Proposing an Arts-focused Bicycle Corridor Connecting North and South Tempe

Introduction and Context

In 2014 the City of Tempe released its Arts and Culture Plan as a guide for what Tempe refers to as the continuation of a “cultural renaissance for the coming decade” (“Tempe Arts and Culture Plan” 1). From the 900 residents and workers surveyed, the plan outlines a set of key findings and desires, focus areas, priorities, and steps to implementation including but not limited to access and participation, commissioned public artworks, more support for artists, improving diversity and inclusion, more variety in offerings for adults and for children and youth, and more opportunities for arts and cultural engagement in South Tempe (the area south of the US 60). Based on the findings and information in the Arts and Culture Plan coupled with the demographics and community culture of Tempe, I propose the creation of a 5-mile bicycle corridor that connects Tempe Center for the Arts to Kiwanis Park using Hardy Drive and the Western Canal Path. This project responds specifically to the following findings from the Arts and Culture Plan:

- Tempe residents seek informal cultural experiences available throughout the city, such as at coffee shops, bars, parks and festivals.
- There is room for improvement in the quality, affordability, availability and variety of arts and cultural offerings to the community.
- There is very high support for city government to continue its leadership role in arts and cultural development.
- Arts and culture are seen as an excellent way to promote diversity and inclusion.
- There is strong desire for enhanced arts and cultural opportunities for children and youth.
- Residents of South Tempe would like more activities to be available closer to home. (5)
Additionally, the recommendations are broken down into six core focus areas for implementation. The bicycle corridor plan directly addresses the following:

1. Arts Programming Throughout the Community
   1.6. Continue, expand and enhance informal arts programming provided in community settings

3. Artists and Arts Organizations
   3.10 Plan for the commissioning of one or more signature public artworks.

4. Diversity and Inclusion
   4.3 Promote Community-Initiated Arts projects that address diversity and inclusion.
   4.4. Support community festivals celebrating cultural diversity and explore a citywide multicultural festival. (6-7)

**Tempe Community Culture and Demographics**

In addition to the findings of the Arts and Culture Plan, Tempe has specific cultural and demographic indicators that uniquely suit the city for a bicycle corridor.

“In 2015, the League of American Bicyclists re-designated Tempe a Gold-Level Bicycle-Friendly Community Award winner. With almost four percent of Tempe residents biking to work, Tempe has one of the highest percentages of bicycle commuters in the country” (“Bicycle Info”). Tempe is also committed to using the best methods for integrating bicycling and bicycle infrastructure into all levels of city planning. The city’s urban design plans include accommodations for bicycling in order to integrate bicycling as part of the culture of Tempe and to assist in the enhancement of a balanced transportation system. (Ibid)

Bike Culture thrives in Tempe. Every year, Tempe hosts New Belgium Brewing Company’s “Tour de Fat,” a festival and cycling tour that celebrates bikes and brews. The city hosts the annual “Bike to Work Day” and celebrates “Bike Month” every April (Ibid). Every year the city gives out a “Bike Hero Award” to an individual or group in the community committed to increasing awareness and promoting cycling as a viable mode of transportation. Tempe is just 40 square miles yet there are 175 miles of bikeways (Ibid).
The local non-profit Tempe Bicycle Action Group (TBAG) advocates on behalf of cycling in Tempe and works closely with the city to advise on planning issues that affect cyclists. They also host a number of community events, collect bike-related data and publish it freely to assist with planning and safety. From their 2016 report, TBAG documented almost 12,000 cyclists in Tempe (Anderson 2). In fact, Tempe boasts the highest bicycle ridership rate (4.2%) of any other Arizona city, and 5% of the Tempe population does not own a car at all (“Data USA”). Each year, TBAG also hosts a “Cranksgiving” event in Tempe, where cyclists gather food from local vendors on their bicycles that is one part scavenger hunt, one part local food drive. Additionally, TBAG has a board member position devoted specifically to “Public Art and Special Projects.” TBAG is embedded in the Tempe Community and plays an integral part in its leadership.

Tempe is also an interesting and sometimes fluid community in that it is a college town where there is a mix of both rooted residents and transient university students, and it is in the middle of a development boom where high-rise luxury residential and commercial buildings keep popping up around Tempe Beach Park with mixed response from the community as rents increase citywide (AZRE). For example, only 41.8% of housing in Tempe is owner occupied (the national average is 63.9%) (“Data USA”). The median household income is $49,012 with 21.7% of the population living below the poverty line (the national average is 14.7%) (Ibid). Additionally, median rent is $954 per month, and the wealth disparity continues to grow (Ibid).

The Tempe community is also somewhat diverse. The percentage of the population that speaks a language other than English is 24.8% (national average
21%), and 9.9% of the population is not U.S. citizens (the national average is 7%) (Ibid). While 59.6% of the population are white, 22.6% are Hispanic (Ibid).

**Current Infrastructure**

There are already 5 miles of existing flat, paved bikeways between Tempe Center for the Arts and Kiwanis Park using Hardy Drive and the Western Canal Path (Fig. 1).

The Hardy Drive streetscape project was completed in 2015 after engaging the local community. The project includes bicycle and pedestrian enhancements, public art, ADA improvements and landscaping. The project is intended to promote neighborhood stability, sustainable business and development efforts while continuing Tempe's commitment to alternative modes of transportation. ("Hardy Drive")

The public comments included several instances of pro-bike and pro-public art sentiment as well as creating a "village feel" for cycling (ibid). The streetscape project stops at Broadway Road. From Broadway Road to the Western Canal Path entrance there is opportunity to expand the streetscape project, particularly because this area is an active industrial park.

Tempe is also in the process of planning for and developing the Highline Canal Multi-Use Path that will run from Chandler to South Tempe and connect with the Town of Guadalupe.

The purpose of the project is to design and construct a 10-foot wide concrete multi-use path with lighting, landscaping and public art. The project includes street crossing treatments and possible bicycle/pedestrian bridges across the canal. The project is located along the Tempe portion of the Highline Canal.
and links directly to Chandler and the Town of Guadalupe for a distance of 3.5 miles. (“Highline Canal Multi-Use Path”)

The Highline Canal Path and the Western Canal Path can be connected by a 1-mile stretch along Guadalupe Road thus creating an art-focused bicycle route all the way from Chandler to Tempe Town Lake and beyond (Figure 2).

Devoted cyclists and bikeways in general are crucial to any city interested in creating more sustainable communities. As the former Milwaukee mayor and new urbanist John Norquist says,

Bicycling is an important catalyst to move communities toward an urbanism that is ecologically sound and economically productive. The bicyclists are the ones who often bring pressure for change in transportation. Those interested in cities need to appreciate them more as bicycling is very compatible with everything that is urban. We ought to promote it even more than we already do. (Keyes)

Tempe has a strong bike culture, and as a city, it makes a conscious effort to include sustainability in its planning and operations. Creating an arts-focused bikeway will allow for a new range of cultural engagements, social offerings, entrepreneurial endeavors, and economic drivers as well as potential health impacts and more socially cohesive neighborhoods.

**Recommendations**

1. Explore the potential for activating the industrial park between Broadway and Southern roads on Hardy Drive. There could be opportunities for artists to paint murals on the larger exterior walls and/or for warehouse space to act as a venue for
pop-up art exhibitions, performances, or other events. It may also serve as a potential hot spot for bars, coffee shops, or tech startup companies. This kind of economic and artistic activation is happening right now in the Warehouse District in Phoenix, one of the next up-and-coming neighborhoods in the Downtown area.

It’s attracting an eclectic collection of office spaces, restaurants, galleries and one-of-a-kind venues for music and events. Its urban realness draws creative ventures and tech start-ups alike. Ambitious entrepreneurs are reinvigorating once-shuttered warehouses with adaptive new uses. (“Living in Downtown Phoenix”)

A similar Warehouse Arts District was created in Tucson, AZ and later funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. Of the anticipated impacts,

artists and gallery owners became more of a community, sharing information about the district’s geography, and becoming part of a shared map. [Tucson Pima Arts Council] plans to replicate the process and product for another naturally occurring culture district, a 4-mile street car line that connects the University of Arizona to the 4th Avenue commercial district, downtown Tucson, and a redevelopment area west of downtown. (“Warehouse Arts District”)

An unanticipated impact was that the local community began organizing local Art Walks to tour the artwork in the Warehouse District.

2. Recognize the bicycle corridor as an opportunity to plant shade trees and further expand the City of Tempe’s Urban Forestry Master Plan, which “proposes a city-wide goal of 25% tree and shade canopy” by 2040 (“Urban Forestry Master Plan”). The city plan identifies three core public spaces for the planting and maintenance of trees: streets, urban hubs, and parks and open spaces. Nearly half of the proposed bicycle corridor falls within three of the most unshaded areas in Tempe with between just 5-11.2% canopy coverage by census tract (“Urban Forestry Master Plan”).

3. In the spirit of the Art Walk, create a city-sponsored self-guided “art tour” approach for a bike tour of the arts corridor. There are multiple anticipated impacts
here between tourism, health, and social cohesion. Tempe Tourism advertises a variety of outdoor, physical activities from hiking local trails to boating on Tempe Town Lake. Creating an arts-focused bicycle tour could increase both arts and recreational tourism. Tempe is also getting its first bike share program in May 2017 with over 300 bicycles and 31 stations, which tourists can access while they are staying in Tempe (“Bike Share”). A close model to this is the Indianapolis Cultural Trail, an 8-mile bike and pedestrian path in Indianapolis, Indiana that seamlessly connects neighborhoods, cultural districts and entertainment amenities while serving as the downtown hub for central Indiana’s vast greenway system...The Indianapolis Cultural Trail is recognized around the world for enriching the lives of Indianapolis residents and visitors by providing a beautiful connection to each other, culture, art and healthy living. (Indianapolis Cultural Trail)

Because much of the infrastructure and bikeways already exist for the proposed Tempe arts corridor, and Hardy Drive already contains some of Tempe’s most well-known public art pieces from the Tempe Center for the Arts through Broadway Road (including Lauren Lee’s “Don’t Wake the Dreamer” mural), the majority of the work in establishing this as a designated corridor is the naming, digital assets, mapping, and signage. The Indianapolis Cultural Trail includes a physical map with the locations of notable trail history, public art pieces, sustainability features, and bike share locations. Tempe already has these same kinds of features and could include them on its own cultural trail. Additionally, the City of Tempe could develop a website and corresponding app that includes an interactive map indicating features of note, perhaps audio tour guides, and specific app features that correspond with signs designated along the trail.

The arts corridor in Tempe could increase the amount of pop-up artworks, performances, and cultural events along the route and canal space leading to Kiwanis Park. This arts corridor could help to facilitate those programs. The findings
also indicated that Tempe residents enjoy and encourage more festivals. Tempe could consider making a city-sponsored art walk/ride centered around a variety of planned activities along the route and canal space over the course of a single or multi-day festival-like celebration. Additionally, if Tempe begins organizing pop-up exhibitions and performances, these can be integrated into the corridor app’s push notification settings to let people nearby know what kind of events are happening along the trail.

4. Perhaps the most crucial piece of this corridor project is the ability to connect with the neighboring Town of Guadalupe, a primarily Hispanic (44%) and Pascua Yaqui Native American (31%) community with a median household income of $29,375 and a poverty rating of 24.1% (“Data USA”). Guadalupe is a small, diverse town that is home to a mixture of Anglo, Mexican, and Yacqui culture. Its proximity to Tempe is so close that the Guadalupe Cemetery is actually part of the City of Tempe. Tempe is primarily more Anglo, but both cities have large Hispanic populations and a larger than average segment of the population living in poverty. Making this connection with an arts corridor could create greater social cohesion between the neighborhoods and the local residents of Tempe and Guadalupe. On top of the cultural programs that could bring these groups together, the corridor itself as a place for people to get out and move together offers greater community connectedness and better personal health and well-being:

You can’t have a prosperous neighborhood where people can engage in social interaction and converse if they have to drive everywhere. If you can accommodate biking and walking, you’re much more likely to have social interaction, social equity, and a high performing real estate market — it all comes together. If you have a walkable environment, people that aren’t wealthy and those who are actually end up in the same proximity. They interact, and it strengthens the culture, the economy, and the outcomes that you get. (Keyes)
When comparing the neighborhoods in Tempe and the Town of Guadalupe that would play host to the corridor from the Tempe Center for the Arts to Kiwanis Park (with a possible future connection to the Highline Multi-Use Path), the proposed arts corridor would activate space in some of the lowest income neighborhoods in Tempe (Figure 3). This creates access to arts and culture in those communities and better cohesion when people who may not otherwise spend time in these communities show up to experience the arts corridor.

![Figure 3 | Neighborhoods by annual income](image)

**Conclusion**

The City of Tempe has already created a culture of arts appreciation and pro-bike citizens who would likely utilize and support an arts-activated bicycle corridor down Hardy Drive. Tempe is also in a phase of urban renewal between real estate, public transit, upgraded parks, and enhanced streetscapes that account for cyclists and pedestrians rather than just automobiles. Due to some of these developments, there are inevitable economic shifts that are already affecting the Tempe community.
with some residents worrying about gentrification and displacement. With these recommendations in mind, Tempe needs to be mindful in how it can promote economic growth, new business, and new development while empowering the current community in ways that allow them to participate and remain attached to Tempe. As the Knight Foundation’s 2010 “Soul of the Community” report reminds us, community attachment has a direct correlation to GDP growth, and attached communities are those that are open, social, and beautiful—all aspects that can be identified with the arts-focused corridor.
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