

# St. Louis **speaks** about **OPEN STREETS**

Notes from community stakeholders about increasing attendance and community involvement in future Open Streets

**I**N 2011, A RESEARCH TEAM from Washington University interviewed 13 community stakeholders with interests in improving the physical activity and overall health for children and families in St. Louis communities. These stakeholders, in areas such as education, healthcare, and the nonprofit arena, shared their perspectives, providing invaluable information and innovative ideas on how to boost the involvement of their constituents in Open Streets.



**WHEN?** *Community stakeholders suggested days and times that reflected the times that would best work for their constituents:*

**What days and times might draw the most community support?**

Saturday mornings were mentioned as the best for runners, cyclists, and parents looking for activities for their children on the weekends. Saturdays were also mentioned as good days since there is no interference with many church activities.

Sundays were mentioned as good ways for families to engage in healthy activities on a day that in many cases is a family day already. Sunday afternoon events give churchgoers an opportunity to attend also.

Friday evenings were also suggested to provide children and youth with a safer alternative to activities that are usually available on Friday nights in their neighborhoods.

**LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION!** *Route length and placement of Open Streets events were key aspects, according to stakeholders, in engaging their constituents in the community:*

**What kind of route will engage more of the community?**

Community members will be more likely to attend the event if routes pass near their houses. Limited access to transportation could be a barrier in getting parents to bring children to events not near their homes.

Routes must be long enough for cyclists and runners to use effectively, or be arranged in a loop that could facilitate the use of the route for these Open Streets participants.

Routes that connect blocks north and south of Delmar could be ways to break down social barriers and build trust across communities.

If longer routes passing through several communities are not feasible, several smaller routes could also be hosted on the same day to increase the involvement of various communities.

**PROMOTION** *Stakeholders discussed several sources that the City and Open Streets planners could tap to increase the reach of the Open Streets promotion:*

**WHO can help to extend the City's efforts to promote the event?**

Organizations like the YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, Grace Hill, Salvation Army, and neighborhood associations that the communities trust can promote the events in their newsletters, websites, and e-mail listserves.

Running and cycling groups can promote the event as a place to meet for their weekend group runs.

Schools can be key partners in promoting the events to their students as a part of initiatives to increase students' physical activity.

Churches are also a useful source of event promotion, who are promoting healthy body and soul, and family activities to their members.

## PROMOTION

### HOW can the City tap into the community to engage residents?

*Stakeholders mentioned some of the most effective ways they could think to reach city residents, some of which the City has used in the past and other new ideas:*

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Open Streets St. Louis can reach out to these agencies through their Facebook and Twitter accounts to reach more children, youth, and young adults.

Involve business owners along the route to do something special the day of the event and promote the event with fliers to help their business and the event.

Local newspapers like the St. Louis American, Argus, Centennial, SCOPE, Riverfront Times, Post-Dispatch can be involved in marketing the event.

Local news and radio can also promote the event in advance. Radio stations can also tell listeners they are at the event with giveaways to attract more participants.

Connect Open Streets with other healthy living-type events like farmers markets.

Always emphasize the FREE aspect of the event and mention all of the free things people can do and get if they come, including raffles and giveaways, and tours of buildings along routes.

Advertise that there will be food.

Have music or DJs that will make neighborhood residents want to come check out what is going on the day of the event.

## WHAT TO DO?

### What activities do stakeholders believe would be most engaging?

*Stakeholders suggested that activities offered at Open Streets events could be both structured and unstructured to involve residents with different interests:*

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Basketball hoops, jump ropes, volleyball, soccer, Nintendo Wii sports, and life-size chess, were all ideas of unstructured types of activities children, youth and families, even seniors, could play at the events.

A variety of classes could also engaged the community, like Zumba, aerobics, martial arts, yoga, and dance.

Mile markers along the route could indicate to runners or cyclists track their exercise and/or maps of different routes to accomplish certain goals could be provided.

Activities that children and families could continue to do at their homes (i.e., affordable and/or able to done indoors) or classes they could access through community organizations would be beneficial in promoting continued physical activity in participants.

Activities should be spread along the route to promote walking and route exploration.

## LOOK AND FEEL

### How should the event be portrayed?

*Stakeholders expressed a clear vision of Open Streets was needed by the community, since many are unfamiliar with the concept of this kind of event-- one that was inclusive of diverse social groups:*

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The event should include community organizations to build community ownership in the event, as well as City sponsorship.

A feeling of inclusion of different types of people across the physical activity spectrum should be promoted, from cyclists to walkers and dancers, from those who already engage in regular physical activity, to those wanting to increase physical activity in their lives.

# Open and shut: the case for **Open Streets** in St. Louis

**OPEN STREETS INITIATIVES** open spaces normally reserved for cars to people, providing a safe environment to walk, bike, dance, play, and socialize, promoting healthy and active living and building community. Researchers in the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis have received funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to evaluate St. Louis' 2011 Open Streets events, and to build a campaign encouraging participation by urban youth and families in 2012. With over 1,800 participants in 2011 alone, leadership from the Mayor's office, and generous sponsorships, St. Louis has the potential to be a national leader in Open Streets. In fact, our evaluation survey is featured as a model resource by the Open Streets Project, a national coordinating collaborative. Working together, we can grow St. Louis Open Streets in 2012 and beyond.



## Open Streets 2011 by the numbers

**108**  
MINUTES  
*Average time spent at Open Streets*


**58%**  
Participants who were attending their **first** Open Streets


**73%**  
Participants who spent money at a restaurant or store on the Open Streets route


**68%**  
Participants who became aware of a store or restaurant that was new to them

## What do people think about Open Streets?

We surveyed **119** Open Streets participants at the two 2011 events. We asked them to answer some questions about Open Streets, and its effect on St. Louis:

"Open Streets is a free event that welcomes everyone."  **99%** Agree or strongly agree

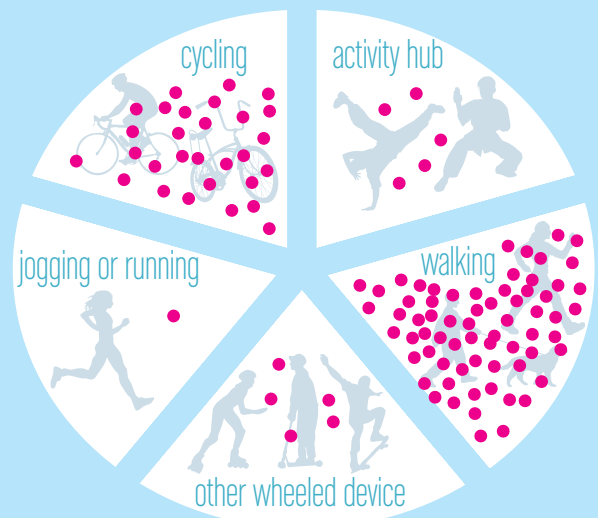
"Open Streets strengthens our community"  **100%** Agree or strongly agree

"How safe do you feel at Open Streets?"  **97%** said "very safe"

"Does Open Streets change your feelings about the city?"  **94%** said "yes - positively"

## What do people do at Open Streets?

Open Streets participants could place a sticker on a poster we made to tell us what their main activity was:

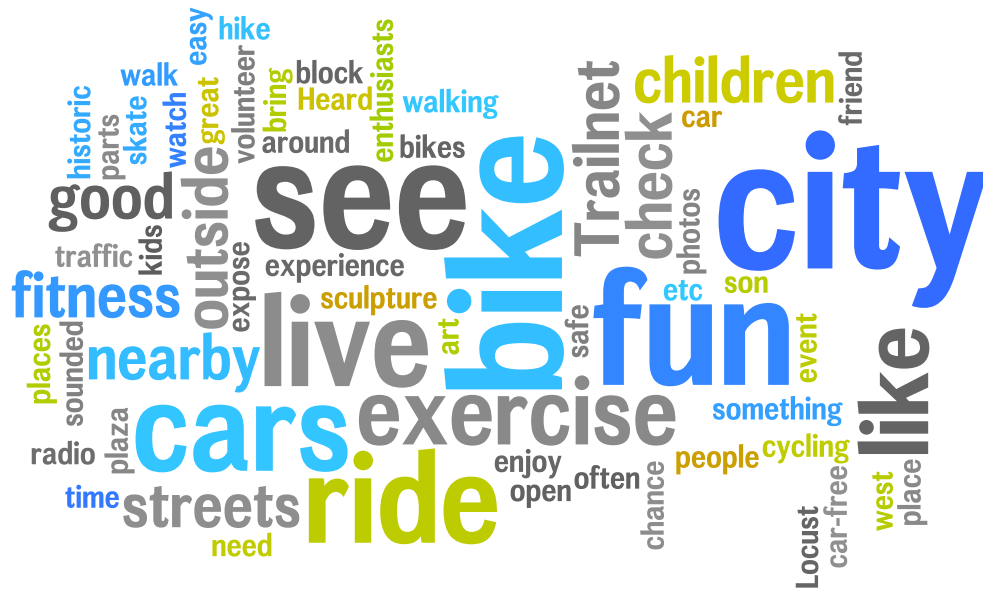


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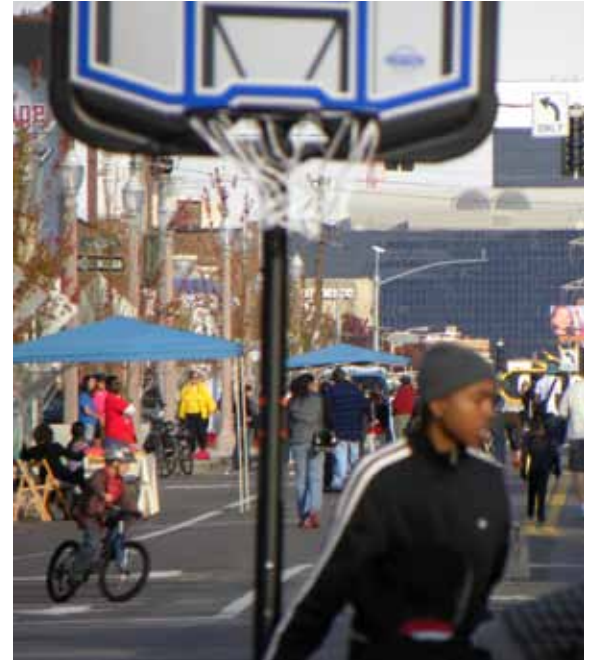
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When we asked Open Streets participants the main reason they came, they named many reasons, while some themes also became apparent.



Open Streets participants at the October 29<sup>th</sup> event in the Grove neighborhood.

## Challenges for Open Streets and the City of St. Louis

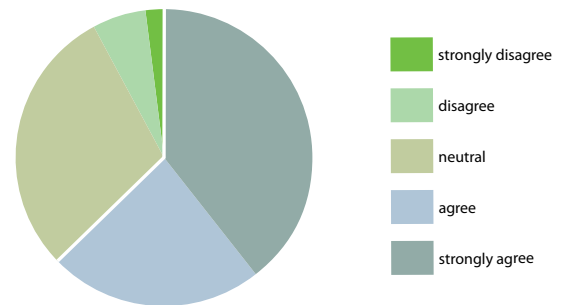
People who participate like Open Streets, but the demographics of Open Streets participants does not match those of the City overall.

City of St. Louis	Open Streets participants	
49%	23%	Black
44%	66%	White
0.3%	0%	American Indian/Alaska Native
3%	2%	Asian
4%	0%	Hispanic/Latino

Source: Washington University, U.S. Census Bureau State & County QuickFacts

**Policy action:** Continue Open Streets, and promote the event to segments of the community that were underrepresented in 2011. Marketing and outreach through trusted community partners, such as schools, neighborhood organizations, and advocacy groups.

Outside of Open Streets, the city of St. Louis can improve in offering friendly environments for physical activity such as walking.



One-third of participants did not agree with the statement "Outside of Open Streets, St. Louis provides friendly environments to walk".

Source: Washington University

**Policy action:** Support collaboration among groups in St. Louis whose missions include promoting physical activity, improving the built environment, sustainable development, and livability. Activate communities to pursue low-cost, improvements in the environment.

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<http://stlouis-mo.gov/openstreets>  
[www.facebook.com/OpenStreetsSTL](http://www.facebook.com/OpenStreetsSTL)  
<http://openstreetsproject.org>

This work is supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Active Living Research program.  
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