

Good evening, everyone. My name is Matt Covert, and I work for 1000 Friends of Wisconsin, a land use and community planning nonprofit organization. I was asked to come here to speak briefly to the importance of the pedestrian experience, particularly as it relates to transit-oriented development. I am heavily involved in research and advocacy on urban sustainability, walkability, and livability. I believe that we as a community have an obligation to ensure that our streets and public spaces function not just as vehicle conveyance devices, but as inclusive social spaces that are safe, comfortable, interesting, and engaging. Thank you very much for allowing me to speak today.

We are all, at one time or another, pedestrians. Transit-oriented development, which the South Capitol TOD is obviously pursuing, has positive ripple effects that trickle all the way down through the very steps we take. I'm sure I'm preaching to the choir here, but when people take transit, they walk more, and the reverse is generally true as well. Transit-oriented development goes hand in hand with walking and biking and reinforces one's ability to make transportation choices that are healthier for individuals and for the community. That's why any discussion of transit-oriented development is inevitably also a conversation about walking.

While walkability is an undeniably positive attribute, one that the real estate and development communities have discovered people really care about, I think that sometimes too much weight is given to how close places are to each other and not enough to ensuring that the experience of walking is a good one. Between the research I'm doing and the public comments submitted in the South Capitol TOD process, it's clear many, many people care about the walking experience.

In thinking about specific things that help pedestrians, I would urge the committee to keep the following three things in mind. First, pedestrian safety. Some of the worst spots for pedestrians in dense urban areas include right turns by cars into pedestrian crossings, one-way streets, which encourage faster car traffic and are more difficult to cross as a pedestrian, and a lack of a suitable barrier between the pedestrian zone and traffic, which can add to a feeling of discomfort. We have all of those things here, particularly on Wilson Street and John Nolen Drive. Work to limit conflicts between turning cars and pedestrians, make sure pedestrian crossing islands are large enough to fit more than a couple people in the middle of fast-moving traffic, and consider wider sidewalks and/or better landscaping to create a sense of separation from traffic.

Second, signage and wayfinding. One of the things I have learned from my research thus far is that often, wayfinding and signage downtown is useful for cars but not so useful for pedestrians. This is particularly important when thinking about visitors who may be coming into town on intercity bus, or intercity rail, if that ever becomes a reality. Any big transportation hub needs to provide a way for pedestrians to orient themselves in an unfamiliar place and get where they need to go. Important locations and destinations should be adequately signed and directioned. When you are a visitor in a town like Madison, with lots of government buildings, identifying whether a building or a block is where you want to be can be challenging. For example, if the transit center were at the Brayton lot, you would be let off in BACK of three enormous, obscure government buildings with intimidating and unclear street facades. Not exactly a welcoming experience for a visitor on foot.

Third, make sure the interaction between public and private, at street level, is built for people. Any redevelopment that happens, whether it's at Judge Doyle Square, the DOA building, Brayton, or wherever, should aim to engage people. Look at the Wisconsin Institutes for Discovery or the renovation of the Memorial Union—loading docks and vehicle access is being put underground, with all four sides of the block accessible to and interesting for pedestrians. That's not to say that putting all building services underground is an absolute must-have. But remember that nothing hurts the pedestrian experience more than blank, featureless walls or the sense that you're simply walking by a series of parking lots instead of a street. The best streets in the world have views that change constantly, windows that engage passers-by, and a multitude of uses, both public and private, that make the street an inviting place to be. Not every street can be the Champs de l'Éysee, or even State Street, but we should always aim to make our streets comfortable for people above all else.

I am available for questions, and I look forward to seeing how the South Capitol TOD planning process improves the neighborhood and the city as a whole. Thank you for your time.