
# VIRTUAL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EVENT: RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

DOWNTOWN NASHVILLE INTERSTATE CORRIDORS (DNIC) PEL STUDY

**June 2024**

Build With Us | TN TDOT Department of Transportation

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# ACRONYMS, ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

| ACRONYM/ABBREVIATION | DEFINITION |
|---|---|
| **DNIC** | Downtown Nashville Interstate Corridors |
| **EJ** | Environmental Justice |
| **ETSA** | Environmental Technical Study Area |
| **FHWA** | Federal Highway Administration |
| **I-** | Interstate |
| **LEP** | Limited English Proficiency |
| **NEPA** | National Environmental Policy Act |
| **P3** | Public-Private Partnerships |
| **PEL** | Planning and Environmental Linkages |
| **ROW** | Right-of-Way |
| **Study Team** | TDOT and its consultants |
| **TDM** | Transportation Demand Management |
| **TDOT** | Tennessee Department of Transportation |
| **TMA** | Transportation Modernization Act |
| **USC** | U.S. Code |

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) held a Virtual Public Engagement Event from April 1-30, 2024, to provide information about the Downtown Nashville Interstate Corridor (DNIC) Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study and to solicit public comments on the interstate network.

The Study Team used many tactics to reach the public throughout the DNIC PEL Study, including but not limited to paid and organic social media posts, e-newsletters, flyers at public buildings and transit centers, and Google Ads.

This Virtual Public Engagement Event hosted 4,951 visitors from at least 95 different ZIP Codes. Of those who visited the site, 388 completed the DNIC PEL Study survey. Participants in the Virtual Public Engagement Event answered 14 survey questions and submitted comments to four open-ended questions. It should be noted that some questions were skipped by some respondents. TDOT has developed this summary of comments and responses based on the feedback received during the Virtual Public Engagement Event. Comments have been organized into broad topics and in each section individual comments have been consolidated into questions representing a common theme or concern, which are presented in italics, followed by the response to each comment.

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# 2. PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL LINKAGES (PEL) STUDY OVERVIEW

In addition to the I-24 Southeast Choice Lanes project, TDOT has also initiated a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study to establish the vision for the interstate network and how future Choice Lanes projects in the Downtown Nashville area could potentially connect or expand on the larger system. The purpose of the PEL Study is to determine overall urban congestion relief improvement strategies for the interstate network leading into and surrounding Downtown Nashville. The PEL Study includes 20 miles of interstate segments:

**Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL)** is a collaborative approach to transportation decision-making that considers benefits and impacts of proposed transportation system improvements to the environment, community and economy during the early transportation planning process. The primary goal of a PEL Study is to gather information and input early in planning to inform the environmental review process and meet the requirements of NEPA.

- I-65, I-24 and I-40 – the "Inner Loop" in Downtown Nashville
- I-65, from SR 155 (Thompson Lane) to the Inner Loop
- I-440, from I-65 to I-24/I-40
- I-24, from Inner Loop to I-65 interchange (north of Downtown Nashville)
- I-40, from the Inner Loop to Elm Hill Pike (East of BNA Airport)

Concurrently, TDOT is advancing the I-24 Southeast Choice Lanes project by initiating surveys and field studies as part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) development process.

The PEL study area complies with the TDOT Environmental Technical Study Areas (ETSA) Guidance. An ETSA is developed for a project to document natural, cultural and community resources within a broader study area than the immediate project footprint. By documenting all resources within this broader area TDOT staff can better plan for and potentially mitigate any impacts to these resources as projects progress. The ETSA Guidance for interstate widening projects requires the boundary be set a minimum of 50 feet past the proposed Right-of-Way (ROW) line, or proposed slope lines, whichever is greater.

The purpose of the PEL study is to address unreliable travel times and regional connectivity issues along the Downtown Nashville Interstate Network. The proposed study would identify alternatives that provide more reliable travel times and improve regional mobility for commuters, including those commuting via passenger vehicles and transit. Specifically,

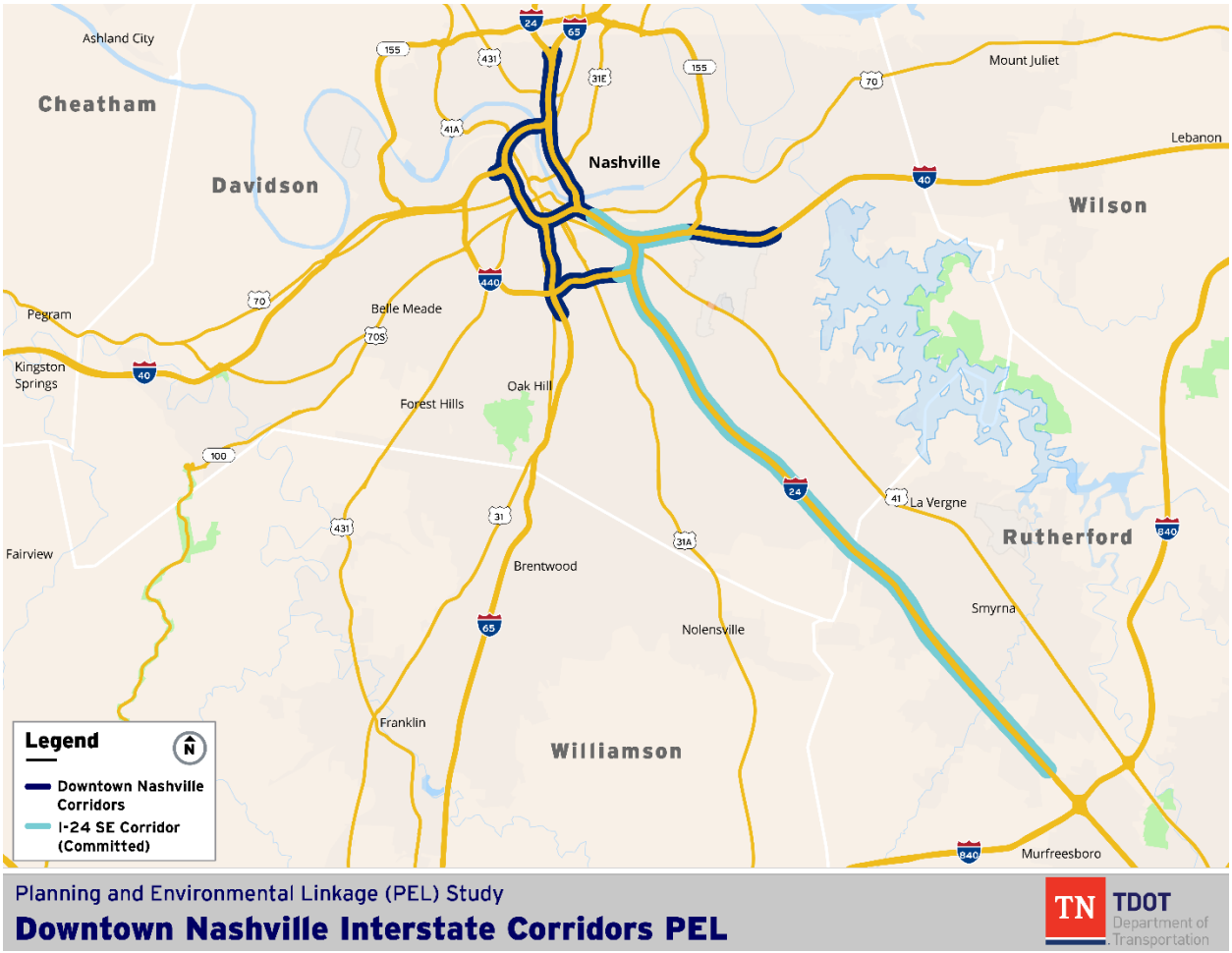
considering financial constraints, the project seeks to leverage funding and financing mechanisms provided in the TMA.

The Downtown Nashville Interstate Corridors (DNIC) PEL Study will include the development and screening of a preliminary range of up to 25 multimodal alternatives for the DNIC network encompassing the 20 miles of interstate outlined above. The PEL Study Team will screen and refine those Preliminary Alternatives to reach a set of Reasonable Alternatives.

The completion of the DNIC PEL Study will advance in parallel to the NEPA development process for the committed I-24 Southeast Choice Lanes project. The PEL Study will provide a planning product to be utilized in future decision-making and additional recommended future Choice Lanes projects on the DNIC network which may transition to NEPA as project funding is identified.

**The PEL Study location map in Figure 2-1 provides a visual overview of the DNIC that the PEL Study will comprise. The I-24 Southeast Choice Lanes project is shown in light blue on the map to show the committed project within the PEL study corridor that should be considered while developing potential choice lane improvements within the PEL study area.**

**Figure 2-1. Study Location Map**




*This map depicts the Downtown Nashville Interstate Corridors PEL study area which includes 20 miles of interstate segments. The map also depicts the adjacent I-24 Southeast Choice Lanes Project corridor which is a committed TDOT project under development that has overlap within the PEL Study area. The Reasonable Alternatives for the PEL study and the I-24 Southeast Choice Lanes Project may overlap due to the interconnectivity of the two corridors.*

## *2.1.1.* Planning & Environmental Linkages Study Benefits

The purpose of the PEL Study is to conduct planning studies with procedures and documentation that align with and can inform future NEPA studies. By following the PEL Study process, project teams can avoid revisiting past decisions and duplicating analyses and documentation during the NEPA phase. Using the PEL Study process can lead to more efficient and effective project delivery and facilitate meaningful engagement with the public, stakeholders and agencies earlier in the decision-making process. The PEL Study can assist in the early identification of issues and potential constraints, reduce risk and concerns and lead to better environmental outcomes. The PEL Study will assist in the clear determination of the NEPA class of action for a proposed future project.

During the PEL Study, the Study Team (TDOT and its consultants) will begin data collection and conduct preliminary analyses, including but not limited to:

- Defining roles and responsibilities and committing to an accelerated schedule;
- Establishing the preliminary Purpose and Need statement, including goals and objectives;
- Identifying and including stakeholders;
- Determining environmental impacts and benefits, including potential mitigation and programmatic agreements, if applicable;
- Evaluating and screening alternatives;
- Addressing potential funding options and phasing scenarios;
- Developing a plan that identifies sections of independent utility and smoothly transitions a project from the PEL Study to the NEPA phase; and
- Documenting the PEL Study process by developing reports and a final PEL Study Report.

These planning and analysis activities, conducted with input from stakeholders and the public, will produce transportation planning products (deliverables) that effectively serve both TDOT's transportation needs and meet the requirements of the Greater Nashville Regional Council's (GNRC) regional transportation planning processes. FHWA will review and concur with the development of this PEL Study and its use in future NEPA documents as specific projects are defined.

The PEL Study will comply with 23 USC, 168 and PEL guidance so recommendations from the PEL Study can be incorporated into future NEPA studies. The Study team anticipates that FHWA will participate in reviews associated with the identified concurrence points to achieve the goal of completing the PEL Study within approximately 12-15 months.

The PEL Study will:

1. Identify and analyze the overall corridor environmental concerns.
2. Demonstrate how all the recommended improvement projects would work together to provide congestion relief.
3. Provide preliminary environmental analysis, cost estimates and recommended project scopes with independent utility and logical termini for the identified congestion relief solutions that could transition into NEPA for further analysis once projects receive funding.
4. Communicate to potential P3 developers that the intention is to build out a Choice Lanes network in Nashville.
5. Enhance stakeholder, agency and public engagement in the development of the first Choice Lanes in Tennessee by engaging them in the planning and project development processes early in the network.

Linking planning and NEPA minimizes the duplication of effort, promotes environmental stewardship, encourages meaningful and productive public engagement and reduces delays in project implementation.

# 3. PEL STUDY SURVEY RESPONSE OVERVIEW

## 3.1. Purpose and Need

The survey for the April 2024 Virtual Public Engagement Event had 388 responses with 276 comments specific to the DNIC PEL Study's draft Purpose and Need. Respondents appreciated TDOT's forward-thinking approach to addressing travel time reliability and enhancing regional connectivity. Many respondents recognize and support the initiative to improve transportation for passenger vehicles and transit riders. The focus on leveraging innovative funding and financing mechanisms under the Transportation Modernization Act (TMA) is also seen as a positive step toward realizing these improvements. Comments reflecting this sentiment often expressed satisfaction with the direction of the DNIC PEL Study, highlighting its relevance and potential to significantly benefit daily commuters and the regional flow of traffic.

While there is notable support, respondents also provided constructive feedback for refining the DNIC PEL Study's approach. Criticism of the draft Purpose and Need mainly revolved around concerns regarding the practical implementation of the DNIC PEL Study's recommendations and the feasibility of its ambitious goals given financial constraints. Below is a summary of the feedback:

- **Redesign and Utilization of Road Infrastructure**
  Respondents suggested redesigning certain segments of the infrastructure to improve safety and efficiency, which included many different ideas. Some suggested converting downtown interstates into boulevards, prioritizing bus routes and redesigning problematic interchanges. Respondents asked about the potential for narrowing ramps and diverting traffic away from congested areas like the Inner Loop.
- **Improvement of Safety Measures**
  In addition to design-related safety concerns, respondents voiced concerns about safety on the interstate corridors due to risks from other motorists, such as traffic congestion and reckless driving. They suggested enhancements like increased police patrols and more cameras to monitor traffic and reduce dangerous driving behaviors.
- **Integration of Public Transit and Rail**
  Respondents emphasized a need for improved public transit solutions, such as expanding rail services between key population centers to alleviate traffic congestion and reduce reliance on personal vehicles. Specific suggestions included expanding the Nashville Star route and developing regional and commuter rail systems.

- **Equity and Accessibility**
  Concerns were also voiced about equitable access to transportation solutions, emphasizing that any new infrastructure developments like Choice Lanes should be accessible and affordable to all residents.

## 3.2. Response Data

Fourteen survey questions were posed to understand the primary concerns and priorities respondents have for the DNIC. Most were multiple choice providing respondents various options as well as open-ended questions and mapping tools.

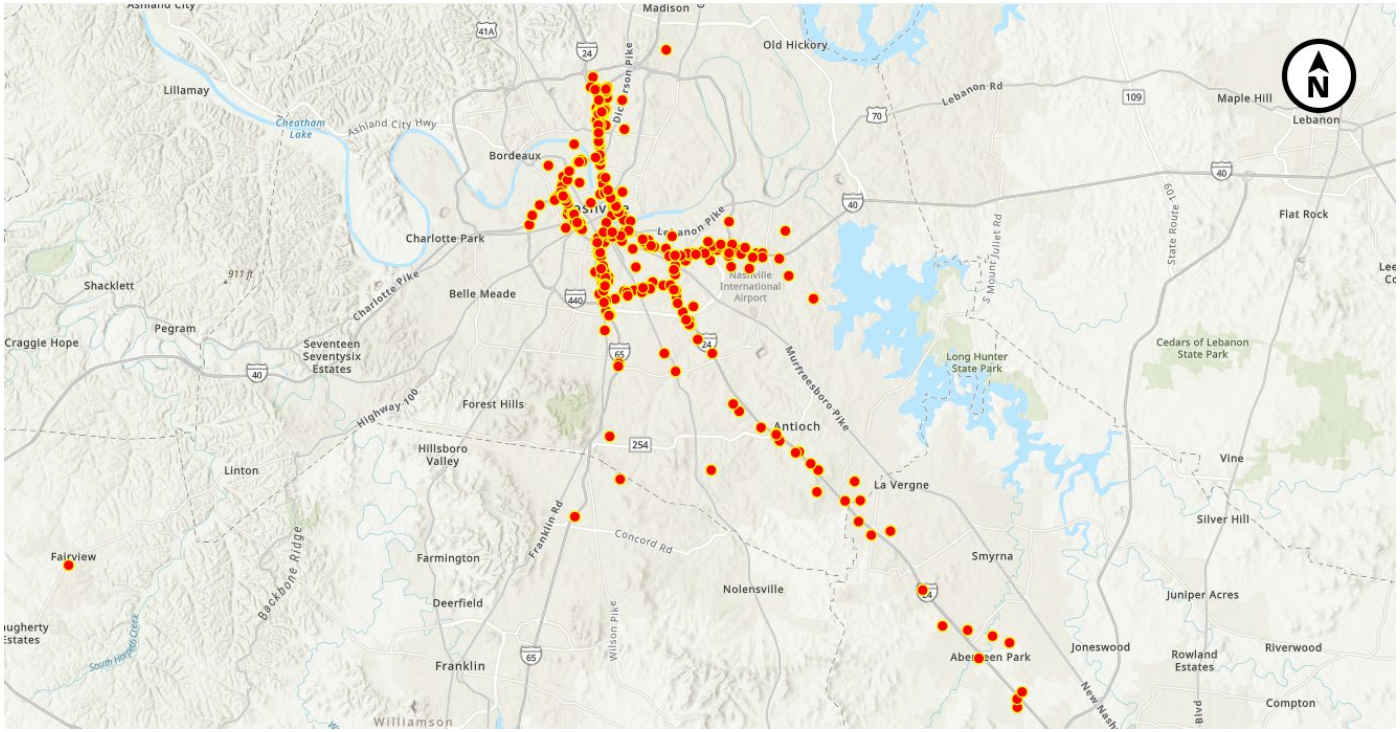
### *3.2.1.* Survey Questions

The following data was retrieved from the 388 completed surveys. The data and figures below represent results from close-ended survey questions. Questions and comments from the open-ended survey questions appear in **Chapter 4: Respondent Questions & Comments**.

Respondents had the opportunity to indicate the segments of the corridor they travel most by selecting a point on a map. **Figure 3-1** shows that the Downtown Nashville "Inner Loop," consisting of I-65, I-24 and I-40, has the highest concentration of frequent users. Some respondents indicated locations outside of the Study Area.

When asked about the type of vehicle most often used to travel the corridor, 94 percent of respondents said they use a personal vehicle to travel the corridor, 13 percent use a high occupancy vehicle, 2 percent carpool, 4 percent operate trucks for goods or business and less than 2 percent use a motorcycle. Respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer.

**Figure 3-1 Segments Most Frequently Traveled**



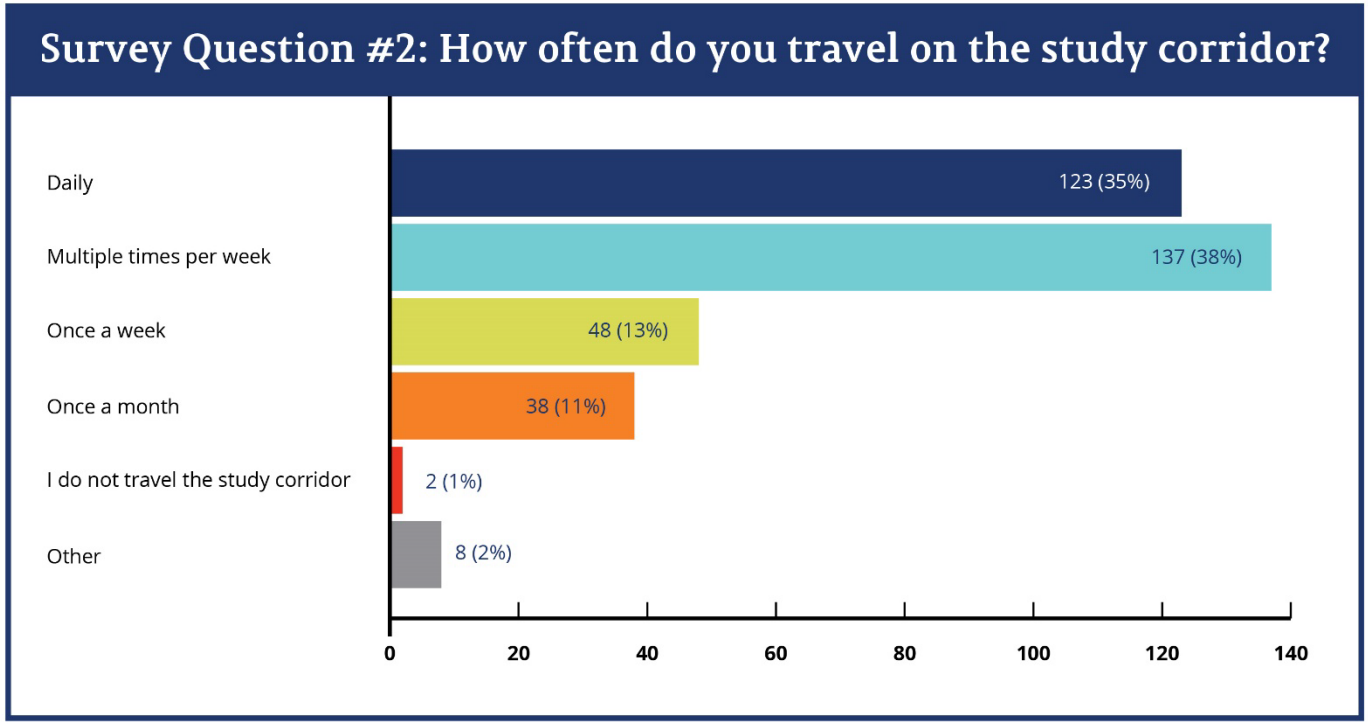

*Source: PIMA. Map depicted is not to scale.*

**Figure 3-2** shows the frequency of travel within the Study Area as reported by respondents, and **60** percent of respondents indicated they experienced the most congestion or unreliable trip times during their evening commute.

**Figure 3-3** illustrates the times of day respondents reported experiencing traffic congestion in the Study Area.

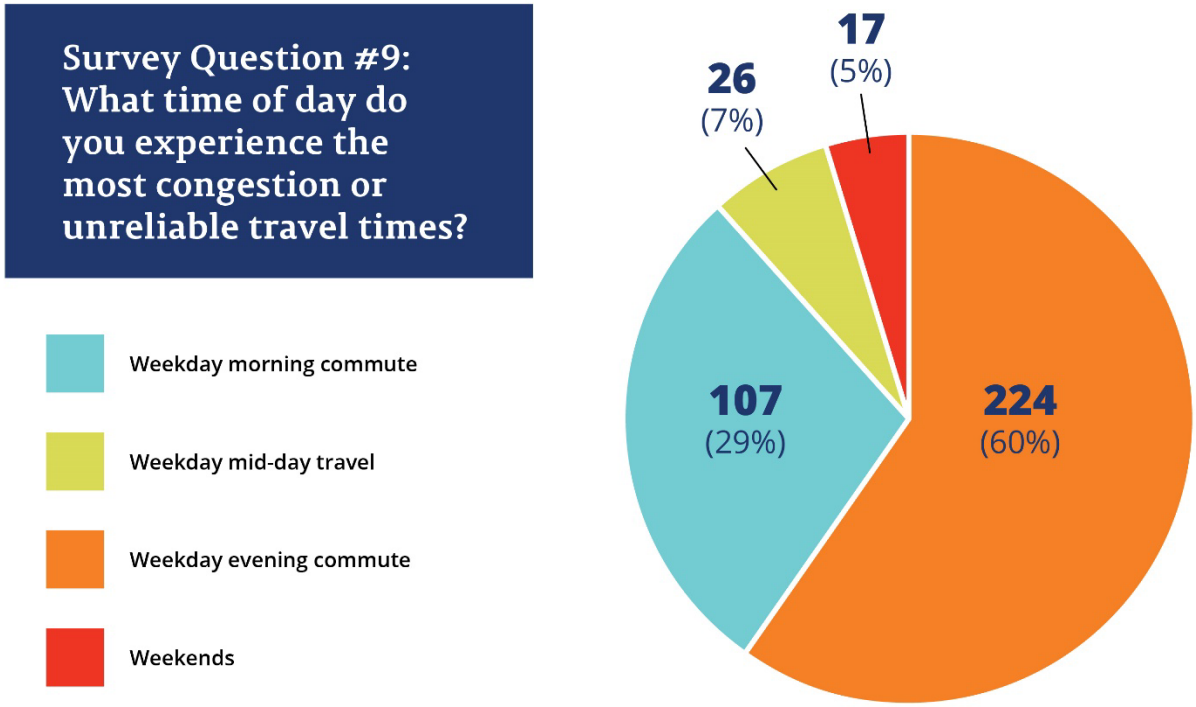
Most respondents (73 percent) reported traveling on the PEL Study corridor either daily or multiple times per week.

**Figure 3-2. Frequency of Travel Within Study Area**



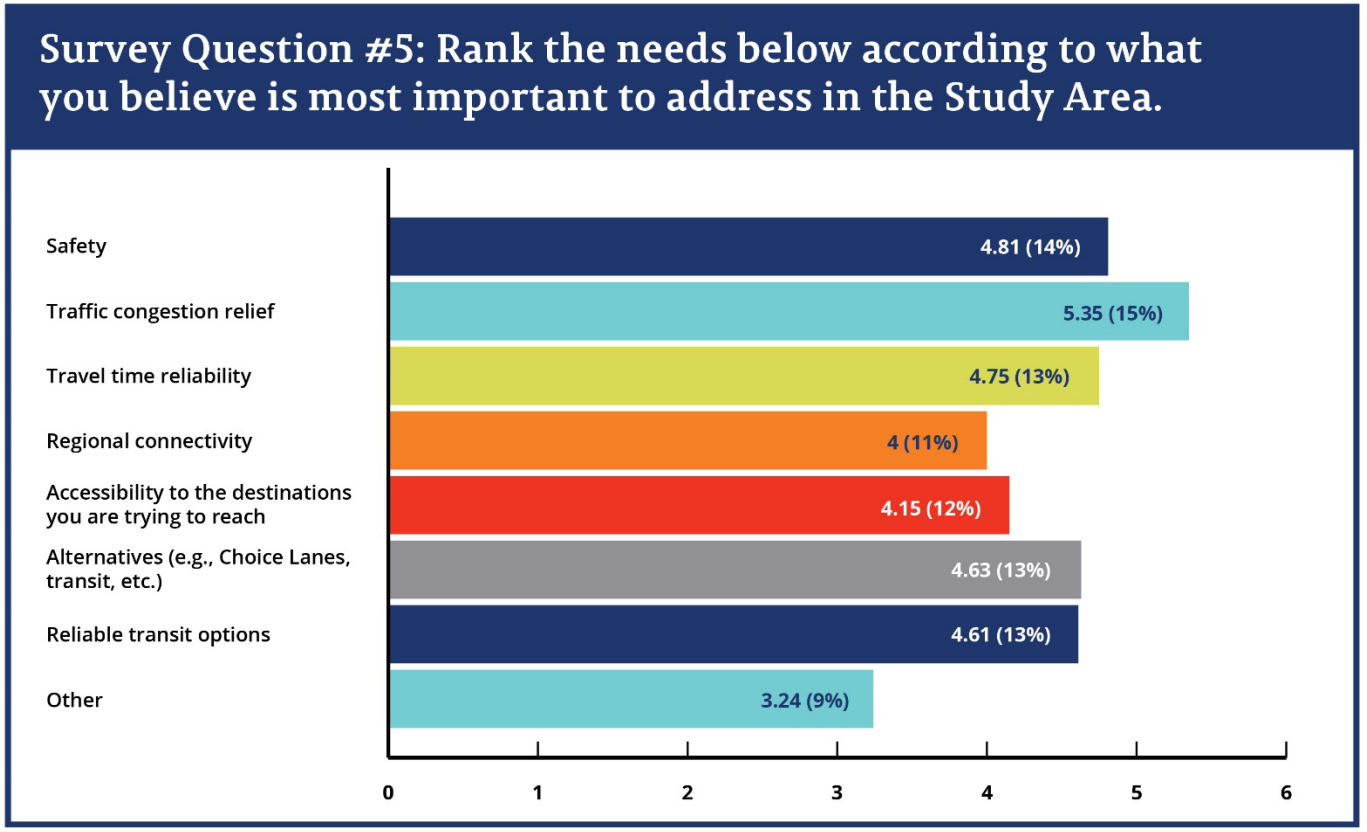

Over 60 percent of respondents indicated they experienced the most congestion or unreliable trip times during their evening commute.

**Figure 3-3. Time of Day Respondents Experience Traffic Congestion**




Respondents were asked to rank the needs of the corridor according to priority. **Figure 3-4** shows the resulting ratings for each need.

**Figure 3-4. Needs Prioritization by Survey Respondents**

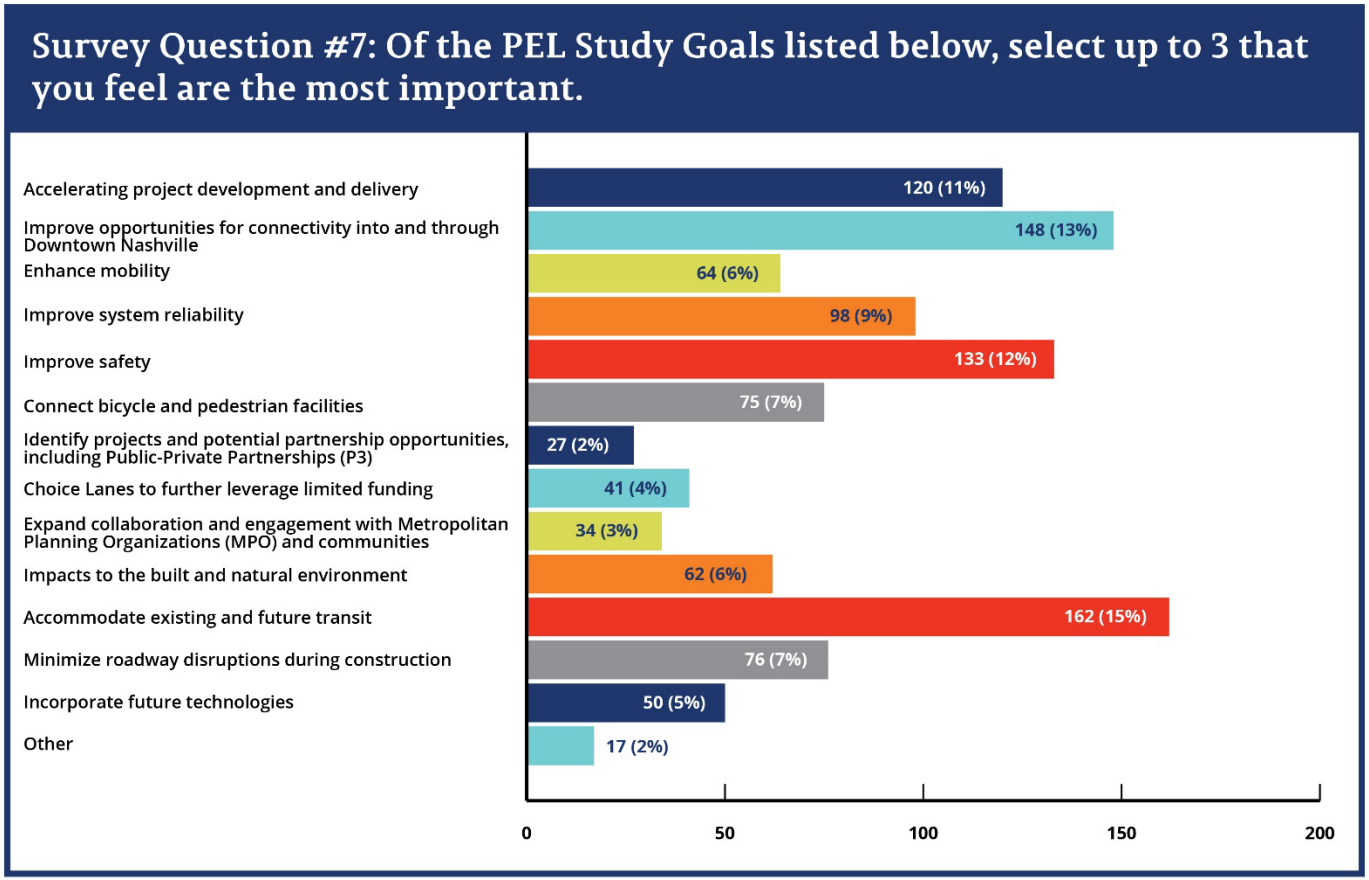



A sampling of responses that fell into the 'Other' category include:

- Add lanes to the interstates.
- Improve the safety of entrance and exit ramps.
- Maintain the condition of existing infrastructure.

Respondents were asked to rank the Study Goals according to personal importance. **Figure 3-5** shows the resulting ratings for each goal.

**Figure 3-5. PEL Study Goals by Importance to Respondents**



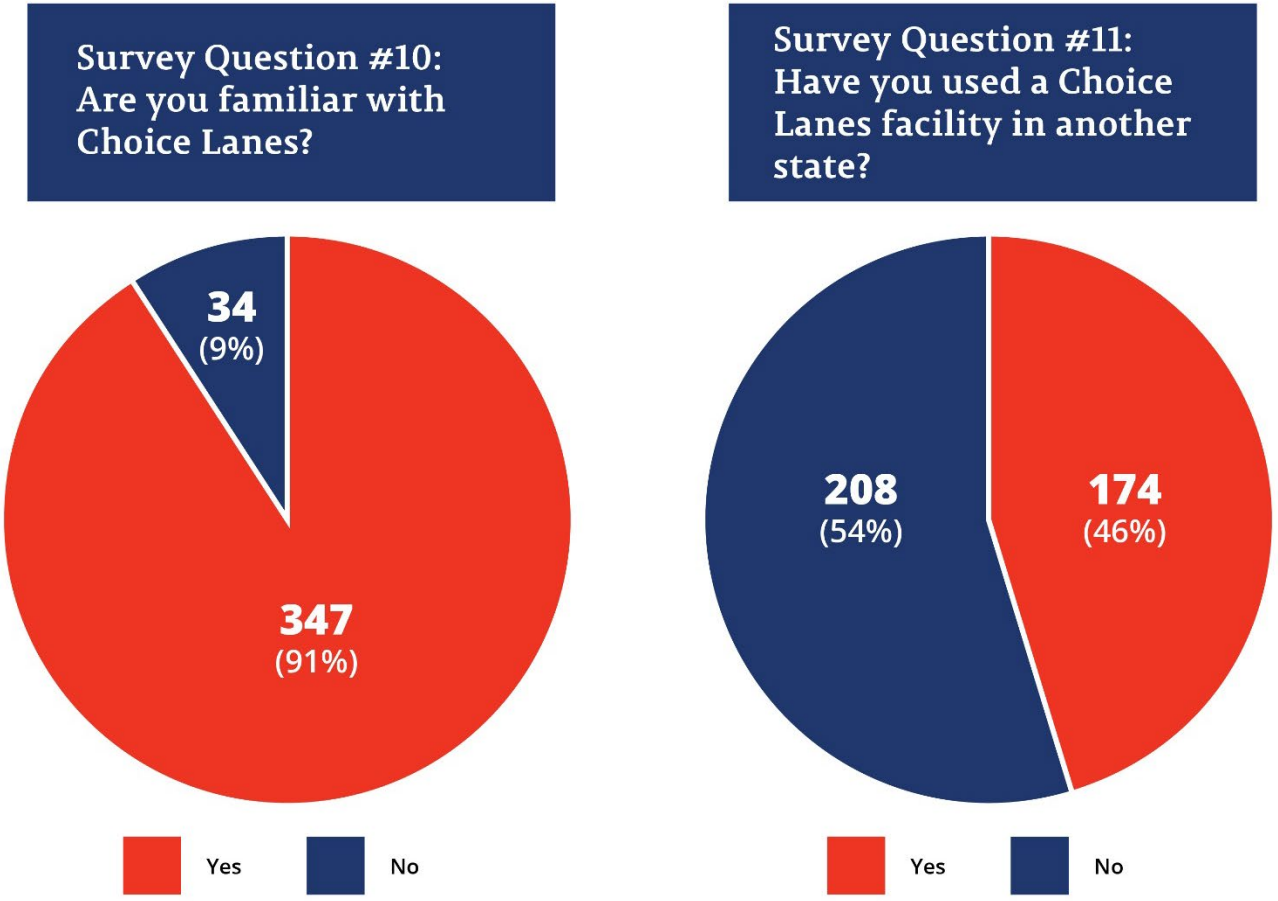

A sampling of responses that fell into the 'Other' category include:

- Remove highways and make space for housing.
- Study the impacts of the removal and subsequent relocation of the downtown loop [Inner Loop].

- Fill the potholes.
- Prioritize public transit.
- Build [a] corridor for 18-wheelers to go around Nashville.

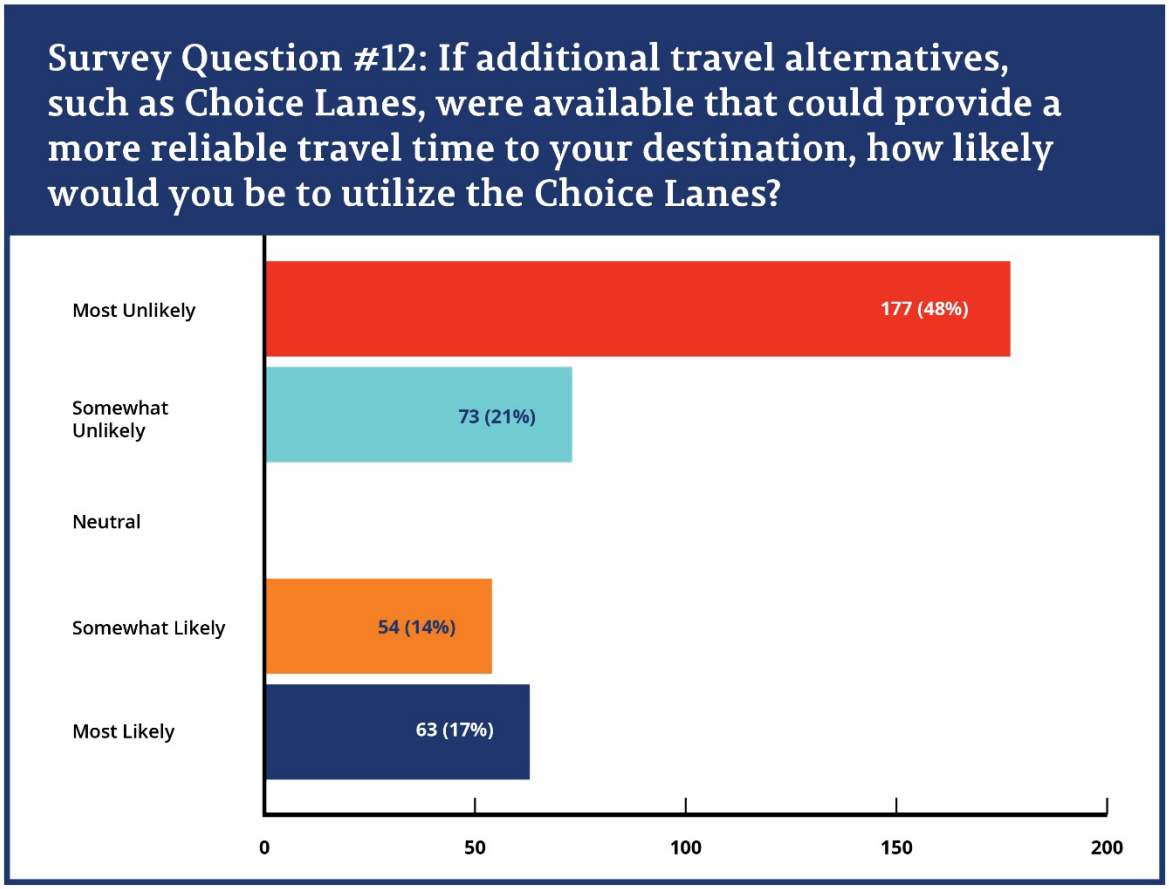
Respondents who said they are familiar with Choice Lanes made up 91 percent of all responses, with 46 percent having used Choice Lanes in other states, such as Florida, Georgia, Texas and Virginia. **Figure 3-6** illustrates these results.

**Figure 3-6. Choice Lanes Familiarity and Previous Use**



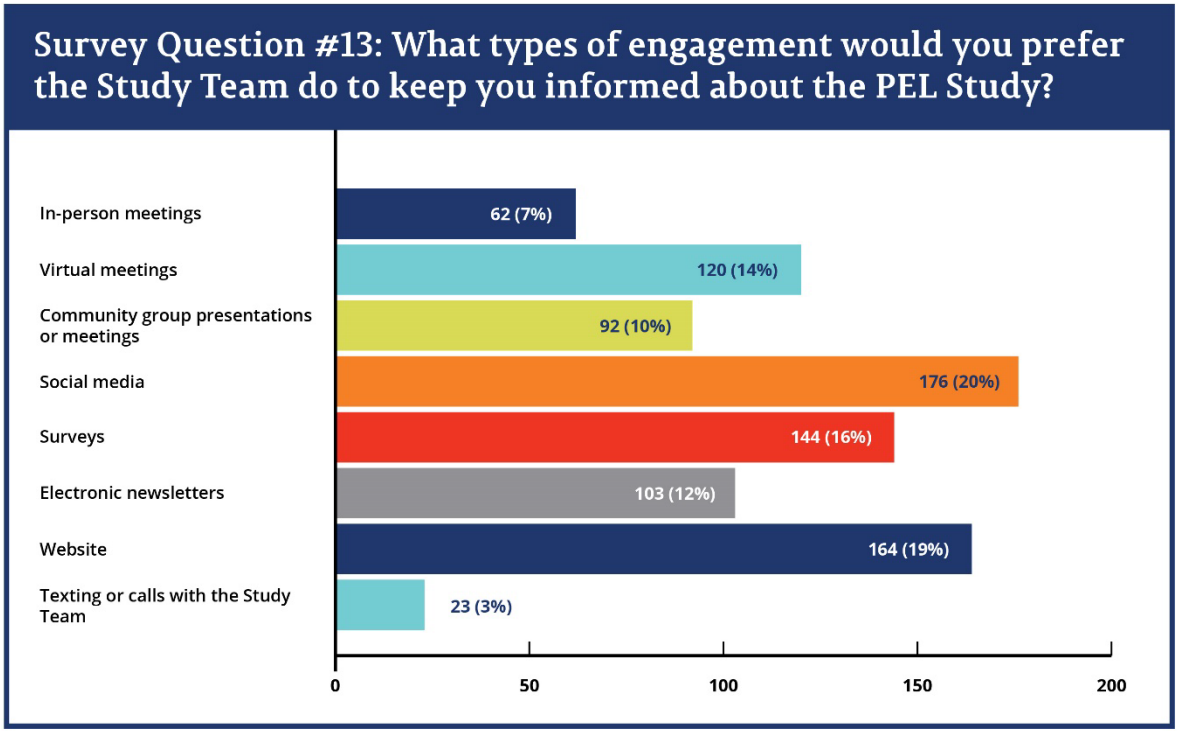
Respondents were asked if alternatives such as Choice Lanes were available, how likely would they be to use them. Results show 69 percent indicated they were most unlikely or somewhat unlikely to use them while 31 percent indicated they would be somewhat or most likely to utilize Choice Lanes. **Figure 3-7** reflects the full results received.

**Figure 3-7. Likelihood to Use Choice Lanes**



A question was included regarding how respondents would like to engage with the DNIC PEL Study in the future. **Figure 3-8** illustrates the responses given by respondents.

**Figure 3-8. Engagement Preferences**




Social media, surveys, website updates and virtual meetings ranked highest for what type of engagement respondents would prefer to stay up to date on the DNIC PEL Study. Texting and calls with the Study Team ranked the lowest.

These results will be taken into consideration when engaging with the public throughout the remainder of the DNIC PEL Study.

### *3.2.2.* Demographics and Equity Outreach

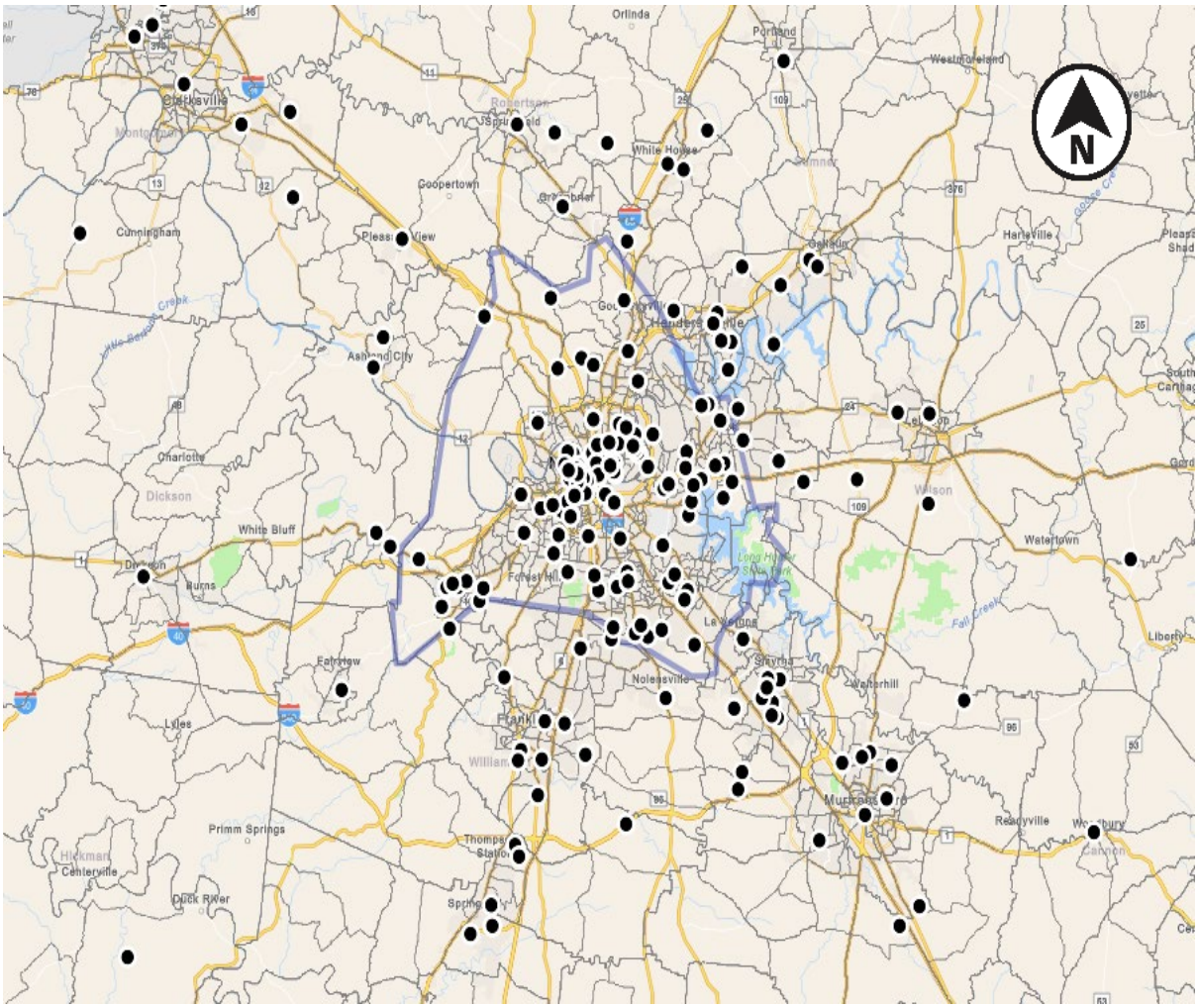
Of the 388 surveys completed, 377 shared their ZIP Codes, allowing the Study Team to measure outreach to Environmental Justice (EJ) communities within the ETSA. Using U.S. Census tract and block group data, several trends among respondents were notable:

- 95 unique ZIP Codes were recorded.
- 4.3 percent of respondents live in neighborhoods with limited internet access.
- 17.5 percent of respondents live in areas with a high minority population density, with the minority group most represented in these neighborhoods being Black or African American.
- 5.8 percent live in Limited English Proficiency (LEP) neighborhoods, with the language spoken at home most represented in these neighborhoods being Spanish.

Based on this data, the Study Team would recommend continued outreach to EJ communities including LEP communities in the Study Area.

As **Figure 3-9** shows, survey respondents represented fairly even coverage across the Study Area.

**Figure 3-9. Map of Survey Respondent Locations**




*Source: PIMA. Map depicted is not to scale.*

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# 4. RESPONDENT QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

Below are questions and comments from respondents during the public comment period from April 1 to April 30, 2024, along with responses from the Study Team.

## 4.1. Traffic Congestion

***"What causes the frequent bottlenecks on this network and how can you improve the design to accommodate traffic volumes and improve traffic flow?"***

A: Heavy traffic and bottlenecks are caused by a variety of factors, including a high volume of vehicles, road design, and incidents/accidents. Solutions that could help to improve traffic flow in these areas include:

- **Road Infrastructure Improvements:** Upgrading road infrastructure by widening lanes, adding turning lanes, and optimizing intersections can increase the capacity of roads and improve traffic flow.
- **Traffic Management Measures:** Using advanced traffic management systems, such as intelligent traffic lights, dynamic lane control and variable speed limits, can help regulate traffic flow and reduce congestion.
- **Infrastructure Benefiting High Occupancy Vehicles:** Creating dedicated lanes for carpooling or public transportation can incentivize motorists to explore these travel options and reduce the number of vehicles on the road, particularly during peak hours.
- **Congestion Pricing:** Charging drivers a fee to enter congested areas or during peak hours can help manage traffic demand and reduce congestion.

There are additional potential solutions that are outside the scope of this PEL Study.

***"What new options can be developed to divert through traffic, including large trucks, away from city centers in order to reduce the traffic load on downtown corridors?***

A: Providing peripheral routes as alternatives that bypass the city center can divert through traffic and truck traffic away from densely populated urban areas. This could work well in conjunction with other technologies such as congestion pricing, dynamic routing and navigation systems that consider real-time traffic conditions, road closures and vehicle size restrictions to help direct trucks away from congested city centers; however, providing this type of new option may not be included TDOT's 10-Year Project Plan and is not a solution proposed based on the feedback received from the completed survey. These systems can suggest alternative routes that are more suitable for large trucks and provide real-time updates to optimize travel times.

Implementing innovative last-mile delivery solutions, such as cargo bikes, electric vans and drones, can reduce the need for large trucks to enter the city center for final deliveries.

These alternative delivery methods can navigate through narrow streets and pedestrian areas more easily, minimizing congestion and emissions in urban areas.

## 4.2. Choice Lanes

***"What evidence supports the effectiveness of Choice Lanes in reducing traffic congestion, and how do we address concerns that they might instead increase traffic volumes?"***

A: Choice Lanes were first introduced in 1996 and have been rapidly expanding across the country as an effective tool to mitigate congestion on heavily traveled interstate networks like the DNIC. There are currently 70 Choice Lanes corridors open in 12 metro areas across the United States, with just as many being designed and under construction. States like Texas, Georgia, Florida and North Carolina use Choice Lanes as part of their urban congestion mitigation plans with much success.

- Georgia's Express Lanes are 20 percent faster than the existing general purpose lanes during peak travel times. [1]
- Georgia saw a 30- to 50-mile-per-hour speed increase in general purpose lanes and a 10 percent increase in on-time bus performance.[2]
- Texas saw a 60-70 percent reduction in congestion and a 10-15 percent increase in travel speeds.[3]

The primary result of adding more lanes or more travel choices would be reduced travel times for those currently using I-24 Southeast. Motorists currently using other, longer routes for their commutes because of the congestion and frequency of crashes on I-24 Southeast may choose to use the corridor in the future. This hidden or built-up traffic demand consists of trips that are not new but would be attracted to I-24 Southeast with a new travel alternative with Choice Lanes. This is accounted for in the proposed project's future traffic forecasts.

## 4.3. User Fees & Equity

***"How can pricing strategies for Choice Lanes be structured so they are affordable and equitable, preventing disproportionate impacts on lower-income commuters?"***

A: Choice Lanes would empower drivers to choose the travel mode that works best for them and their circumstances; however, motorists in the existing general purpose lanes would still enjoy the benefit of decreased congestion as other motorists opt to utilize the Choice Lanes without ever having to pay a user fee. These types of facilities have a history of successfully shifting traffic out of existing lanes so that all motorists or transit customers

[1] Georgia Department of Transportation
[2] Georgia Department of Transportation
[3] Texas Department of Transportation

on the roadway benefit. Additionally, Choice Lanes can provide reliable trip times for transit vehicles such as buses and vanpools.

By managing the new, additional Choice Lanes through dynamic pricing, the cost to use the Choice Lanes would change throughout the day based on how many vehicles are using them. If the new Choice Lanes start filling up, the price would also go up to help manage demand. TDOT will set a user fee policy and more details will be provided in the coming months.

Other states with Choice Lanes facilities have implemented discounts and programs for lower-income drivers. Deliberating potential equity programs is one piece of determining the user fee policies as Choice Lanes are developed.

***"What steps is TDOT taking to distribute transportation resources (revenue) equitably across all communities, particularly focusing on minority and under-resourced areas?"***

A: The DNIC PEL Study allows TDOT to collect data regarding communities that may benefit from or be impacted by proposed transportation system improvements. Part of this analysis specifically evaluates minority and under-resourced areas under an Environmental Justice review as outlined in NEPA. Conducting these analyses early, along with early engagement with the public, stakeholders and participating agencies, allows TDOT to make decisions that distribute funding equitably when considering potential transportation projects.

Additionally, TDOT is committed to building a transportation system that benefits Tennesseans statewide, by viewing the economic prosperity of the state as interconnected between its rural, suburban and urban communities and the industries they support.

The Transportation Modernization Act (TMA) fundamentally changed the way TDOT delivers projects by giving TDOT the authority to enter into Public-Private Partnerships (P3). The TMA provided the state with innovative tools to address traffic congestion, especially in urban areas, freeing up funding to invest in rural and suburban communities across Tennessee without taking on debt. TDOT's 10-Year Project Plan provides a roadmap for $15 billion in state and federal funds over the next decade for surface transportation development. One of the guiding principles of the 10-Year Project Plan was to balance urban and rural investments across the state and prioritize projects across the state and all communities that:

- Maximize traveler safety and system reliability.
- Reduce congestion and manage travel demand to support an efficient system for people, goods and services.
- Support the state's economy.
- Preserve and protect the transportation system.
- Support livable and sustainable communities through multimodal integration.

- Accelerate project delivery.

Revenue generated from future Choice Lanes user fees will be collected by the private sector partner in exchange for designing, building, financing, operating and maintaining the new Choice Lanes.

***"How could investing in affordable and accessible transit options that cater to all economic groups reduce the dependency on costly road expansions and toll lanes in Downtown Nashville?***

A: Reducing the dependency on costly roadway expansions requires a shift in driver behaviors to utilize alternative travel choices that will reduce the number of single occupancy vehicle commuters on the roadways. Commuters are less likely to choose a transit option if transit vehicles are traveling in the same congested lanes and experiencing travel delays.

By introducing new travel choices, like Choice Lanes, transit vehicles and high occupancy vehicles can utilize these new Choice Lanes for free and increase travel time reliability for these travel options. Choice Lanes provide the best option for advancing transit and have been endorsed by the Tennessee Public Transit Association. Choice Lanes have resulted in transit success in other states including:

- 73 percent more transit customers due to improved travel reliability in Texas.[4]
- 68 percent reduction in travel times in Florida.[5]
- Transit ridership quadrupled in the first five years after Choice Lanes opened in Florida.[6]
- 10 percent increase in on-time transit performance in Georgia.[7]

## 4.4. Traffic Design & Safety

***"How can we improve road conditions and infrastructure to prevent accidents caused by issues like potholes?"***

A: TDOT continues to make maintenance of its existing infrastructure a high priority and the 10-Year Project Plan includes $4.5 billion in ongoing resurfacing/state-of-good-repair project funding. Resurfacing projects are the most effective method of improving road conditions on asphalt roadways, and nearly all TDOT-maintained roadways (98.9 percent) are flexible (asphalt) pavements. TDOT maintains over 37,000 lane miles of roads and prioritizes resurfacing projects based on existing pavement conditions such as distress, roughness, traffic level and pavement age.

[4] Texas Department of Transportation
[5] Florida Department of Transportation
[6] Florida Department of Transportation
[7] Georgia Department of Transportation

TDOT has increased its pavement repair efforts to address potholes from the winter storm in January 2024. TDOT is investing an additional $15 million in a total of 121 various projects statewide and accelerated TMA dollars to supplement their state-of-good-repair/maintenance budget.

***"How can we redesign dangerous interchanges to reduce accidents and improve traffic flow?"***

A: The existing interchange designs in the DNIC PEL Study area were developed based on projected traffic volumes and then-current design standards. When population growth and development lead to increased traffic volume, redesigning interchanges may be warranted to accommodate current and anticipated traffic volumes and to address safety and operational challenges. Crash data is used to analyze issues and lead engineers to effective solutions. Current design standards and future traffic projections are used to develop a new design, which may include additional capacity (e.g., added lanes, longer ramps, improved roadway geometrics), increased travel speed, wider shoulders, additional signing, lighting and incorporating other safety features.

TDOT released its 10-Year Project Plan in December 2023, which includes proposed interchange redesign projects and interchange enhancement projects based on current statewide priorities.

***"How can we involve emergency services and law enforcement in the planning and implementation stages to ensure that safety measures are practical and effective?"***

A: TDOT recognizes that engaging early and often with stakeholders, such as emergency services, law enforcement and first responders, plays a key role in successful project delivery. TDOT has already started engaging with first responders and other community stakeholders to ensure they are part of the planning process by providing stakeholder meeting opportunities. By creating a line of open communications with stakeholders, TDOT can better identify the community's concerns and issues early in the project planning process.

***"How can safety be improved for pedestrians and cyclists, particularly when crossing or navigating near major roads and interstates?"***

A: TDOT has a Pedestrian Road Safety Initiative Program funded through the Federal Highway Safety Improvement Program. The Program's goal is to create safer roadways for pedestrians and reduce the number of fatal and severe pedestrian crashes by identifying safety concerns and implementing countermeasures as part of the Tennessee Strategic Highway Safety Plan. In addition, major projects like the ones being considered in the DNIC PEL Study typically incorporate enhancements that will better protect vulnerable road users such as sidewalks, pedestrian signals, bike lanes and lighting.

## 4.5. Transit

***"What strategies can be implemented to expand and integrate diverse transit options, including buses, trains, and non-vehicle transportation, to ensure efficient and accessible transit across the region?"***

A: New Choice Lanes on I-24 Southeast would provide more reliable trips for transit vehicles, providing opportunities for transit to expand as the Choice Lanes encourage transit ridership. Transit buses would also be able to use the Choice Lanes for free.

TDOT continues to partner with Nashville DOT and WeGo on future opportunities for transit expansion and collaboration.

***"What impact would repurposing existing road lanes for dedicated transit use and active transportation like cycling and walking have on current traffic conditions?"***

A: The DNIC PEL Study is focused primarily on identifying potential improvements that would address travel time reliability and connectivity on the interstate network through Downtown Nashville. Repurposing existing road lanes for other uses is outside of the scope of the DNIC PEL Study.

Transit buses would be encouraged to use Choice Lanes to benefit from the reliable trip times at no charge. Bicycle and pedestrian considerations will be given to arterial connections along the PEL Study corridor. TDOT will continue to partner with WeGo on future opportunities for collaboration on transit and Choice Lanes.

***"What role can public transportation play in connecting cities and suburbs to reduce congestion?"***

A: TDOT is committed to delivering a safe, reliable transportation system that supports a variety of travel options. TDOT works with local planning authorities and offers a variety of transportation grants for transit and active transportation projects. Specific to the Study Area, TDOT continues to partner with Nashville DOT and WeGo on future opportunities for transit expansion and collaboration.

New Choice Lanes on I-24 Southeast would benefit public transportation by allowing transit buses to use the new lanes for free and providing more reliable trips for transit vehicles. These benefits would provide an opportunity to encourage transit ridership connecting the cities and suburbs along the I-24 Southeast corridor.

***"How can we develop a comprehensive rail transit system, including potential expansions to the Nashville Star, to connect Nashville with surrounding suburbs and reduce the reliance on automobiles, similar to systems in cities like Denver or Dallas?"***

A: Potential expansions of the WeGo Star are outside of the scope of the DNIC PEL Study. TDOT is proud of its IMPROVE Transit Investment Grant program, which since its inception

in 2018 has awarded grants for nearly 100 capital transit projects, including investments with the WeGo Star. TDOT will continue to partner with WeGo on future opportunities for transit expansion and collaboration.

## 4.6. Pedestrian and Bicycle

***"What strategies can be used to better integrate pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure into urban planning to encourage walking and biking for connecting locally as viable alternatives to vehicle use?"***

A: The Study Team will coordinate with the TDOT Multimodal Planning Office to understand the multimodal plans along the DNIC and consider them as project concepts are developed. For example, if a proposed project would impact a planned shared use pathway, TDOT would consider how to establish the project to potentially accommodate the shared use pathway.

## 4.7. Environmental

***"What measures are being considered to manage and mitigate the noise and pollution caused by high traffic volumes, and what role can infrastructure improvements like sound walls and traffic rerouting play?"***

A: TDOT recognizes that highway traffic noise is an important consideration in the improvement and development of the state's highway system. Traffic noise is assessed in the planning, development and construction phases of highway improvement projects. TDOT attempts to reduce impacts from highway traffic noise on noise-sensitive areas during each of these phases. During the development of the DNIC PEL Study, a review will be conducted of the potential noise receptors along and adjacent to the corridor, including locations of frequent human use where noise would have the potential to interfere with typical activities. A planning level assessment of potential noise impacts will be included in the development and screening of potential improvement alternatives during this study.

Based on the recommendations made in the DNIC PEL Study, specific projects may be required to perform detailed noise measurements and studies during the NEPA phase once they are funded and project development is initiated. Future projects will be reviewed in accordance with the TDOT Noise Policy and FHWA Noise Regulations. The TDOT Noise Policy[8] has more information on this process.

***"What initiatives are planned to address the environmental impact of traffic, such as air pollution and urban heat islands?"***

In association with partner agencies, TDOT provides several programs and resources that address air quality issues. The Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality and Carbon Reduction Programs fund projects and programs that reduce air pollution from mobile sources (i.e., cars, trucks, trains, etc.), as well as from other non-mobile sources like streetlighting and

[8] Tennessee Department of Transportation. Policy on Highway Traffic Noise Abatement, July 2011. Accessed May 8, 2024. Microsoft Word - FHWA Approved TDOT Noise Policy with Final Edits July 11 2011.docx

construction equipment. TDOT is also working to produce a number of viable Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies that seek to address congestion caused primarily by single-occupant vehicles by encouraging alternatives to driving alone, such as carpool, vanpool, transit, bike, flex schedules, walk, scooter and telecommuting. TDOT is also supporting national efforts to make electric vehicle charging more accessible through the Tennessee Electric Vehicle Infrastructure and Alternative Fuels Corridors programs. In addition to TDM, and green construction, TDOT's Carbon Reduction Strategy outlines six other focus areas to reduce transportation emissions: active transportation, alternative fuels, fleets and facilities, freight, transit and transportation system management and operations. Capacity-adding projects that may develop out of recommendations made in the DNIC PEL Study will undergo a review of potential air quality impacts under NEPA.

***"In what ways can urban design be transformed to support environmental benefits, such as reducing urban sprawl, enhancing local communities with accessible amenities, and removing high-impact infrastructures like inner-city highways?"***

A: TDOT is committed to creating meaningful community engagement during the planning studies and throughout the project development process to identify the least impactful transportation improvement alternative while balancing the community's needs. During this planning process, community members will have an opportunity to participate in decisions that may affect their environment and/or health and influence TDOT's decisions regarding improvement alternatives and potential mitigation for impacts, if needed.

In some cases, mitigation could include strategies to mitigate for disproportionate impacts or burdens or to balance the transportation benefits to communities that may utilize alternative transportation modes such as transit, biking or walking as their primary mode of transportation. These strategies could include design features that enhance access and connectivity for these modes as a part of the transportation project or strategies that reconnect communities that have historically been disproportionately impacted by highway development. As a part of the planning study, these potential benefits and burdens will be studied, and some preliminary considerations may be recommended for further consideration and analysis during the future project development process. During this planning process, community concerns will be considered in the decision-making process and decision makers will seek out and facilitate the involvement of those communities potentially affected by the potential transportation improvements recommended.

***"Can the areas currently occupied by underutilized roads be converted into public spaces or green areas to improve urban living conditions?"***

A: The DNIC PEL Study is focused on the downtown interstate corridors, which are heavily traveled and utilized corridors for the Nashville region. The DNIC PEL Study is focused primarily on identifying potential improvements that would address travel time reliability

and connectivity on the interstate network through Downtown Nashville. Nashville Department of Transportation and Multimodal Infrastructure has been studying the feasibility of interstate capping projects in the Downtown Nashville Inner Loop area. TDOT is facilitating coordination between Metro Nashville and the Study Team to further understand the downtown interstate capping project priorities and goals within the Study Area.

## 4.8. Additional Comments

***"How will the results of this survey be used, and will it actually make a difference?"***

A: TDOT initiated the DNIC PEL Study to understand the community's top concerns for the DNIC and determine the vision for how future projects, including Choice Lanes, could potentially connect to or expand on the larger system. The results of the DNIC PEL Study will be used for future NEPA studies on future projects along the DNIC, per USC Title 23 Section 168.

***"I may have more to say, can I still offer more feedback on this study?"***

A: The DNIC PEL Study is ongoing. While the first open public comment period is closed, the public can always engage with the Study Team by emailing TDOT.BuildWithUs@tn.gov. A Public Information Meeting will take place later in 2024 to seek input on the improvement alternatives and alternatives screening process where the public will have another opportunity to provide feedback. Stay tuned for updates on the DNIC PEL Study website.