

Policy Analysis of Open Streets Programs and Street Closures as Policy Tools

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Abstract

Though street festivals are commonplace around the world, the recurring closure of a street space to motor vehicle traffic for the purposes of improving public health, boosting business, and fostering community is a relatively new development. These so-called “Open Streets” programs (or “Ciclovias”) are structured like a special event, but are generally undertaken by local governments and partners in order to have particular policy impacts, including encouraging active lifestyles, drawing visitors to local businesses, and building stronger bonds within the community. This project seeks to better understand these programs and their impacts, particularly on local communities and businesses, by using a mixed method research strategy comprised of both a localized survey and a comparative case study employing stakeholder interviews. The survey aimed to capture the experience of businesses with regard to a local open streets program. Further, a comparative case study of programs was used to identify project impacts, how programs were implemented and operated, and identify what implications programs have for the use of street closures as recurring policy tools. Findings demonstrate mixed impacts on businesses, with opportunities for managing programs to maximize business impacts. Programs shared the presence of partnerships in organization and operation, and a variety of goals including transportation, economic development, public health, and community development. Programs were most successful with their programming when tailored to program goals. Lessons learned from case studies provide a set of program recommendations for municipalities considering future program implementation.

The Issue

Cities are increasingly facing challenges that are not easily understood or addressed. Many of these challenges are what might be considered “wicked problems” (Rittel and Webber 1973): these problems are not easily defined, have no stopping rule or exhaustible set of possible solutions, and are often intertwined with other problems in a set of feedback loops. For example, many cities have been faced with decreased investment in their central business districts as a result of increased suburbanization, made possible by inexpensive fuel and housing opportunities, plentiful transportation budgets, and externalized costs (congestion, pollution). Any attempt to spur increased development in a downtown business district, or to draw renewed interest in local businesses and industries, must combat the numerous mechanisms which support the national retailer located on the periphery of a city. These wicked problems have led to increased interest in pursuing policy tools that might combat interrelated problems with a broader approach, rather than attempting to engineer a “right” answer. Economic development is a priority for municipalities of all sizes; however, it is a problem that is tied closely to non-

economic factors, such as community bonds and confidence and the very physical health of the populace. As such, addressing economic development and failing to address the associated factors may risk a very incomplete response, and worse, a response that is eroded over time by negative feedback mechanisms accelerated by other intersecting challenges.

Open Streets programs have become increasingly common over the last half decade as municipalities, non-profits, and private partners have all realized the opportunity to use a recurring community-level program, centered on the closure of a street to motor vehicle traffic, as one piece of a more creative policy strategy. Open Streets offers the chance for community residents to interact directly with each other and their local businesses, and in doing so to become more physical active. This increased activity and engagement in turn encourage a return to businesses and a renewed interest in the community itself; by recurring this program, a municipality might provide an invaluable boost not only in direct benefits but also by turning the feedback mechanisms to their advantage.

Introduction to Ciclovía

Closing streets to motor vehicle traffic is not a particularly novel activity; streets festivals and special events of all shapes and sizes have done so for as long as there have been streets to close. Yet these one-off events have tended to require street closures merely as a byproduct of the scale or location of their activities. In most of these cases the street is merely a chance location unfortunately impacted by a concert or fair. However, the last few decades have seen the street closure used in a novel way and to significant effect. These programs, commonly referred to as “Open Streets” or “Ciclovía” (Spanish for ‘bike lane’), focus on the conversion of a traditional roadway into a large public venue where particular public goals can be accomplished. For example, an Open Streets program might include large areas dedicated to physical activity, such as dance classes, sports fields, or simply space to walk, run, or bike without fear of traffic. The program might include business specials, extended hours, and street seating. It might also create large areas for visitors to mix and mingle and visit non-profit vendor tents, engage in public dialogue, or enjoy entertainment. In these different ways, the closure of the street can potentially be used as an economic development tool, a tool for encouraging physical activity, and a community development tool. The policy impacts associated with these programs have made them increasingly appealing to municipalities of all sizes as ways to affect positive change in their communities.

Literature Review

While open streets programs have been around in the Americas since the late 1960s, the last few years have truly seen a steep increase in their popularity and presence. Though the most iconic example of the open streets program, Bogotá’s Ciclovía, is almost 40 years old (having started in 1974), most North American cities have only recently become aware of the concept. One estimate identified ten examples of such programs in 2006; by 2011 that number had climbed to more than

70 (Streets Plan 2012). With this growth in program experimentation has come a slower but still present interest in better understanding the programs and their operation, organization, and impacts.

A sizable portion of the literature on open streets-style programs has focused on Ciclovía itself, unsurprising considering its prominence and the size of the program (it currently occurs every Sunday across 70 miles of streets and can include more than 1 million people per week). Some of this work has been focused on evaluation (Montes et al 2012, Wright and Montezuma, Torres et al 2013), while others have looked at factors influencing its success (del Castillo et al 2011, Cervero et al 2009). Despite the increasing popularity of Ciclovía as a research subject, others cities have also drawn attention, including San Francisco (Zieff et al 2010), St. Louis (Hipp et al 2012), Los Angeles (Lugo 2013), and Chicago (Mason et al 2011).

Policy Impacts

Since open streets programs are intended to generate positive public impacts, program evaluation is a popular and valuable task for both third party researchers and program organizers. For some programs, such as Portland's Sunday Parkways, the scale of public financial support for the program is such that a regular annual report is required and includes discussion of program implementation, operation, and evaluation (including participant surveys and interviews). Others, such as St. Louis Open Streets, have been the site of both organizer and academic evaluation. Regardless of the party undertaking the assessment, and the location of the program, the findings seem to support some general conclusions.

First among these conclusions is that participants experience much higher levels of physical activity than they might otherwise (Torres et al 2013, Montes et al 2013, Zieff et al 2010, Mason et al 2011). They also express greater feelings of community solidarity (Torres et al 2013, Lugo 2013) and positive perceptions of the community (Hipp et al 2012, Mason et al 2011) as a result of the program. The benefits associated with the increased physical activity were even found to be valuable enough to offset the cost of the program by a factor of 2.3 in San Francisco and 3.2 in the case of Bogotá (Montes et al 2012). Retailers and restaurants appear to experience higher than normal sales on a regular basis (Zieff et al 2013), and demand for additional vendors in Bogotá is sufficient to boost local employment relative to non-program days (Wright and Montezuma). In St. Louis, researchers found that 73% of participants spent money at a business during the program, and 68% became newly aware of a store/restaurant (Hipp et al 2012). In addition, one study found that partnerships built during the program fostered additional community efforts afterward (Mason et al 2011). These impacts provide preliminary and general support for the value of such programs, but they also serve to provide some guidance on factors identified in each study as influential for program success.

Factors Influencing Success

With any large program such as Ciclovía, it's extremely difficult to isolate particular components to which success can be attributed. However, some efforts to survey attendees have found that residential proximity to program routes is

associated with higher participation (Cervero et al 2009, Sarmiento et al 2010, Mason et al 2011), which does suggest that route selection will be heavily responsible for attendance. Attendance, in turn, was found in another study to be far more responsible for the size of impact outcomes than was the size of the route (Montes et al 2012). On the planning and organization side, Bogotá organizers identified the important of having support from both smaller and large scales of government, and the participation of stakeholders in program organization and implementation (del Castillo et al 2011).

Program Organization and Features

Streets Plan, a partnership of various non-profits, conducted the largest cross-comparison of Open Streets programs in North America to date in early 2012 (Streets Plan 2012). In their analysis of the 70 programs they identified at that point, they found a variety of funding and operation structures. Table 1 displays this typology, which demonstrates the frequency of partnerships behind Open Street programs and highlights the diversity of approaches that can be successful for program implementation and operation. The same diversity appears when looking at program characteristics. Consider the following table constructed of ranges in program characteristics among those programs identified within the Streets Plan comparison, as displayed in Table 2.

Table 1. Open Streets Organization Typology

Model (named after the first city, to employ this structure)	Leadership	Funding Source
Seattle	Publicly led	Publicly funded
Cleveland	Non-profit led	Privately funded
San Francisco	Publicly/Non-profit led	Privately funded
Portland	Publicly led	Public/Privately funded
Winnipeg	Non-profit led	Public/Privately funded
Savannah	Public/Privately led	Privately funded
Kentucky	Public/Privately led	Publicly/Privately funded

Table 2. Open Streets Program Characteristics

Feature	Minimum	Maximum
Host city population	12,000	8,000,000
Average Attendance	300	100,000
Route length	.2 miles	32.6 miles
Frequency of program	Annually	Weekly

In addition to wide variation in program size, frequency, and attendance, there are also variations in program goals, evaluation methods, and the sponsor (privately funded may mean a health care provider, a grocery chain, a soft drink manufacturer, or any number of other entities). Of those programs reviewed by Streets Plan, most appeared to be focused around community development and physical activity goals, with a few also aiming to generate interest in local business corridors. Program features vary widely as well. Taken together, this paints the picture of a program

that is flexible to the needs and features of its community. Given sufficient community enthusiasm for the program, it's likely that the outcome of any given program will be simultaneously similar to others, and very much unique.

Research Questions and Goals

There is a small but meaningful quantity of literature devoted to the Open Streets program, particularly Ciclovía. Amongst the limited comparative work, the focus has been on creating meaningful typologies and identifying the range of program characteristics. This is a sizable and crucial task, as program organization and operation vary from site to site but always influence the degree of the program's success. As such, contributing to the understanding of program organization and operation is an important research task.

R1: How are Open Streets programs organized, and operated? What goals are associated with the programs?

While some research has worked to classify programs according to their organizational and funding arrangements, no work before has considered the variation in program goals and how they may influence program outcomes, as well as how they may be related to program organization in order to better support desired outcomes. This leads to a second research question, focused on the assessment of impacts and how they may play a role in program development:

R2: What benefits do stakeholders see from the programs? How do these benefits influence program structure, organization, and/or funding?

Among the potential desired outcomes are the more oft-discussed physical activity levels and community perceptions, but there may also be economic development goals. As such, a better appraisal of how Open Streets programs impact businesses along the program route, as well as how such programs may serve economic development goals more broadly, is of great interest for this project.

R3: How do Open Streets impact businesses along the route?

Considering the policy goals and impacts of Open Streets programs, of particular interest is better understanding of what factors influence the frequency of program occurrence, and whether there is interest on the part of stakeholders to increase the frequency of the program, or expand the program in other ways (such as more locations or a larger route).

R4(a): What factors influence the frequency of recurrence of Open Streets programs?

R4(b): Is there interest on the part of stakeholders to increase the frequency of the programs?

By investigating these questions, we hope to have a better grasp on what differentiates these programs in a meaningful way from permanent pedestrian streets, and what role, if any, the special-event component plays in the programs.

Methods

A dual qualitative-quantitative mixed methodology was selected to evaluate Open Streets programs. First, a survey was constructed and provided to businesses that directly fronted the May 19th, 2013 Atlanta Streets Alive route. The purpose of this survey was to better appraise the impact that Open Streets programs may have on businesses in densely mixed-use corridors with a high representation of retail and restaurant establishments. As such, the survey included questions about the business' sales receipts for the week prior, day of, and week following, the event. It also inquired about the business' perceptions of the program, customer feedback, level of participation in the program, and awareness of the program, as well as general reception of the program and concept. It was made available to over 80 businesses by way of walk-in distribution of a link to the survey instrument (made available online to facilitate ease of completion for participants), as well as e-mail distribution and follow-up e-mails.

The business survey supplements the central focus of the research, a comparative case study of 8 different recurring programs similar in concept (with a fair amount of variation) to Open Streets-style programs. The cases were selected on the basis of both their similarities and their differences, and include four large cities (Atlanta, Austin, Portland, and San Antonio) and four small/medium cities (Charleston, Macon, Rome, and Savannah). All but one of these cities has a program built around a street closure; the exception (Macon) was selected to better understand the role of street closures. As noted in the literature review, variation in program organization and operation is common, and the cases demonstrate this diversity. Nonetheless, they represent a range of applicable examples, and are more than sufficient to conduct a critical analysis of Open Streets programs as policy tools, as well as generate guidance for future program development.

The case comparison was developed through document review and stakeholder interviews. Public documents (including annual and event reports, web pages, media publicity, and social media representation) were reviewed for each case, and a list of central stakeholders was generated (usually consisting of an organizing entity and/or municipality, and a primary sponsor). Secondary interview contacts were gathered from primary contacts, for a limited snowball interview technique. No less than two interviews were conducted for each given case, with some cases featuring three interviews based upon referrals from primary interview participants.

Survey Results

Despite reaching out to the full suite of merchants along the Atlanta Streets Alive program route through personal visits, email contact, and numerous follow-ups both in person and via email, only ten merchants completed the survey. Of these

ten, only seven fully completed the survey, so any discussion of the survey results is limited to some general observations and the discussion of specific responses from merchants who completed the survey. Of those businesses that reported revenue figures, only one business reported increased revenue on the day of Atlanta Streets Alive. At the same time, only two businesses reported a meaningful decrease in revenue, and one attributed this in large part to poor weather conditions. Of the nine businesses open on the day of the program (the tenth was a service firm), four reported higher than normal traffic in their business, another four less than normal traffic, and one the same level of traffic. This did not appear to be related to location, though 3 out of the 4 businesses reporting higher traffic were centrally located on the route, closer to activity centers. While a number of businesses along the route offered expanded seating, special activities, and other draws, none of the respondents reported any such efforts. One merchant was open on a day that would be otherwise closed for business, and reported that it was not worthwhile from a direct revenue perspective. Interestingly, of the five merchants who were independent merchants (i.e. theirs is a unique location) only one saw decreased foot traffic. Size of business (as measured through annual revenue) was similar across those with more traffic and less traffic.

Awareness of the program amongst respondent businesses was fairly high (seven out of nine were aware of it beforehand), and they attributed their awareness to a range of exposure (including beverage reps, Atlanta Bicycle Coalition volunteers, employees, or previous experience with the program). Despite the mixed immediate results for respondent businesses, six out of the nine businesses who answered the question would support a return of the program to the corridor. One respondent noted that “sales are sales”, and encouraged a return of the program annually. None of the business reported any direct feedback from customers on the program. Table 4 identifies some positive and negative aspects of Open Streets from an economic development perspective, as well as lessons drawn from merchant responses and the case comparison that follows this section. Since the sample size is insufficient to speak in any statistically meaningful way, these points serve to capture respondent and stakeholder assessments of the program.

Table 4. Survey Lessons

Pros	Cons	Lessons
Increased revenue and foot traffic for businesses engaged in program	May require additional hours and/or staffing	Work with businesses to evaluate needs and encourage businesses to be engaged
Exposure to broad, semi-captive audience	Businesses reliant upon auto traffic may require alternative access routes	Consider secondary access routes, provide come-back coupons
Environment supports window shopping, walk-ins	Activities may compete with businesses for attention	Offset activities from dense commercial blocks
Businesses along heavily visited sections of route saw high traffic	Businesses farther from activity centers may see declined traffic	Location of businesses along route matters; route must be carefully planned

Case Comparison

Case programs were selected to capture the variety of options available to an open streets program, to better convey the importance of certain commonalities as well as the suite of choices available when planning a new program and organizing its operation. Table 5 shows the differences between each of the case programs, from program route and frequency to cost and attendance. An annual orientation to programs is common, as many cities conceive of their program as an annual operation with one or more specific executions (which are not consistent in date or location). The two monthly programs stand out in this regard, as they reorient themselves throughout the year on a consistent basis. Route sizes and shapes also vary, though these cases all fall on the shorter end of the established range of programs identified in the literature. Cost also varies greatly, though it appears to scale with the size of the city, the scale of the program's goals, and their ability to capture large sponsors. The most expensive programs were larger in route size, occurred more frequently (thus requiring ongoing organizational staff employment), and had more aggressive promotional campaigns. They also included more amenities, such as portable restrooms and free bottled water. While the largest programs dwarfed the others in cost, they also generated sizable crowds, and all had seen growing participation over the last few years. Smaller programs experienced smaller crowds, though more aggressive promotional campaigns seemed to draw larger crowds to even the smallest locations, as evidenced by the success of Charleston's 2nd Sunday program which is promoted by the City, its sponsors, and all participating businesses.

Table 5. Case Cities

	Atlanta	Austin	San Antonio	Portland	Charleston	Savannah	Rome	Macon*
Title	<i>Streets Alive</i>	<i>Viva! Streets</i>	<i>Siclovia</i>	<i>Sunday Parkways</i>	<i>2nd Sunday on King</i>	<i>Play Streets</i>	<i>Streets Alive</i>	<i>First Friday</i>
Frequency	3x annually	Annual	2x annually	Monthly (May-Sep)	Monthly	2x annually	Annual	Monthly
Route length	2-6 mi	1.5 mi	2.2 mi	6-9 mi	.6 mi	.2 mi	.56 mi	~1 sq mi
Cost per occurrence	\$35,000	\$40,000	\$75,000	\$93,000	\$9,000	\$12,500	\$2,000	\$1,500
Organizer	Non-profit	Partnership	Non-profit	Public	Non-profit	Partnership	Public	Public
Major sponsors	Coke, City	HEB, City	HEB, City	Kaiser Permanente, City	King St Marketing Group	Partnership for a Healthier America	Bike Walk NW GA	Robins Federal Credit Union
Average attendance	17,500	20,000	45,000	20,000	10,000	900	900	2,000
Cost per attendee	\$2	\$2	\$1.66	\$4.50	\$.90	\$13.9	\$2.2	\$.75

*Macon's program does not include a street closure

The organizational arrangements present in the case cities demonstrate some of the range of options available when considering an open streets program. Many of the most frequently recurring programs are operated by a public entity;

since the recurring nature of the program demands continuing oversight and a close relationship with a municipality to manage street closures, permits, and the like, this might be expected. However, public entities are limited in their ability to collect sponsor donations and absorb the risks associated with the program. This means that partnerships are highly appealing, with even the public-led programs bringing in a smaller partner to absorb fundraising and liability. Some partnerships bring together a public entity and a private for-profit group, such as an event management firm. Others partner the public entity with a local non-profit. In three of the cases the non-profit actually took the lead, with a range of support and/or involvement from the local public entities. In two cases (Atlanta and San Antonio) the program began with greater public entity involvement, and then transitioned toward most of the operational burden being on the non-profit partner. In others, such as Portland, the public entity stepped up its involvement over time. In none of the cases was the public entity not involved somehow; likewise, all of them involve some level of participation from a partner non-profit organization.

On the sponsor front, larger programs unsurprisingly had larger sponsors, with all programs reporting that they gathered larger sponsors as the program drew more attention and established itself in the community. Smaller programs more commonly identified one central sponsor who can support the program nearly in full in exchange for title rights and promotion. Larger programs instead featured a number of presenting sponsors who provide the central funding backbone and then a volume of additional sponsors to provide cash or in-kind support as possible. Sponsors identified a number of incentives to partner with a program, including shared goals, promotional value, and community interaction. Some sponsors have supported the program as a way to further their own mission or sub-mission, while others view it as a way to give back to their community and foster their image as community conscientious businesses.

Program organizers noted the importance of setting clear program goals in order to provide a vision and guidance for organizing the program and evaluating its success. The three most common goals identified were increasing physical activity, fostering community interaction, and encouraging economic development. Community development is the most common goal, followed closely by increased physical activity, then economic development. Four case cities identified either physical activity or economic development goals, but not both: this demonstrates that while there are opportunities to accomplish both goals in one program (note the other four cases listing both goals), the strategies may be different in many regards. Community development was prevalent regardless, while a number of other goals were present in only a few of the cases.

Multiple interview participants noted the importance of pairing program features to program goals in order to maximize the impact of the program. For example, physical activity goals demanded a significant change to the space, hence the use of the road closure in all cases where that goal was present. The closure of the street provided space for participants to bike and walk freely, and also generated open space in which programs could hold a range of group activities such as Zumba, yoga, dance classes, soccer, basketball, and even special activities like rock climbing, clay sculpting, or “bad poetry reading”. The provision of group

activity space was common, and while not strictly tied to community development goals, participants noted it as a valuable tool for fostering interaction. In the same way, economic development goals require close coordination and involvement with the business community to be fully effective. Among these cases that meant either extended hours and special deals, opening the business into the street (hanging clothing racks outside, expanding outdoor seating), providing special activities, or even special open container ordinances. Direct participation from community partners (local non-profits, advocacy groups, resource centers, faith-based orgs, etc.) was also very common, with interview participants noting it as a valuable tool for building relationships and drawing interest, as well as building civic awareness. Table 7 depicts the suite of general program features present in the case cities.

Table 7. Program Features

	Atlanta	Austin	San Antonio	Portland	Charleston	Savannah	Rome	Macon
Road closure	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Business Involvement	X	X			X		X	X
Dedicated group activity space	X	X	X	X		X	X	
Open shared space	X	X	X	X		X		
Community partner participation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	

While only five of the eight case cities had explicit development goals, all eight worked with the local business community as part of the program. In three cases this took the form of informing local merchants; the other five actively involved businesses in the program. Even those programs not specifically aiming to boost a business corridor were aware of the impacts that a street closure might have on businesses, and worked closely with local businesses to boost their awareness and provide them with opportunities to either boost business or at least reduce the undue impacts that the closure might have for them. Table 8 shows both the range of development strategies and the impacts observed for each case city.

Table 8. Economic Development and Open Streets

	Development Goal	Development Program Strategies	Business Impacts Observed
Atlanta	Yes	Dense mixed-use corridor; businesses expanded hours, space, and activities, no outside vendors	Businesses which were actively engaged in some way (special activities, specials) reported increased sales; mixed results from remaining businesses (though businesses along corridors consistently ask for a return of the program)
Austin	No	Contact with businesses during planning	Some reported higher traffic and exposure, others reported same as usual; appears that businesses more engaged in the program did better business

San Antonio	No	Contact with businesses during planning	Small retail and restaurant businesses have reported increased sales and traffic; businesses have all approved return of program each year
Portland	Yes	Outside vendors excluded, occasional inclusion of commercial corridor, business involvement	Mixed responses; some corridors have had lower than normal traffic as potential clients are active rather than entering businesses (varies greatly among type of business). Also commercial density is low.
Charleston	Yes	Promotion, dense commercial corridor, expanded business space, cooperation, no outside vendors	Majority of businesses have reported it as their best Sunday of the year (60-65%), with additional businesses reporting their best day of the month. All businesses on corridor (regardless of direct sales boost) are supporters of program
Savannah	No	Businesses involved in planning	Positive reception from the few businesses along route
Rome	Yes	Ties into promotion of major annual event, dense commercial corridor	Some businesses have expressed increased sales and promotional benefits; others have reported that the clientele does not suit their particular business.
Macon	Yes	Promotion, dense commercial corridor, expanded space and hours, specials	Mixed impact directly on businesses (program occurs on Friday night), though city has seen increase in interest in the area, with additional investment and development in downtown

Among those cities seeking to generate development outcomes, popular strategies include the selection of a dense commercial corridor with sufficient residential density nearby to draw strong crowds, prominent and consistent promotion of the program through all media (particularly web, social media, and local news outlets), special business offerings (including extended hours, reduced prices, outdoor seating/shopping), and the exclusion of any outside vendors. Some programs worked closely with businesses that rely heavily upon auto access (such as furniture stores) to provide alternative routes, come-back coupons, and other incentives to boost their business through the program as well. Businesses have reported back to organizers mixed results in all cases, with a few consistent trends: First, businesses that are actively engaged in the program and take advantage of the crowds do much better sales days than normal, and much higher increases than other businesses. Also, retailers and restaurants consistently benefit the most from the programs, with other businesses seeing little direct impact. Finally, in all cases the program served to support a stronger community identity for the corridor, and many communities identified increased investment in the corridor over time since implementation of the program. Put another way, the programs all demonstrated some form of development outcomes, and were particularly effective where businesses took full advantage of the opportunity.

Considering the positive development impacts, as well as the positive responses that all of the case programs reported from participants, local elected officials, and stakeholders, one might expect a high degree of interest in expanding the program. After all, if a semi-annual program is working, why not expand it? However, a common concern presented itself in the interviews: program dilution. It turns out, if the cases are any indication, there is an optimal balance between the

advantages of a frequently recurring program (like public awareness, ease of planning, and compounding of outcomes) and the appeal that a “special event” has. In some cases, as they attempted to expand the program’s frequency they found that partners had a harder time devoting the same resources, and the impact of each single event was reduced. At the same time, the draw of the program was slightly reduced as it became too frequent, with less participants showing up than when the program was less frequent.

If there is an optimal program frequency, it likely varies based upon competing programs, the size of the population, the locations of the program sites, and the scale of support available for the program. In almost every case the biggest barrier to even considering expansion (either to more dates or to bigger routes) was the difficulty of finding additional sponsors for the program. With sufficient support for the program, more frequent options become quickly available. However, even once securing additional resources it appears to behoove organizers to consider the appropriate expansion strategy for their particular desired outcomes.

Recommendations

New Program Suggestions

A few general recommendations can be gleaned from this research, applicable to potential new programs. First among these is the importance of a close partnership (or at least working relationship) between a local public entity and one or more community organizations (likely an existing non-profit with experience in event organization and operation). A non-profit can solicit and coordinate volunteers and secure donations and sponsors. Having a public entity involved will make it easier to secure street closures, work with local communities, and manage much of the required steps. The second recommendation is that goal setting is critical when constructing a program. Without a clear set of program goals to guide program development and organization it will be much harder to maximize the value of the program. Involving a diverse suite of stakeholders and participants offers the best opportunity for a successful program, and may lead to valuable partnerships beyond the program as well.

Fourth, clear program goals can act as guidance when making decisions about program features. By matching the program to its goals, opportunities for overlap can be identified and conflicts avoided. This matching is crucial for generating the maximum impact from a program, an ever-present goal given the tight competition for the resources of municipalities, sponsors, and non-profit partners. Finally, program evaluation, particularly based on program goals, is invaluable to improving and sustaining a program.

Conclusions

On the basis of the case comparison and the limited number of survey results, we can draw some general conclusions about the research questions. Each question was left intentionally broad at the outset, to allow for the potential variation in programs suggested at by the literature. The qualitative nature of the

research methods also suggest speaking broadly about these specific cases, focusing on commonalities and differences as indicative of the significant findings.

R1: How are Open Streets programs organized, and operated? What goals are associated with the programs?

Cooperation and collaboration between one or more public entities and non-profit organizations appears to be central to the successful organization and operation of an Open Streets program. In some cases the program is operated by a public entity and other components outside the realm of local governments (fundraising, event management, volunteers) are managed by a non-profit. In other cases public entities are a support structure, providing resources, coordination, or other services to make the programs (operated by a non-profit) possible. In all cases the goals were very much public policy goals, including goals related to improving local economic development, transportation, public health, and community well being.

R2: What benefits do stakeholders see from the programs? How do these benefits influence program structure, organization, and/or funding?

In all cases the associated public entities saw community benefits, including increased activity and positive perceptions of their community. Sponsors, particularly the large private sponsors who were critical to the operation of the programs, displayed little interest in specifically influencing program organization or operation, but did attach themselves to programs to accomplish a range of their own goals. Most sponsors use the programs as community outreach efforts, with the added benefit of encouraging particular outcomes associated with their firm's priorities. For the non-profit partners, program features and activities are used to influence the outcomes associated with a program in ways that generally match their organizational priorities. The level of involvement of business partners in planning appears to directly influence other merchants' interest, and lead to programs coalescing around special offers, outdoor seating, extended hours, and promotion sponsored and facilitated by those businesses. Programs targeting economic development goals appeared far more successful at realizing those benefits when businesses were fully involved, not just informed. Finally, location decisions play a part in realizing particular benefits, as an effective economic development strategy requires the appropriate commercial corridor; likewise, a physical-activity strategy requires a diversity of activities and residential density.

R3: How do Open Streets impact businesses along the route?

Across the limited number of business surveys collected, as well as the comments of case program stakeholders, business impacts varied widely. Most programs reported anecdotal increases in traffic and revenue at businesses, with some programs resulting in the busiest business days of the year. At the same time, programs are far more effective for retail and restaurant establishments than other merchants, and merchants who invested the resources to actively engage program

participants appear to be more successful at seeing returns than do businesses that operate as usual. It appears that program organization, promotion, and the level of involvement on the part of businesses are all tied to the effectiveness of Open Streets as an economic development program.

R4(a): What factors influence the frequency of recurrence of Open Streets programs?

R4(b): Is there interest on the part of stakeholders to increase the frequency of the programs?

For programs operating at an annual or semi-annual frequency, interest in expanding frequency was high. Many reported an interest in holding programs throughout the warm weather months. However, amongst those programs already holding a monthly program (or a monthly program during the warm seasons), there was less interest in expanding. Despite the different levels of enthusiasm for expanding program frequency, all respondents noted a lack of resources as the biggest barrier to expansion, particularly the cash and staff time needed to hold a program more frequently. They also noted the value of having the program infrequently enough to make it a special attraction.

This leads to one additional common sentiment expressed by many participants when discussing outcome goals: Open Streets as part of a movement. It was noted by participants that while their programs did have meaningful direct impacts, that their primary vision for the program was that it would actually spur more meaningful, ongoing changes in behavior and perspective. Some groups hoped that their programs would open participants' minds to biking and walking as means of transportation, while others wanted to showcase the enjoyment of exercise and the pleasure of spending time in a previously undervalued neighborhood or commercial corridor.

Although Open Streets programs offer significant opportunities, they are not without their own challenges and obstacles. The scale of resources needed for an effective and sustainable program is not to be underestimated, and effectively engaging a community is a sizable and ongoing challenge. At the same time, as part of a long-term strategy to effect meaningful change in a community, Open Streets suggest a creative strategy that can be tailored to the unique, diverse needs of any particular community. In this regard, they represent a creative, pragmatic tool to both generate and employ collaboration to positive effect. By working within the intersection of multiple broader issues (and at a more human level), they may be more successful at combating feedback mechanisms and addressing these complex challenges. Future efforts to assess how unique conditions have led programs to take the form they have, as well as to more successfully quantify the impact on outcomes (particularly business impacts), will offer additional opportunities to better understand these programs. In the meantime, it appears that the growing interest in such programs as policy tools is unlikely to decline.

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