

Chapter 9

Driver Focus Group Results

QUALITY-OF-LIFE STUDY OF THE 7th AVENUE AND 7th STREET REVERSE LANES

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CHAPTER 9: DRIVER FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

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Focus Group Overview

Two focus groups representing drivers identified in the study area were held at the end of March and April of 2008. The participants in both focus groups were found via a solicitation enclosed with the surveys they received by mail. Of ten residents who were scheduled for the March focus group, six participated. For the April focus group, of six that were scheduled, five participated.

The driver focus groups followed a format similar to the other focus groups in the study. Each discussion lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The perspectives and opinions of each of the participants regarding the costs and benefits of the reverse lanes were discussed and then various solutions were discussed. The discussion was transcribed and analyzed using both pseudo-quantitative and qualitative methods. Using a qualitative analysis software package called Xsight¹, each statement from the discussions was classified into one or several topic areas enabling the comparison of topic emphasis from group to group. In the end, there were 39 topic areas discussed among all four of the focus groups. This chapter reviews the range of topics discussed in the driver focus groups, and tries to tease out the most important topics discussed. We then present quotations from the discussions which exemplify these key themes. Detailed transcripts from the discussions are provided at the end of the chapter.

Range of Topics Discussed

Statements from the discussions were classified into a total of 39 “topics” and tallied for their significance. Table 9-1 below is set in order from greatest to least commonly discussed topic. This focus group sample discussed the least number of concerns of all the focus group samples - just 16 of the 39 possible topics. This total is less than ½ of the next highest range of comments received from the pedestrian focus groups.

Table 9-1 Focus Group Topical Summary: Drivers’ Results Highlighted

Discussion Topics	Drv Cnt	Drv %	Res Cnt	Res %	Bus Cnt	Bus %	Ped Cnt	Ped %	Total Count	Total %
RL rules are confusing to some drivers	11	15%	23	11%	9	5%	13	8%	49.5	9%
Afraid/avoid using the RL	10	14%	5	2%	5	3%	0	0%	20	4%
Congestion is apparent along RL	9	12%	16	8%	12	6%	8	5%	41	7%
RL's create better traffic flow/ reducing congestion	6	8%	10	5%	3	2%	5	3%	21.5	4%
More enforcement is needed	6	8%	8	4%	7	4%	6	4%	24	4%
Afraid/difficulty turning left or right	4	5%	23	11%	11	6%	3	2%	39.5	7%
Benefits of RL are worth keeping it	4	5%	10	5%	3	2%	7	5%	20.5	4%
RL's are Dangerous	4	5%	5	2%	10	5%	4	3%	21	4%
Light Rail/ Construction Impact	4	5%	4	2%	1	1%	7	5%	12.5	2%
Illegal Lefts	3	4%	4	2%	4	2%	4	3%	13	2%
RL is used incorrectly	3	4%	2	1%	3	2%	0	0%	8	1%
Road-rage	2	3%	7	3%	2	1%	8	5%	15	3%
Shortens travel times	2	3%	5	2%	0	0%	1	1%	7.5	1%

¹ See http://www.qsrinternational.com/products_xsight.aspx for more information about Xsight.

Weaving in-and-out of lanes	2	3%	1	0.5%	1	1%	0	0%	4	1%
Congestion due to busses	2	3%	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%	3	1%
More accidents in lieu of RL	1	1%	8	4%	7	4%	1	1%	16.5	3%
Traffic cutting through neighborhoods	0	0%	14	7%	14	7%	2	1%	29	5%
Speeding on Street	0	0%	12	6%	25	13%	4	3%	39	7%
Speeding in neighborhoods	0	0%	9	4%	0	0%	2	1%	10	2%
Start/Ending time confusion	0	0%	8	4%	0	0%	2	1%	9	2%
Traffic lights and LH turns between blocks helps	0	0%	8	4%	0	0%	0	0%	8	1%
Honking	0	0%	4	2%	5	3%	3	2%	10.5	2%
Dangerous to cross mid-block	0	0%	4	2%	3	2%	11	7%	12.5	2%
Pollution issues	0	0%	4	2%	0	0%	0	0%	4	1%
Prefers least expensive alternatives	0	0%	4	2%	0	0%	0	0%	4	1%
Dangerous environment for pedestrians	0	0%	3	1%	8	4%	24	16%	23	4%
Pedestrian Deaths/Accidents	0	0%	3	1%	4	2%	7	5%	10.5	2%
Anxiety and Stress	0	0%	2	1%	5	3%	3	2%	8.5	2%
Cut-thru parking lots	0	0%	2	1%	2	1%	1	1%	4.5	1%
Tailgating	0	0%	2	1%	2	1%	0	0%	4	1%
Necessity in lieu of freeways	0	0%	1	0.5%	6	3%	1	1%	7.5	1%
Run the red light	0	0%	1	0.5%	0	0%	6	4%	4	1%
Decreases number of cm	0	0%	0	0%	13	7%	0	0%	13	2%
Desire for more Pedestrian Amenities and Urban Lifestyle	0	0%	0	0%	10	5%	13	8%	16.5	3%
Hard to access businesses	0	0%	0	0%	7	4%	0	0%	7	1%
Turning out of businesses	0	0%	0	0%	7	4%	0	0%	7	1%
Cm complain about the RL or traffic	0	0%	0	0%	5	3%	0	0%	5	1%
Delivery impacts	0	0%	0	0%	4	2%	3	2%	5.5	1%
J-walking	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	5	3%	2.5	0%
Total	73	100%	212	100%	199	100%	154	100%	561	100%

Emphasized Topics

The most commonly recurring discussion topic concerned the confusing nature of the reverse lanes. This issue was raised 11 times, which represents a 15% share of all the topics mentioned in during the process of the focus groups. The second most prevalent issue is the drivers' fear and avoidance of using the reverse lanes while driving on 7th Street or 7th Avenue (10 counts, or 14% share). Other topics were often stated, such as congestion found along the reverse lane routes (9 counts, or 12% share), the idea that the reverse lanes reduce congestion and improve traffic flows (6 counts, or 8% share), and the need for more enforcement (6 counts, or 8% share). The following common themes held an equal share (4 counts), or 5% share of the topics discussed: difficulty of turning left or right, the overall dangerous nature of the reverse lanes, light rail and road construction impacts and the view that the benefits outweigh the negative impacts of the reverse lanes.

These findings demonstrate that though the drivers often mentioned a few positive effects of the reverse lanes, drivers were more likely to discuss the negative aspects. In fact, from the focus groups proceedings, it was apparent that a significant share of drivers avoid using the lanes, and would be in favor of their removal, while only a few are enthusiastic users of the lanes. It is not surprising that most of the concerns offered by the drivers relate to issues that directly affect drivers, such as the topics that relate to traffic flow and functional aspects of the reverse lanes. It is, on the other hand, surprising that speeding, dangers to pedestrians and neighborhood cut-through traffic were not mentioned at all. Other topics not discussed are traffic impacts such as honking, speeding or pollution, that are by nature just as or more visible to pedestrians and others viewing traffic from an external point of view, such as business owners and residents. The absence of the wide array of topics from the driver focus groups may be the result of the narrow perspective drivers have on their driving experiences. If drivers' primary use of 7th Street and 7th Avenue is an insignificant and relatively short-term trip to and from work, their attention could be more on their destination ahead than on peripheral issues that are of greater concern to other stakeholders.

Drivers varied in their preferred solutions to the reverse lane issues. Some seemed to be in favor of removing the reverse lane and designating it as a standard two-way left hand turn lane. Others would also like to see additional signage or lighting that more clearly indicate to drivers how and when to use the reverse lanes. The drivers did not clearly indicate any preference for implementing traffic calming measures, additional stop lights between blocks or pedestrian or urban amenities.

Specific Quotations

Below is a sample of quotations offered during the driver focus groups that provide insights into the topics discussed. The quotations may include minor editing to remove original names or to improve readability and punctuation.

1. Illegal left: "I never use that lane [the reverse lane], but only in the evening to turn left at the intersections. And I never get a ticket."
2. Avoids 7th Street: "I rarely use it [7th Street]. There are police and ambulances and accidents going on along 7th Street."
3. Bus pull-outs: "I agree on bus pull-outs. Put as many of these as possible."
4. Lack of enforcement: "More enforcement! More police physically there, and heftier fines, perhaps even suspended driver licenses. People are apathetic towards the legality for enforcement for the past 20 years. "
5. Use police and added lighting: "Drivers enforce themselves, lighted signage would be [the] most cost effective way, increase police monitoring for the first year to pay for the lit signage. Strobe light during the time it is active."
6. Confusing nature: "Tinkering with the lanes are a drop in the bucket, make the signage better, make driver more aware; make the driving test more strict and informative."

7. Education: “Put the reverse lane on the drivers’ test, so drivers are aware of the reverse lane.”
8. Avoids the lanes: “I avoid them at all costs, even though I live very close to them. Often times, I see 11 cars facing head to head and stuck in the reverse lane.”
9. One-way roads: “I’m opposed the way they [the reverse lanes] are now. If 7th Avenue were a one-way street going south and 7th Street a one-way street going north, it might work out for the lane.”
10. In favor of the reverse lanes: “I’m FOR IT. I drive it all the time, although it is much more dangerous in the evening. In the morning it is not as dangerous.”
11. In favor: “I’m FOR IT. It’s more apathy than confusion!”
12. Takes longer to arrive at destination: “I’m against it, and live really close the reverse lane. It takes an extra 15 to 20 minutes to get home.”
13. When to use the reverse lane: “In the morning, I always use the reverse lane, but in the evening – I NEVER use the lane.”
14. Preference for more police: “Photo radar wouldn’t work; it would have to [be] physical police officers.”

Comparison with other Focus Group Samples

The most common topics discussed by drivers were also discussed by all other focus group samples, although the frequency in which they appeared was different. For example, eight of the top nine topics of drivers were also raised by the other focus group samples. It is significant to note that drivers mentioned a fear of using the reverse lanes less than the businesses and residents. Some topics are strongly represented throughout the sample groups, including drivers, such as the confusing nature of the lanes, the need for more enforcement and the finding of congestion along the reverse lane routes, though it is noticed that drivers identified these issues proportionately more than did other sample groups.

Conclusions

The focus groups revealed that drivers are split on whether there is really a problem with the reverse lanes. Some emphasize issues such as safety, left-turn restrictions, confusing rules, aggressive driving, and the detraction from local accessibility, while others emphasize the improved north-south flows it provides. Typically, those in discussions who had longer commutes were in favor of keeping the lanes as they are, while those from central Phoenix preferred returning them to normal operation. While those opposed to the lanes were fairly passionate about its costs, we could find only a couple who were adamant supporters of the status quo. All could agree that better signage was in order, perhaps even adding sections on driver education programs covering reverse lane driving. What was evident was that those wanting to return the lanes to normal try to use the street for more than a twice-a-day thoroughfare, while the commuters see few problems. It is in the end a difference of viewpoint because of the different ways the two groups use the streets.

Focus Group Transcripts

Two focus groups were held for drivers along 7th Street and 7th Avenue. The transcripts for the applicable discussions are provided below.

Driver's Focus Group Minutes

ASU Traffic Study

Which direction do you use the 7s, at which times?

- 1: 7th st morning and evening
- 2: 6:45am 7th street both ways during rush hour
- 3: 7th ave south morning and evening
- 4: 7th street m-f 8:15 – 8:30am mountain view
- 5: 7th ave north from freeway in afternoon
- 6: 7th street from south to north evening

Are you familiar with the reverse lanes on 7th ave and 7th street?

try to avoid reverse lane, it's dangerous
 rarely use the reverse lane, it's dangerous
 as a passing lane, only, it is dangerous... illegal left-turn at lights extremely dangerous!
 morning, always use the reverse lane, evening – NEVER use the lane
 never use reverse lane, only makes illegal left-turn in the evening, never gets a ticket.
 Use it only for passing, only in the afternoon, people slow down because he drives a Crown Victoria, always for passing.

Who uses these lanes regularly?

They all did.

If you have to categorize yourself loosely into against, for or neutral – who here really does not like the reverse lanes?

- : They would be good were the enforced by the police. Never see police on 7th street. Opposed to how it currently is.
- : Opposed the way they are now, 7th ave 1 way south, 7th street 1 way north it might work out for the suicide lane
- : not black and white, don't like the lane, but realizes it still benefits me. Somewhat neutral.
- : FOR IT. Drive it all the time, although it is much more dangerous in the evening, in the morning it is not as dangerous. Make people aware of it... needs to be informed by the public. Never have to make a left hand turn mostly on 7th street.
- RM: against it, lives really close the reverse lane. It takes an extra 15 to 20 minutes to get home. Rarely uses it... police and ambulances and accidents going on. From 7th street.
- : FOR IT. More apathy than confusion!

What would you do to the lanes differently?

: MORE enforcement!!! More police physically there, and heftier fines, perhaps even suspended driver licenses. People are apathetic towards the legality for enforcement, for the past 20 years. I want the violators to be fined.

: easiest solution, make it back into a left-turn lane. 1 way north 1 way south, would be first choice... 2nd choice would be have to a red x's and green triangles's lights. Lit up red arrow for left-turns. Friends from Scottsdale and else where don't understand the reverse lanes. Photo radar wouldn't work, it would have to physical police officers

: do not want 2 directions, left-turns. Do want lit arrow and red x, photo enforcement no matter. All the time north and south 7's.

: drivers enforce themselves, light signage would be most cost effective way, increase police monitoring for the first year to pay for the lit signage. Strobe light during the time it is active.

: against the reverse lane, need the reverse lane might go away because of the light rail. Looking for a solution is difficult

: add bus pullouts, strobe lights.

Are there specific locations along these two corridors that have specific difficulties?

: Madison school 10th street and state! Left-turn is allowed, because it is mid block.

:

: agree on the bus pullouts, as many of those as possible

: Indian school is a really busy intersection. 7th st and Missouri is a really difficult intersection in the morning.

: nothing specific

: morning southbound 7th ave and Thomas, evening northbound 7th ave and Camelback (weird u-turn), indian school and 7th ave.

Driver's Focus Group

ASU Traffic Study

April 21, 2008

Where do you live?

- 1: 7th Ave. and Indian School
- 2: 7th Street and Washington , lives downtown
- 3: Glendale Ave. and Maryland
- 4: Reams Road and Cactus
- 5: 7th Avenue and Glendale

Which direction do you use the 7s, at which times?

- : Avoids them at all costs, but lives very close to them, often times sees cars facing head to head and stuck in the reverse lane.
- : Almost always avoids them too
- : 7th Ave to get to work, 7th Street to get back home.
- : 7th Ave. south every morning, mostly stays in the reverse lane, no problems with it, 7:40am – 8am, Reverse lane is great, and tends to stay in the lanes. No problems with it.
- : 7th Ave takes it to work and back home, all the time enters the reverse lane, going north on 7th Ave when it becomes most dangerous, at Indian School and Camelback.

Reverse lanes

If you have to categorize yourself loosely into against, for or neutral – who here really does not like the reverse lanes?

- : (why would you avoid it?) Generally avoids the reverse lane completely, inconvenience of left hand turn, and concerned about other drivers “road rage”.
- : Usually loops around, and avoids the reverse lane, doesn't know all the rules, and rather than make a mistake avoids the reverse lane
- : Tendency to stay in a lane that doesn't change, wouldn't say I never get into it, but they do concern me, because I often see drivers in the wrong lane, or making illegal left-turn. A lot of people from out of town, don't know the rules
- : As long as it's in the morning, it tends to be safer, but still keeps the distance between cars, and slightly more cautious when the reverse lane is active.
- : Smaller pipe carries few cars. Meaning that 3 lanes will carry more cars, than simply 2 lanes. Closing down the reverse lane, would be a bad idea.

What are the benefits, if any?

- : I don't think the reverse lane, get me to where I need to be any faster, and it wasn't worth the aggravation. A lot of residents have difficulty with it, because they have to make frequent stops in and out of the neighborhood to make stops.
- : It seems to be pretty efficient and helpful, but if you need to stop and go, they don't seem to be that much helpful.
- : It the time of day, when you go on, when there isn't a whole lot of traffic. I don't see the advantage of a reverse lane - it doesn't make a difference. You can only go a

certain speed, no matter what. A lot of people getting angry no matter what, because there is a lot of traffic. Takes 7th street north to go home...

: Works just south of Indian School, 7th Ave tends to be the fastest route south, in the morning.

: More room for the road makes travel faster in general.

Are there any possible solutions? Take away the reverse lane? Make Better lighting? Changing the time when the reverse lane is in effect? Change the width of the road?

: Put the reverse lane on the drivers test, so drivers are aware of the reverse lane. Changing times of the reverse lane would be a bad idea. I'd like it to turn to normal, but it might be selfish for me to say that. Likes the idea of Red X's and Green Arrows

: I know it would be laborious, but to put down cones in the middle of the street letting drivers know when the reverse lane is in effect. Moveable concrete lanes, that are automatic, would be a good idea too.

: Our traffic has been affected by the construction of the light rail, traffic might go back on the Central and the 7's after the construction, Cristown Spectrum Mall off of 19th Ave and Glendale. The traffic situation needs to be helped somehow, and can't widen 7th Street and 7th Ave, so we have to think of another solution. Tinkering with the lanes are a drop in the bucket, make the signage better, make driver more aware, make the driving test more strict and informative.

: Votes to keep the reverse lanes in place, opts to keep them functioning as they are, the lights and signage should be upgraded to red x's or green arrows, to inform other drivers of when the reverse lanes are in effect, would be a more realistic option. Doesn't need to be put on the drivers test, because it's only in central Phoenix.

: LOVES the reverse lane, lights would be a GREAT idea, in terms electronic light solutions.

Are there any last thoughts, suggestions?

: We'd love to have some type of rapid mass transit, heavy rail, in the Valley.

: Needs to be an educational piece, about the reverse lanes, there is no city website or information about how to use the reverse lanes.

: We have just grown so much, it's hard to keep up. Busses are getting better as a means of mass transit though... but I personally don't use it, but I have friends who do.

: Never takes the rapid bus, but doesn't like the idea of spending more time using bus transit.

: Keep the lanes, just inform drivers.