Quick-build project at the intersection of Windsor and Exchange Streets. *Source: City of Akron*

Innovations at a School Crossing in Akron, Ohio

Introduction

Guided by a commitment to continuous improvement, thoughtful experimentation, and creative approaches to enhancing pedestrian corridors, Akron, Ohio, implemented targeted improvements at a school crossing. The city of approximately 200,000 people received a mini-grant from the National Center for Safe Routes to School, made possible by General Motors, to install a quick build project. Through this partnership, the Akron Traffic Engineering Office identified a crossing that serves students who attend the Mason Community Learning Center (Mason CLC) that could benefit from low-cost changes to improve safety and accessibility.

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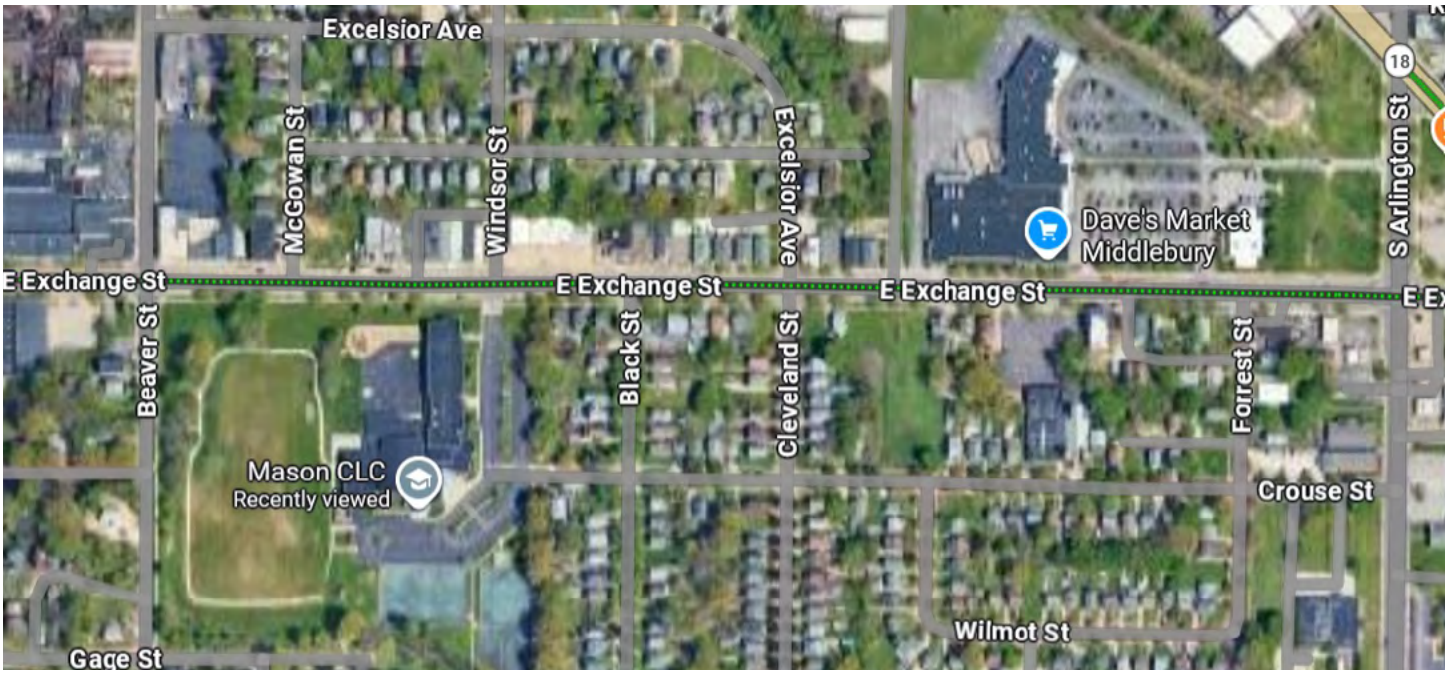
From lane reduction to targeted intersection improvements

Mason CLC has two purposes: It is a pre-K through 6th grade school, and it serves as a community hub for recreation and services during non-school times.

Students come to the school from neighborhoods to the north and south of East Exchange Street, and from another neighborhood located between Exchange Street and South Arlington Street.

East Exchange Street is a busy roadway, carrying more than 6,500 vehicles per day, and features buffered bike lanes in both directions. The street serves as a main corridor that connects downtown Akron and the University of Akron with the Middlebury neighborhood. At the time of the project's implementation, 17 percent of Mason CLC students lived within one-quarter mile of the school, and an additional 20 percent lived between one-quarter and one-half mile of the school.

With funding from the Ohio Department of Transportation Safe Routes to School program, the segment of East Exchange Street serving Mason CLC was reconfigured from four to three lanes and received a new bike lane with floating parking to provide separation between bicyclists and motorists.



Above:
Street network around Mason CLC.
Source: Google Maps.

Right:
Intersection of Windsor and Exchange Street with existing bike lanes and lane reduction. Driveway to the school is shown on south side of intersection.
Source: Google Maps.

City workers apply new paint to the project. *Source: City of Akron.*

After the SRTS project installation, the Traffic Engineering Office identified an opportunity to apply the mini-grant to narrow the roadway visually and delineate space for biking, parking, and accessing the crosswalk. This work would also align with citywide efforts to increase bicycle infrastructure and improve accessibility. Project elements included:

- Flexible delineators to outline the curb extensions
- Colored, textured paint in the curb extension spaces between travel and bike lanes
- Crosswalk markings replaced with high visibility thermoplastic paint
- Directional bar tiles and detectible warnings for people with visual impairments

The floating parking lane remained, and yield markings were added to the bike lane to prioritize pedestrians at the crosswalk. Nicholas Meyer, Project Manager for the City of Akron's Traffic Engineering Office, viewed this project as a chance to test out new materials for future use within the city. Meyer said, "All were enhancements to what was already there, creating an opportunity to try something different without having to tear up the roadway."

Testing out paint

The team also wanted to test out textured and colored paints. The city selected a textured pavement coating to test durability, installation demands, and operational performance. Meyer said that engineering staff were enthusiastic about installing the new materials but also recognized how the process differed from their current installation capabilities. This was the first time the city's markings crew had installed the textured system. The paint was different from typical paint used, and it took longer than anticipated to apply and emitted a strong smell.

After several months, the paint surfaces still looked fresh. The true test will be if the improvements last five years. "If this isn't going to last five years, is it worth our time?" says Meyer. "I tend to think not." With a planned resurfacing of Exchange Street set for 2030, the timing was right for this trial.

The quick build project included features to help people with visual impairments. *Source: City of Akron.*

Low-cost accessibility features

The project team saw challenges to wayfinding and creating a pedestrian network that gives visually impaired users a safe and informative built environment. For the intersection at Windsor and Exchange Streets, Meyer noted that "if somebody comes down the original curb ramp, they need to know where to go." This concern, combined with the desire to test new treatments, inspired the project team to pursue an intersection enhancement to address this identified barrier and be replicable at other intersections in Akron.

The project team installed vertical delineators and directional bar tiles. The directional bar tiles were intended to help people with visual impairment benefit from the shortened crossing distance made possible by the curb extensions and to know the direction of the crossing. Meyer said, "We really wanted to get people to start their crossing at the edge of the bump out where technically a new curb is… basically changing the location of the curb ramp without building a new curb ramp." Detectable warnings and delineators were placed on the painted bump-out edge, therefore relocating the start point of the crossing.

Changing behavior at the crosswalk and in city practices

The intersection at Windsor and Exchange Streets was in an area already treated with markings and lane reduction to calm traffic. Fine-tuning it with low-cost materials made improvements to how road users interacted with the space. For example, motorists better understand how to use the floating parking lane, and frequencies of parking in the bike lane have decreased. But other questions remain; the team is waiting to receive feedback from a crossing guard posted at the crossing and from visually impaired users.

Meyer hopes to apply lessons from this project to other projects. The textured paint used in the bike lane was seen as worthy of replication in other areas of the city. However, the odor of the paint used within the curb extension area not taken by the bike lane, and the extra time needed to apply it, was not seen as an advantage over other options.

Conclusion

Akron's quick-build project outside the Mason Community Learning Center demonstrates how thoughtful experimentation and low-cost interventions can meaningfully enhance safety, accessibility, and comfort for people walking and biking—especially around schools. By building on prior Safe Routes to School investments, the Traffic Engineering Office was able to fine-tune an already improved corridor, testing new materials and accessibility features without costly construction or roadway disruption. While not every treatment proved ideal for broader use, the project generated valuable insights that will inform future design decisions, strengthen citywide practices, and support Akron's broader goals for multimodal safety and accessibility.

Acknowledgments

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1 Microsoft. (2025). Copilot Chat (with Data Protection). [Large language model]. https://m365.cloud.microsoft/chat/?auth=2