be offering service that duplicates what The Rapid and the DASH offer. Further these other routes are limited to affiliates of the service sponsors or, in the case of DASH, to those parking in paid lots owned by the sponsor.

With some exceptions for the private shuttles, most of these services are relatively popular. The private shuttles that operate below capacity creates a negative public perception, especially along a congested corridor like Michigan Street.

**Parking Management**

There is, at present, no cohesive parking management downtown, although the Downtown Development Authority has definitively established its interest in pursuing such policies. Different institutions charge different prices and have different deals with the various public and private parking lots and ramps. Pricing is not matched to demand, and few institutions use pricing incentives to encourage drivers to park in lots further out along transit routes. The unmanaged parking situation affects economic development, as well; some downtown restaurants struggle in the evenings because parking is free or cheaper elsewhere, even though they are very popular for the lunchtime crowd.

Further, some nonprofit and educational institutions are exempt from certain parts of the zoning code, allowing them to avoid implementing some of the more progressive elements of the City’s zoning code regarding parking.

**Conclusion**

Grand Rapids is a city on the rise. From the philanthropic fathers to the world-class institutions to the proud populace, the city has civic and community structures that are the envy of communities around the nation. Coordinating these many assets and establishing common and consistent measures of success and commitments to achieving it will be a critical next step for the city, region and state.