



FEET FIRST PHILLY

Helen Gym

Question #1: When you replace car trips with walking, you help reduce carbon emissions.

In the past week, where did you walk to and why?

In the past week, I've walked to a number of campaign events and forums. Reducing carbon emissions is important to me. Generally, I often walk or bike to work, however the demands of being a candidate for citywide office require me to drive most days to make it to multiple events every day. I am a strong proponent of making public transportation more accessible and affordable for all – and would certainly aim to make taking public transportation much more than a once a week commitment when in office.

Question #2: The public discussion surrounding the 2023 municipal elections has mostly addressed the surging gun violence in Philadelphia.

Do you believe quality of life issues like broken and blocked sidewalks, abandoned cars, and lack of accessibility to greenspace are connected to the violence? Will your administration's approach to gun violence incorporate a focus on safe streets and sidewalks?

Absolutely. Quality of life issues and neglected community spaces are key issues that are connected to high rates of violence. My anti-violence agenda for Philadelphia includes investing in place-based interventions to reduce violent crime, address quality-of-life concerns proven to reduce violence, and invest in our young people.

My Mayoral Administration will fully enforce the pedestrian safety bill I authored in 2017 and ensure safe passage around construction sites. We will explore the creation of an annual fund to invest in sidewalk repairs for low-income property owners to guarantee safety along critical routes for seniors, families, and people who use wheelchairs.

When it comes to investing in neighborhood services, I will target the 57 blocks most impacted by violent crime and build cleaner and safer streets in areas that have faced historic disinvestment.

Question #3: Hit-and-runs have reached a crisis in Philadelphia. In 2022, hit-and-run fatalities rose to a record 31, more than triple the count in 2019.

How will you address this epidemic in the short and long term?

I will lead on a cross-agency, comprehensive vision for street safety that will ensure safe routes to school for children, protect pedestrians, reduce speeding and other dangerous behaviors, and ultimately reduce traffic deaths.

Speed is what causes fatalities and serious injuries. Based on the success of the Roosevelt Boulevard speed camera pilot program, in the short term I will support the considerable and rapid expansion of automated speed enforcement throughout the city.

Additionally, Philadelphia is the only major city without a department of transportation. Having transportation paired with sanitation is historical vestige that holds back policy and operational advancements. My Administration will combine OTIS with Streets Transportation Function to increase accountability for transportation and accelerate the implementation of transportation priorities.

Question #4: Philadelphia first committed to “Vision Zero,” a strategy to eliminate traffic deaths and serious injuries, in 2017. The premise of the city’s pledge is that traffic deaths are not “accidents,” but policy failures. However, 120 Philadelphians died in traffic incidents in 2022, twice the 2022 target set by the city’s Vision Zero Action Plan 2025.

What went wrong, and what will you do differently as Mayor?

Despite often talking about Vision Zero, the current administration has made very little investment into it and progress on it. I believe that budgets are moral documents, and they encapsulate our priorities and visions for Philadelphia. Our city deserves more than just a plan, it deserves a leader who will roll up their sleeves, align partners around a shared vision, and get results.

As Mayor, I want to be a champion of a real Vision Zero action plan, not just an aspirational outline that we don’t live up to, but something tangible and achievable. As Mayor, I will increase investment in speed and traffic cameras in danger zones where traffic accidents commonly occur. I will also update our sidewalks and streets, invest in safe crosswalks, and prioritize safety in any street redevelopment projects.

Question #5: In May 2017, City Council passed a bill amending City law on sidewalk closures (Chapter 11-600 of The Philadelphia Code). Now, those who seek a Streets Department permit to close a sidewalk or even a portion of a sidewalk must submit an analysis regarding the

feasibility of providing a protected walkway. But this reform only matters if those responsible for sidewalk closures bother applying for a permit. Unpermitted sidewalk closures persist across the city, endangering pedestrians and making our sidewalks inaccessible to people who are wheelchair-bound or push strollers.

What went wrong, and what will you do to fix it?

I authored the bill that this question references. When I introduced the bill, there were very few (if any) protections in place for pedestrians and we were coming out of several decades of administrations that prioritized unbridled development over pedestrians. That bill represents one of the first steps in guaranteeing sidewalk safety and accessibility for all Philadelphians.

As Mayor, I will continue the work that I started. First, I would direct my administration's street department to require sidewalk closure permit applications and the protected sidewalk feasibility analysis alongside any new applications for construction and re-zoning. This would guarantee that safety is being considered before approval of any development projects begin. Furthermore, I would direct increased enforcement of illegal sidewalk closures and give out tickets until those closures are changed.

Question #6: The Streets Department is responsible for paving and maintaining roadways, but the City leaves sidewalk maintenance to property owners – many of whom cannot afford to make sidewalk repairs on their own. Philadelphia has over 230 miles of sidewalks in poor condition, which decreases the quality of life and makes walking and rolling difficult.

What forms of mobility does the Streets Department exist to serve? Do you support using the Streets Department budget to develop a plan, or a funding strategy, to repair and replace sidewalks?

As stated earlier, I believe that the city government must lead by example in ensuring that sidewalks owned by the city are in good repair and properly maintained. As Mayor, I will increase funding to invest in quality sidewalks and ensure young people, parents with strollers, seniors, and wheelchair users can safely use our sidewalks.

Question #7: Car ownership rates are skyrocketing in Philadelphia, seeing its largest increase in low-income households. Car ownership is a huge burden on household costs and on public space. Because much of the city was built in a time before cars, there is limited public space for personal car storage, leading to illegally parked cars on sidewalks and crosswalks.

Will your administration promote mode shift and reduce reliance on personal car ownership? How will your administration advance this policy goal?

Philadelphians need better transportation options to get them out of their cars and out of traffic. This includes safe, clean and reliable SEPTA service and an expanded network of bike lanes that make it safe to take the 25% of trips that are less than 2 miles by bike. Improving the quality of the pedestrian experience and reducing violent crime will encourage residents to choose to take more trips on foot. In addition to investments in transit and cycling, there are operational strategies to get Philadelphians out of traffic whether they are riding a bus or behind the wheel.

Less than half of all of Philadelphia traffic signals are connected to the city's Traffic Operations Center, meaning there is no way to optimize those signals to prioritize transit or lower delay times and associated congestion and pollution. Current capital budgets only bring the number of connected signals to 48%.

Too much traffic, particularly in Center City and along business corridors is caused by doubled parked trucks and cars. Through a mix of policy and enforcement we can make sure there is enough loading for trucks and drivers making quick stops, and get tough on trucks blocking traffic lanes.

In the long term we have to address land use to reduce congestion, building more affordable and market rate housing along the Broad Street and Market Frankford lines, as well as on our regional rail corridors.

Question #8: Public parking management and enforcement of parking rules in Philadelphia are entrusted to the Philadelphia Parking Authority, a State agency that operates outside the control of City government. However, this does not mean that the City has no role to play in holding the PPA accountable for its decisions, lobbying Harrisburg for more funding, or taking action on its own to supplement activities that the PPA is not but perhaps should be doing.

Are you satisfied with the PPA's stewardship of public space and enforcement? What is your Administration's strategy for the City to proactively address illegal parking, abandoned cars, and other parking management concerns?

No, I am not satisfied with the PPA's stewardship of public space and enforcement. In the past, I have led efforts to demand that the PPA pay what they owe our public schools when they were failing to live up to their promises. As Mayor, I will continue to demand more from the PPA by improving accountability and ensuring their priorities actually benefit Philadelphia families and make communities safer. My administration will prioritize intersections on common routes to schools, parks, senior housing and commercial corridors for day lighting treatments. We will also step up PPA enforcement of the kinds of illegal parking that constitute a significant safety risk. Additionally, my administration will stop the madness of towing legally parked cars for construction projects, special events, and utility works and moving them without recording the location.

It costs drivers in time, money, and in the most extreme cases thousands of dollars in parking tickets and even arrest when the police failed to remove their cars from inter-state databases of stolen vehicles. In my administration, construction companies, utilities and special event organizers will be required to track and report the location of all vehicles as a condition of their no-parking permits.

Question #9: After nearly a decade of planning, two rounds of community input, and a great deal of controversy, in the spring of 2022 the City Council authorized a “hybrid redesign” of Washington Avenue, intended to protect the safety of cyclists and pedestrians on an important, but notoriously deadly thoroughfare. However, the portion of Washington Avenue west of Broad Street was left alone, in deference to councilmanic prerogative.

What went wrong with the Washington Avenue Complete Streets project? How will your administration govern differently to ensure Complete Streets projects across all council districts are successful?

When our City leads extensive community-input and research processes, we must actually follow through with our findings. The Washington Ave project is a clear example of the City failing to align all City leaders, community partners, and stakeholders around a shared vision for safety. As Mayor, I will draw from my success in building coalitions to deliver results – not just make promises.