

Candidate Name: Austin Davis

Ward: 7

1. In 2024, more than 600 people walking or biking in the city were struck by drivers. In 2022, the City adopted Vision Zero, committing to eliminate traffic fatalities by 2032—yet there is still no dedicated annual budget for traffic calming. During budget season, would you advocate for increased funding for street safety improvements?

Yes. I am running on a street safety and neighborhood walkability platform. Our new Ward 7 (Detroit Shoreway, Ohio City, Tremont, and the Flats) is one of the most walkable, bikeable, and transit-friendly communities in the region. And we all deserve to enjoy our neighborhoods and feel safe crossing our residential streets—whether you're 8 weeks old or 80 years old, whether you use a stroller or a wheelchair, and whether you're walking, biking, or taking transit. I take Vision Zero seriously, and we need to fund these efforts. I have specifically been calling for more speed tables, roundabouts, raised crosswalks, and curb extensions.

2. Last year, the City adopted Cleveland Moves (our city's new Mobility Plan) and, with that, committed to building 50 miles of low-stress bike facilities over the next 3 years. Protected bike lanes are a proven safety countermeasure for not just bike riders, but people walking and driving as well. Will you support upgrading existing bike lanes in your ward to be physically separated from car lanes?

Yes. I'll support upgrading existing bike lanes in Ward 7 to physically protected lanes wherever possible. Curbs, bollards, planters, or parking buffers can all create true separation from car traffic—because painted lines alone don't do enough to keep people safe.

3. In 2022, City Council changed the name of its Transportation Committee to the Transportation and Mobility Committee. Still, the vast majority of legislation that this committee sees is related to the airports and the Port of Cleveland. What role do you see this committee playing going forward?

Much of pedestrian and bike safety, as well as transit ridership, is ultimately determined through land use policy—which tackles big questions about where folks live, work, shop, and play, and therefore how people move between those destinations (and if a car is required to do so). With that perspective, I believe that the Development, Planning, and Sustainability committee has the strongest ability to make an impact on bike and pedestrian safety. It may make sense to bring traditional transit/mobility pieces into that committee, to connect them with highly related land use issues and separate them from issues like the airport and the Port.

That said: if I'm elected to City Council, I will make it a priority to bring a mobility-forward perspective to any committee to which I am assigned, because it is my priority and the priority of Ward 7.

4. Last summer, the city upgraded coin-operated parking meters to accept online payments and has continued adding new on-street paid parking zones in Ohio City, Downtown, University Circle, and Detroit-Shoreway—creating a new revenue stream for the city. Surface parking lots in Downtown and other neighborhoods are also taxed, with much of that revenue currently directed toward stadium funding. Would you support dedicating this money to mobility and safety improvements instead? Why or why not?

Cleveland has a very complex budget and no shortage of needs—needs that are constantly evolving in response to unforeseen crises, shifting federal priorities, and unreliable state support. And so I generally do not support dedicated funding streams. Case in point: surface parking lot taxes should not be earmarked toward stadium funding.

I would instead work hard to establish stronger line-items in the general fund budget and capital budget for street safety measures. Because regardless of where the funds come from, the goal has to be to well-funded mobility and safety improvements across our city.

5. Historically, community engagement around street projects starts after design is well underway, leaving little room for meaningful feedback. Even now, public meetings often happen on short notice and promotion for these meetings is limited. How do you plan to collect feedback from constituents and ensure they know about opportunities for input on projects?

Good street design starts with good listening—and that means making engagement easier for everyone. My office will share clear, early updates through block clubs, social media, and newsletters. I'll also push for easy-to-read project maps and timelines published online, so that people can see what's coming in their neighborhood at a glance. And in general, I've always appreciated it when my councilmember had a tent or a table at community events, and I certainly plan to keep meeting people where they're at. We can't expect everyone to show up for a public meeting on a school night: the goal is to ensure residents have steady, transparent communication, so folks can engage when and how it works best for them.

6. Cleveland's ability to deliver safer streets is limited by staffing levels that fall short of many peer cities. Would you commit to support funding additional mobility positions – including a dedicated crew for installing traffic-calming measures like speed tables and more engineers – to bring Cleveland in line with similar cities and accelerate street safety improvements?

For Cleveland to deliver safer streets, we need to keep investing in the staff who make them possible. I believe in a strong public sector across the board, but particularly one that has the capacity to design, build, and maintain safer infrastructure. That's why I'd support funding additional mobility positions, including more engineers, planners, and a dedicated crew to install traffic-calming measures like speed

tables and curb extensions. Strengthening our in-house expertise is essential to making Cleveland's streets safer, sooner.

7. What is your experience with public transit? Do you ride the RTA?

When I lived in Ohio City, I lived without a car. I either took the bus, or I walked. It was great. I got more exercise, I never needed to find parking, and the number of bus lines that connect downtown (where I worked) and Ohio City made it easy to always get around without having to plan my whole day around the bus schedule. I now live in Tremont, which has limited transit access, and while I walk in my neighborhood as much as possible, I do not take the bus or other transit much.

8. The 2025 Cleveland Health Survey found that unreliable transportation prevented 20% of residents citywide from getting to medical appointments, work, or other essential needs over the past year – with even higher rates in some wards. What role should public transit play in ensuring residents can meet their daily needs, and how would you support RTA in making that happen?

Reliable transit connects people to jobs, schools, healthcare, and each other, and it's key to reducing traffic, improving street safety, and cutting emissions. Ultimately, I believe public transit should be a mobility option of choice for anyone who wants to get around the city conveniently and affordably. And high-quality transit service requires investment and support from across the community. To that end, I'll support city-level tools like transit-oriented development policies and environmental design features like lighting to enhance safety around stops, and I'll work to ensure land use, funding, and street design are aligned around transit accessibility.

9. GCRTA will be broke in a couple years once they run out of federal COVID relief dollars. If that happens without finding new sources of operating funds, the transit authority will be forced to drastically cut service and raise fares. We are already seeing this happen across the country. As a legislator in a city where 20% of the population doesn't have access to a car, how will you ensure we don't face the same fate? Do you support a countywide sales or property tax levy to fund public transit? What other local funding opportunities would you explore to fund transit?

One important way to improve the financial health of our transit system is to increase ridership. On one hand, the relatively dense Near West Side does not have any circulator routes. It takes a transfer to get from 25th and Lorain in Ohio City to 65th and Detroit in Detroit Shoreway, and Tremont doesn't have any high-frequency transit. I'd advocate for new routes that our residents would use—to make transit a more viable option for everyday living and not just hub-and-spoke commuting.

At the same time, the new Ward 7 includes the Rapid station at W. 65th and Lorain. But it's next to a number of abandoned storefronts and a car lot. These are not transit-friendly uses of land. We can increase transit ridership by working to make the land near our transit stops better align with our transit goals—by encouraging more people to live, work, and enjoy themselves near high-frequency transit, so that transit becomes a better option for more people.

As a distant goal, I've always thought the Hong Kong "Rail Plus Property" model—where the transit authority owns land around its stations and builds on that land in ways that generate both ridership and new revenue for transit—made a lot of sense. Especially in Ohio where the state provides so little support for transit networks, we need to explore alternative funding streams for transit locally.

I would need to investigate the finances further, but sales taxes are regressive and disproportionately impact low-income residents, and we already have one of the highest effective property tax rates in the state (which is disproportionately burdening long-term homeowners of moderate means). So I would only support additional tax measures if there was truly no alternative to keeping our transit system running.

10. Public transit infrastructure, from shelters to bus lanes, can conflict with the desires of motorists and real estate and business owners. How will you approach the needs of public transit riders to conveniently get where they need to go in the face of opposition to new or existing public transit infrastructure?

I'll approach these conflicts with the understanding that our streets are public space and should serve the greatest public good. Everyone deserves infrastructure that makes their daily trips reliable, safe, and dignified, and transit riders are no exception. When we clearly communicate the benefits of a strong transit system—more customers on foot, less congestion, and safer streets—most stakeholders can find common ground. And when that's not possible, I'll always default in support of pedestrians, whose needs in a city are often best supported by robust public transit.

11. What does being a good partner with GCRTA look like to you as a city councilor?

The City and GCRTA should share a long-term vision for how Cleveland grows—because transportation and land use are inseparable. The Near West Side already has some of the city's strongest transit assets, and many residents already embrace transit as part of daily life. We should build on that strength. I'd advocate for aligning the city's housing policy, zoning, and infrastructure planning with GCRTA's network design, so we're building density and walkability around strong transit corridors. Being a good partner means thinking beyond one budget cycle and planning together for the kind of city we want Cleveland to become.

At the same time, a strong partnership with RTA means making transit work better for every neighborhood, and for the residents of our neighborhoods. Even though the bus and Rapid stops themselves are owned and maintained by RTA, the city is a crucial partner in their activities. And when there's joint planning, I'll advocate for the people who use transit—starting with stops that are well-maintained, well-lit, sheltered, and easy to reach.

12. How would you ensure that the needs of all citizens are represented on the city council?

I'm here to learn from all residents of Ward 7. That means inviting folks in by hosting town halls and public forums across every neighborhood. That means going where folks already are, by joining at the block club or the street party. That means reaching out through print newsletters, email updates, and social media. And that means staying responsive and communicative, because there is always more to learn.

At the same time, we can't lose sight of how we're all in this together. Our Ward 7 neighborhoods are full of diverse folks from all backgrounds but who share many of the same concerns: keeping traffic safe on the streets we all share, keeping the electricity running on the power infrastructure we all share, and keeping the neighborhoods we share vibrant and affordable for all of us.

13. How do you stay informed about current events and issues affecting the city?

I read, I listen, I talk, and I get out there! I make a point to attend block club meetings, chat with small business owners, and read all the local news I can. And I worked in City Hall as a lawyer and advisor, so I am certainly familiar with how the city works, the issues we're facing, and how to get things done.

But I'm always learning more, and I'll say that the best insights often come from Clevelanders sharing their stories and their lived experience. My own lived experience in this city—as a resident, a homeowner, a parent, and a bilateral above-knee amputee—certainly helps me understand how current events and policy decisions play out in real life. Staying engaged keeps me grounded in what Clevelanders are actually experiencing every day, because it's often happening to me and my family, too.

14. What will you do to increase the availability of affordable, integrated, safe, and accessible housing for people with disabilities?

In my experience as a person with a physical disability, multi-family housing like apartments is often easier for folks with mobility challenges. Economies of scale can make accessible units more affordable.

First-floor living or an elevator is more likely to be available. And shared amenities like ramps, wider hallways, and automatic doors can be designed once and benefit everyone. To that end, I've been advocating for the legalization of small multifamily housing—threeplexes and fourplexes—that would easily fit with Ward 7's urban fabric while providing needed new housing units that are more likely to be accessible to more members of our community. And as new apartment proposals come up, I will certainly be assessing them through a disability lens.

I've also been advocating for the legalization of accessory dwelling units and in-law suites, to make it easier for more kinds of housing scenarios that fit more kinds of needs, like aging in place or multi-generational living. I'd also like to see city building incentives help create more affordable, accessible housing, and ensure that it's integrated near transit, jobs, and community life. And I firmly believe that we should build accessible and affordable housing on city land wherever possible, which is why I am a strong supporter of the affordable housing development for seniors planned for the former McCafferty Health Center site on Lorain Ave. in Ward 7.

At the end of the day, I believe there's space for everybody—everybody—in our amazing community, and that certainly includes people with disabilities.

15. What do you know about the crisis facing the disabled community in regard to availability of transportation and employment opportunities? And what will you do to mitigate these barriers?

A society that absolutely requires a car to get around cannot be an accessible society, even if there are accessible cars available and affordable. I unequivocally believe in robust and accessible infrastructure, public transit, and an urban fabric that embraces all ways that folks move around town. That said, much of our city and society requires a car to get around, and I'd be proud to advocate for accessible transportation options, improved paratransit coordination, and transportation-focused partnerships between employers and workforce programs.

16. How do you see the impending changes to both State and Federal programs impacting your community? And what solutions can you offer in your community to combat the loss of these programs and funding?

These changes are wide-reaching and devastating. The Trump Administration's closure of the refugee program, for example, means 1,500 newcomers won't be moving to Cleveland per year anymore. Community Development Block Grant funds may be under attack, which would pose an existential challenge to our network of community development corporations and the key neighborhood support they provide. When the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency rescinded its grant to MetroHealth to replace gas stoves with induction ones for families where someone had asthma—that included my family, too.

But cuts to state and federal programs will hit Cleveland's working families hardest, especially those relying on safety net services. Our leaders will have to strengthen local partnerships to provide missing services where we can. We'll have to think creatively about the use of our limited city resources. And we'll have to keep advocating in Columbus and DC, particularly on issues of shared importance.

The City of Cleveland can't fill all the needs that will be left by our state and federal governments. But we can cushion the impact for those who most depend on programs under siege.

17. Why does Cleveland not currently have contracts with Uber and Lyft to provide wheelchair accessible vans options at a fixed rate like larger cities such as Chicago and New York? Can you assist with this?

I am not fully aware of what services Uber and Lyft provide elsewhere, but I suspect that cities like Chicago and New York are in more forward-thinking states that support efforts like these through grants, subsidies, and regulatory mandates. I'd hope to partner with LEAP to learn more, but I'd be happy to explore this.

18. Cleveland will be hosting the Special Olympics in 2030, bringing more than 5,500 athletes and coaches and over 125,000 fans and family members to our city. How will you work to ensure Cleveland is a welcoming, accessible place for people with diverse disabilities, not only through trained volunteers, but also by encouraging accessibility across restaurants, stores, rideshares, museums, casinos, theaters, and other public spaces?

Cleveland hosting the Special Olympics is a chance to make our city truly welcoming for people of all abilities. Disability is a broad category, and the needs of athletes and visitors with intellectual disabilities may differ from those with mobility, sensory, or other disabilities. I'd work with advocates, business owners, and transportation partners to promote universal accessibility, from physical spaces to communication and service design. To that end, I'd explore developing new grant or technical assistance programs to help our community adapt. I'd love to see Cleveland use the Special Olympics as a legacy moment—a chance to make updates, advancements, investments, and partnerships that will keep our city open to all long after the games conclude.