



denver STREETS PARTNERSHIP

## 2023 Denver City Council Candidate Questionnaire

**Darrell Watson**

### **What are your top priorities related to transportation as a candidate? How do you expect to address them if elected?**

My top 3 priorities are: expand micro transit for first and last mile connections, protected and connected bike lanes, & fully funding 'vision zero' initiatives.

1. Denver must fully fund expanded micro transit options namely the Denver Connector (Montbello & GES current ride share program). Providing free or deeply discounted connectors ran by DOTI to supplement RTD regional transport will move more folks from single individual car trips.
2. Multi-modal transportation requires protected bike lanes that connect throughout the city. It is not the miles of bike lanes we should be measuring but the safety of the lanes as well as the connectivity those bike lanes provide. I will propose leveraging funds through CASR to expedite the VAMOS initiative to increase safe protected routes throughout the city.
3. There has been an increase in funds for Vision Zero but it is still not sufficient to reduce vehicle deaths to zero. I will increase funds and also push to prioritize safety and reducing carbon footprint instead of the number of parking spaces when considering street design.

### **Since Denver leaders made a commitment in 2017 to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious bodily injuries by 2030 (an initiative known as Vision Zero) over 460 people have been killed in preventable traffic crashes on Denver's streets. Fatalities have increased every year except 2020, when traffic volumes were significantly reduced during the pandemic. Meanwhile, other cities in the U.S. and across the world have succeeded in substantially reducing traffic fatalities. What actions do you think the City should take to ensure we reverse the current trend and actually make meaningful progress toward the goal of zero traffic fatalities here in Denver?**

I will reiterate what I stated above. As a city, our priorities are based on our funding not just our words. We must increase the funding of Vision Zero to demonstrate that we agree that increasing traffic fatalities is a public health crisis. Community informed process should inform on community desires and the city should have set requirements for street design that prioritizes safety and the environmental benchmarks as non negotiable. When DOTI and CPD engages community on zoning variance or changes even in the face of community disagreement the 5 criteria in the Comprehensive Plan is still used as the 'North Star' and doesn't change because community may not agree with the criteria.

The same expectation should exist for 'Vision Zero'. Public health experts and professionals within DOTI must develop the base criteria and execute on it with extreme transparency.

### **Recently, Denver has started making some limited investments in infrastructure to improve bus service, such as dedicated bus lanes, traffic signals that prioritize buses, and enhanced bus stops. The build out of this infrastructure has been slow, however, and the City has not proactively partnered with RTD to increase service frequency along these routes. What role do**

**you think the City should play in ensuring that Denverites have access to enough frequent, reliable public transit service to make transit a practical option for daily trips and reduce our dependence on driving?**

I think Denver should expand DOTI's role to supplement gaps in RTD service. Free micro transit options is one way to do that. Ensuring that folks across the city have access to the Denver Connector for first and final mile transportation.

**Parking issues inevitably come up in any discussion about modifying our streets to better accommodate people walking, biking, and accessing transit, and can often be a stumbling block that prevents much-needed street safety projects from moving forward. What changes, if any, would you make to how the City manages parking to ensure we are using our limited street space in the best way possible to achieve our community's goals for providing healthy, safe, and affordable transportation options for everyone?**

Our streets throughout the city were expanded to accommodate cars as the primary transportation mode. Denver's current environmental and safety goals require a dramatic shift in public policy and funding to meet those goals.

As your council member, I would collaborate with DOTI to prioritize multi-modal transportation not on street parking. We will fully fund vision zero and expedite the funding of protected & connected bike lanes, the Denver connector and widen sidewalks everywhere. The only way to change the outcry for more parking is to fully fund and then educate the public of other options. If Mexico City can do it in 10 years so can Denver.

**Denver Streets Partnership sponsored the Denver Deserves Sidewalks ballot measure, which passed in November 2022 with 56% of voter support. How will you ensure that this new sidewalk program is successfully implemented in a timely manner?**

My mom is 79 years old. She lives about a mile from me and loves her independence. She walks everywhere. She fell twice during COVID because of large cracks in sidewalk in Curtis Park. She now shuffles a little more looking down instead of straight ahead and only walks a few days of the week afraid of another fall.

I will ensure that Denver Deserves Sidewalks is implemented quickly because it is a matter of life and death for our elders and people with disabilities. Ease of mobility can extend their lives and their ability to socialize with others. I am discussing this initiative in each of my community meetings, candidate debates and when I canvass throughout D9. Once elected, I will work to fast track this through the committee process once the 6 month initial review clock elapses. This initiative is personal to me and my mom and I will do everything I can to get passed, funding flowing and sidewalks improving.

**While funding over time for biking, walking, transit, and Vision Zero has generally increased over the last five years, including the recently established Transportation and Mobility Fund, the City is still well short of what's needed to build and maintain safe, accessible infrastructure citywide. How would you expand funding for these needs?**

Denver should continue to compete for quickly depleting infrastructure dollars and seeking direct carve out by Congressman Degette through the existing federal appropriations process for large 'vision zero' projects like Colfax BRT.

We should work with large non-profits focused on community health and safety to identify any funding mechanisms that can supplement the city. We should review any expiring bonds to verify if those sources can be continued to fund safer streets. Also, looking at ways to tweak the financing mechanisms for private companies that could compete to develop our streets. Funding possibly backed by AAA bonding rating of the city at lower rates of interest and longer repayment schedules.

## **District**

District 9