

STREET collective

2021 City Council Candidate Questionnaire

INTRODUCTION

Just like in 2017 and 2019, the Street Collective wants to know where Des Moines City Council candidates stand on safe streets and active transportation issues. This questionnaire serves to educate and inform the Collective's members and the public. The Collective is an Iowa non-profit corporation and 501(c)(3) organization, so it does not endorse candidates for office. The Collective will, however, encourage all citizens to vote in the city elections held on November 2, 2021.

After the deadline below, the Collective will post these responses on its website (www.dsmstreetcollective.org), Facebook, Twitter, and other online platforms. All responses should be considered public, including a decision not to respond to a particular question or the questionnaire as a whole. We use the terms "walking" and "walkability" as inclusive of people who use mobility devices.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please submit your responses via email to Mike Armstrong at Mike@dsmstreetcollective.org by September 21, 2021.

CANDIDATE INFORMATION

Name: Marcus Coenen

Pronouns: He/Him

Ward or At-Large seat: Ward 1

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PRIORITIES

1. What are three transportation projects you want the City to complete during your term?

- 1) **Merle Hay Corridor Study** - Merle Hay Road is an essential northwest corridor that provides entry into northwest Des Moines. I would like to see a corridor study for the Merle Hay Road corridor that looks at how safety can be improved while also supporting the various land uses from the residential neighborhoods to the south to the commercial corridor in the north.
- 2) **Douglas Avenue Corridor** - We are off to a great start on the Douglas Avenue corridor with the reconfiguration of travel lanes. I would like to see additional improvements made to make pedestrian travel easier across and along the corridor.
- 3) **Connect Downtown** - I would like to see the downtown street network transitioned from one-way streets to two-way streets so we can have a more walkable downtown.

2. Scenario: a proposed street project would add a bike lane, a wider sidewalk, or a bus-only lane, but would remove some on-street parking spaces or a car traffic lane. How would you decide whether to support that project?

I would decide to support this project if two things can be demonstrated. First, does the project improve safety for the traveling public? Based on the scenario I would assume there are some safety benefits to be gained through the alternatives identified. If safety on our streets will be improved by the project I would support the change.

Second, it appears the proposed project would create a complete street. Having our streets support all modes of travel is important to create a safe, sustainable, and stronger city.

3. Scenario: a developer proposes a project with affordable housing, but there are no transit lines, grocery stores, or sidewalks nearby. How would you decide whether to support that project?

First, it is great that a developer is proposing a project with affordable housing - Des Moines and the region need more affordable housing. A major component of household budgets that are often overlooked when

discussing the need for more affordable housing is the cost of transportation.

I would support this project after discussing how the developer intends to address transportation costs related to the location not having transit connections or sidewalks nearby. One item that would help me support this project would be if the developer-funded a shuttle service for residents or identified a vehicle share program for residents. I would also like to see the developer work with the City to build the sidewalk or trail network to help connect the site to services.

4. Scenario: a proposed street project would deviate from the MoveDSM and/or Connect Downtown plans for that street. (Note: both were unanimously approved by the City Council and aim to make Des Moines more walkable and bike-friendly.) How would you decide whether to support that project?

I would support the project if it improves the safety of the traveling public on our streets. I am proposing the need for the City to complete a Vision Zero plan to identify strategies to make our streets safer. If we reduce the likelihood of potential injury or death from our streets we will be moving forward to creating a more walkable and bike-friendly city.

WALKING

5. What investments, if any, do you support that would make sidewalks and crosswalks easier and safer to use for people with disabilities?
 - 1) We need to increase our paint budget so we can delineate crosswalks throughout our city. This will help alert drivers that they should expect other users to enter the street.
 - 2) We need to make sure crosswalks at intersections are appropriately designed to accommodate pedestrian crossings. One example of an intersection that needs significant improvements is Euclid Ave and the entrance to Polk County River Place.
 - 3) We need to put more funding toward completing our sidewalk network.
 - 4) We need to identify midblock crossing locations that are frequently used and would be safer with crosswalks and/or pedestrian hybrid beacons.

6. In 1969, about 50% of American children walked or biked to school. Today, less than 10% do. What should the City do to reverse this trend?

Maintaining infrastructure around our neighborhood schools is essential to increasing walking and biking to school. That means we need to make sure there are no gaps in sidewalks along school walk routes or missing crosswalks at intersections.

We also need to work with our school district, school officials, and PTAs to encourage other modes of travel to school for our kids. We need to work to create walking school buses and ensure crossing guards are located at busy intersections.

BICYCLING

7. Many cities have significant public funding for bike share programs. Do you support increased City funding for the BCycle system? Why or why not?

I would support increased funding for BCycle because it offers access to a mode of travel other than a personal vehicle. However, I would like to see BCycle continue to increase ridership and expand the system further into neighborhoods in Ward 1. We currently only have four stations in Ward 1 which are all located around Drake University.

Also, I would like to see the BCycle system become a regional system that allows residents the opportunity to utilize our extensive regional trail network. Therefore, I would like to see regional transportation funding increase as well. I am currently monitoring how the new federal infrastructure bill will make bike share systems eligible for additional funding.

8. Imagine a 10-year old and a 70-year old bicycling on a busy street. What kinds of infrastructure protections would you want in place to ensure their safety and comfort? If there are budget constraints for a street like the one you described, at what point do finances rise above safety concerns for you?

On a busy street that is used by riders of varying levels of ability, I would like to see protected or separated bike facilities. Ideally, the facility would have a well-delineated buffer between vehicles and bicycles, as well as,

bicycles and pedestrians. The new project on Ingersoll Avenue is an example of creating that designated area for all users.

Safety must be the top priority for every project on our city streets. Evaluating the life-cycle benefits and costs of a project should be the norm for all city projects. Using a life-cycle evaluation, the long-term safety benefits will likely show that the marginal increase in cost today will reward residents well into the future.

TRANSIT

9. How can the City help DART improve its bus system and attract more riders?

Foremost, we need to increase density along key transit corridors where appropriate to create transit-supportive corridors. Adding density where we are able will provide DART with potentially more riders on those routes and give those residents more options for how they move through the city.

We need to work on getting all local routes to seven-day service. I have previously taken DART to get to work downtown, but was unable to take DART to events I wanted to attend on weekends because the route that I typically take does not have weekend service.

Next, we need to work on improving the frequency of buses. Increasing the frequency of buses will improve the perception that you could just walk down the street and hop on a bus - rather than planning your trip, standing and waiting, and then being delayed. Increasing the frequency of buses will attract more riders.

Lastly, I would like to see a proposal for making transit free for all riders. This approach has been successful in other cities, so why not see if it is a possibility for Des Moines.

10. We consistently see DART stops blocked by snow and unreachable by sidewalks. How can the City address this?

The city needs to accelerate the construction of sidewalks throughout the city. We have far too many streets that lead to bus stops that do not have

sidewalks. Being able to access public transportation starts and ends with sidewalks. If we do not have them, how can we expect residents to use transit?

I think the city can work with DART to make sure snow is removed from boarding and alighting locations. While removing snow from streets is the priority during snow events, it would make sense to me to have our public works team assist with clearing bus stops where needed.

EQUITY

11. What should the role of the police be in traffic enforcement? What is the best way to hold drivers accountable for speeding, blocking bike lanes and crosswalks, failing to stop or yield, etc.?

Traffic enforcement has traditionally been one of the elements of creating safe streets, however, that has changed in recent years as data related to traffic stops not being as effective at improving safety. Traffic stops have also been documented as a tool to arrest individuals for non-traffic-related offenses.

We need to design better streets that cue drivers to the behavior we would like to see on streets. We need to design our streets for reasonable speed limits in residential areas. We need to physically separate bike lanes so parked cars cannot block them. We need to paint crosswalks when we have pedestrians crossing.

12. Much of Des Moines is zoned for low-density uses like detached single-family homes and commercial properties that require many car parking spaces. What impacts, if any, does this have on the transportation system? What policies, if any, do you support to combat those impacts?

The combination of vast areas of single-family housing and commercial properties with large parking lots supports the notion that to move about the region you need a car and you need to drive. The more you continue to add tracts of single-family housing, the more land you need to use and the more you encourage driving long distances to get to employment centers.

Some cities have eliminated single-family housing in their zoning codes to help add density that could combat. I am not sure this is entirely appropriate for the City of Des Moines as there are still areas targeted for growth within the Iowa 5 Bypass that would make sense as single-family units.

I think we can continue to move away from parking requirements and work with commercial property owners to identify better ways to use existing parking when a new land use is being added to an area. We should also move away from requiring traffic impact studies that tell the developer what auto-oriented improvements they need to help fund. Instead, we should implement a Transportation Demand Management policy that requires new developments to demonstrate how they are helping reduce single-occupant vehicle trips by adding amenities like bike lockers, pedestrian connections to transit, and reduced parking stalls.

13. Neighborhoods where fewer people can afford a car (i.e., those that are poorer and have a higher proportion of people of color) are also those lacking good transit, safe walking and biking, and quality streetscapes (e.g., trees, benches, trash cans, public art, etc.). How would you address these inequities?

To have complete streets in the City of Des Moines, we need to focus on building streets that not only move individuals. We need to create streets that have amenities that make our streets a safe and comfortable location to travel.

In neighborhoods that lack good transit, we need to identify routes that can be adjusted to better serve residents. We need to connect homes to transit with sidewalks. We need to invest in neighborhoods to complete our streets.

14. The largest source of climate change-causing greenhouse gases in America is from transportation. What role should the City have in cutting these pollutants?

Electrification of the transportation sector needs to happen as quickly as possible to address transportation's role in climate change. We need to continue to convert our fleet of city vehicles - including heavy trucks - to electric or other alternative fuels. We need to add charging stations throughout downtown to support the transition to personal electric vehicles. We need to set policies for regional funding that requires new

bus purchases to be electric. We need to help our school districts convert to electric school buses.

We need to convert all of those vehicles and then we need to start generating electricity locally by adding solar canopies over city-owned parking. This will help the city support the transition to an electric fleet, while also offsetting our carbon footprint for the production of the energy needed to supply the electric vehicles. (Another benefit of the canopies is how they protect vehicles from weather events like hail).

YOU PERSONALLY

15. How often do you walk, ride a bike, or ride transit for your daily needs? Would you accept the Street Collective's challenge to live without driving for a week?

Before the pandemic, I was taking transit and walking quite often for daily needs. One of the reasons we purchased our house was its proximity to a grocery store. Since the pandemic, I have tried to limit my daily trips as much as possible and still find walking to neighborhood businesses very enjoyable.

Currently, I walk my daughter to her daycare about a mile away from home. It is a great way for us to spend time together every morning. I think her favorite part is getting to see all the dogs out for their morning walks.

I would be more than happy to accept the challenge to live without driving for a week.

16. What is your favorite street to walk or bike on in Des Moines? Why do you like it?

I think my favorite street to walk on in Des Moines is Franklin Avenue. The section of Franklin Ave that we usually walk on has nice street trees and transit stops. We can walk to the grocery store, to get dinner, or to get ice cream at Snookies. I also really enjoy biking on the newly restriped section of Franklin Ave with its bike lane and lower speed limit.

I know there are still plans in the works to improve Franklin Ave with additional storm sewer work, but knowing that a group of neighbors spoke up to make sure Franklin Ave has a speed limit that is appropriate for the new design really makes that section important.