



# BETTER BLOCK BR Government Street

WRAP-UP REPORT - Fall 2013



*BetterBlockBR*  
GOVERNMENT STREET

# THE PARTNERS

Better Block BR is a demonstration project of FutureBR, an initiative of the Mayor-President of the City of Baton Rouge - East Baton Rouge Parish. This temporary installation applied Complete Streets design concepts to Government Street and was made possible by the hard work of the following organizations:

## HOSTS



## SPONSORS

The following organizations contributed funds, substantial in-kind services, and/or materials:



## PROJECT PARTNERS

We especially thank the following for contributing materials or time:

- 225 and Baton Rouge Business Report
- Baton Rouge Magnet High School
- Big G's Nursery
- Bricks and Bombs
- Capital Section of the LA Chapter of the American Planning Assoc.
- Catholic High School
- City-Parish Planning Commission
- Coca-Cola
- Community Coffee
- Domino's Pizza
- Downtown Development District
- Downtown Duplicating
- Garden District Nursery
- Giraphic Prints
- Government Street Hardware
- Keep Baton Rouge Beautiful
- La Carreta
- Lamar Advertising
- Landscape Depot
- Letterman's Blue Print & Supply
- Louisiana Chapter American Society of Landscape Architects
- Louisiana Office Supply
- Mid City Bikes
- Neighborland
- Pro Print
- Raising Cane's

## A SPECIAL THANKS

To the Community Build Team who volunteered their time to help create the Better Block BR event: Brian Baiamonte, Susannah Bing, Haley Blakeman, Shannon Blakeman, Laurie Chapple, Scott D'Agostino, Brett Furr, Jennifer Hall, Ryan Holcomb, Laurence Lambert, Justin Lemoine, Camille Manning-Broome, Ingolf Partenheimer, Casey Phillips, John Price, Samuel Sanders, Tara Titone.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

Overhead view of an outdoor beer garden constructed during the event

An outdoor café was set up to provide refreshments to attendees

The overhead view of the bikes lanes and street trees along Government Street

Mayor Kip Holden rides his bike in the temporary lane added for the event

Pop-up vendors set up their operations to demonstrate the effects for local small businesses



# INTRODUCTION

## WHAT IS A BETTER BLOCK?

A Better Block project is a rapid urban revitalization project that creates a live Complete Streets demonstration. Better Block BR took place on April 13, 2013 on a two-block stretch of Government Street between Bedford and Beverly Drives. This living charrette showed that Complete Streets infrastructure can be a catalyst for creating neighborhood vitality, successful small businesses, healthy lifestyles, and diverse communities.

Pioneered by Team Better Block, projects nationwide help build local support for Complete Streets policies and design concepts. Adoption and implementation will provide residents with new modes of mobility, as well as new venues for community interaction, opportunities for public art, spaces for activities and conversations, and often a new neighborhood profile.

## WHY A BETTER BLOCK?

There are several reasons to host a Better Block, including:

- Produces concrete results instead of showing an abstract sketch
- Further promotes innovation by testing the most innovative best practices on the ground
- Makes municipal staff and elected officials' jobs easier by testing ideas and pushing boundaries without the financial commitment
- Creates ownership, and therefore champions, among residents and business owners
- Shows documentation that disarms naysayers

The real question is: Why *not* have a Better Block?

## GOALS OF BETTER BLOCK

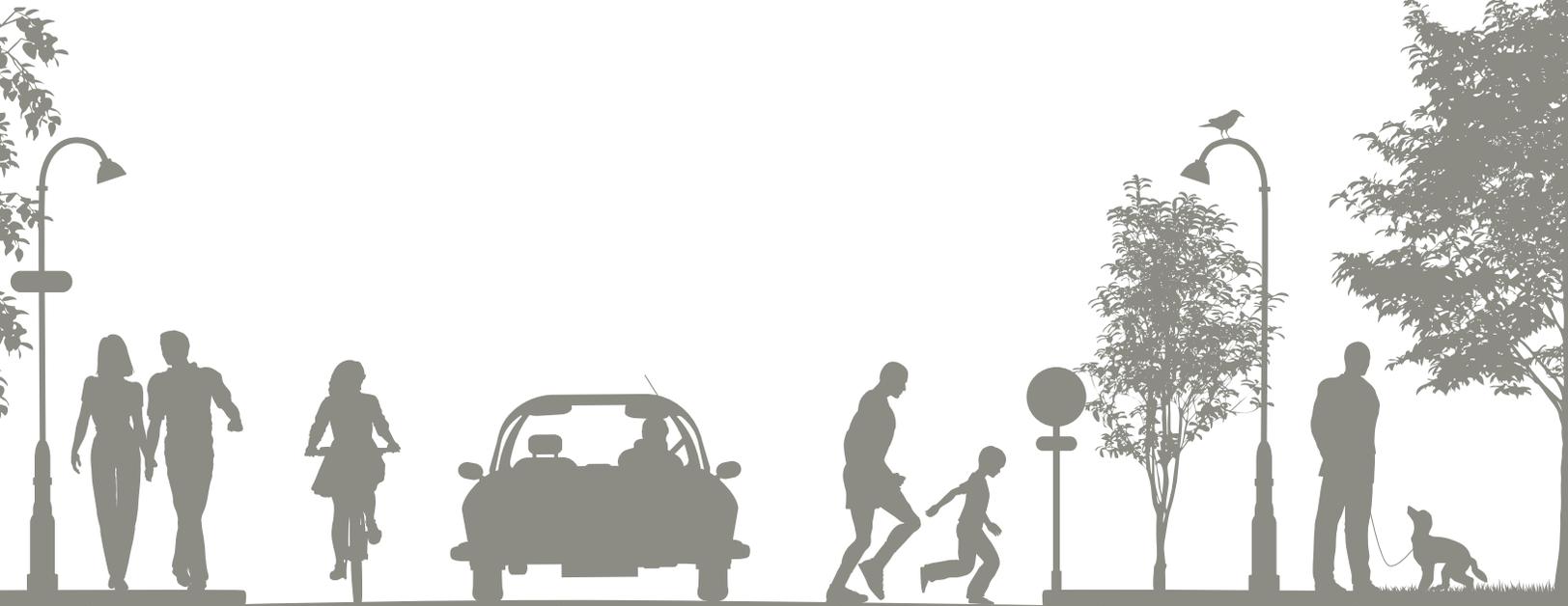
Better Block BR aimed to achieve two goals: 1) to find a unified vision among Baton Rouge's stakeholders and potential investors for Government Street; and 2) to demonstrate the impact of an innovative traffic solution and improved public and retail spaces on economic and community development.

According to an article that appeared in *The Advocate* March 31, 2013, Laurence Lambert, a traffic engineer and Better Block BR volunteer, said "That's the overall goal for everybody – to turn Government Street into a destination, rather than just a means to get from point A to point B." According to the article, Government Street has been the subject of numerous studies and public workshops over the years. A major recurring theme is that no one wants Government Street to be the high-speed, unsafe and pedestrian-unfriendly vehicular corridor it is today. A popular, long-standing idea among planners, residents, and merchants is a Road Diet, which includes shrinking the road from two lanes in each direction down to one in each direction, put in a center turn lane, and use one lane for parking, bike lanes, street trees, and sidewalks. Better Block BR demonstrated just this.

“That’s the overall goal for everybody – to turn Government Street into a destination, rather than just a means to get from point A to point B.”

- Laurence Lambert

# ANATOMY OF A BETTER BLOCK



## ACTIVE SIDEWALKS

Sidewalks should be smooth, wide, feel safe, and have appropriate transitions to the street, making them easy to walk or use a wheelchair on

## DEDICATED BIKE LANES

Simple pavement markings creating a dedicated bike lane make both motorist and bicycle movement more predictable, and therefore safer for both. They may increase the likelihood of casual riders using bicycles for transportation

## ACTIVE ROADWAY

One lane of car traffic going in each direction with a two-way-left-turn-lane (TWLTL) in the center would reduce the amount of car crashes on Government Street by providing turning vehicles a refuge from through traffic, while keeping through traffic moving more efficiently

## SAFE CROSSWALKS

Clearly marked crosswalks allow pedestrians and wheelchair users to cross streets safely, while making sure cars know where to expect them

## PLANTING STRIP

Street trees and landscaping slow speeding traffic, improve the aesthetics of the roadway, provide shade, and create a buffer between cars and people, making a more inviting environment for pedestrians

## GREEN SPACES

Parks and public green spaces create a destination, encouraging community interaction and providing a rest from the surrounding urban environment

## GLOSSARY OF COMMON TERMS

**Complete Street:** A street designed and operated to allow all types of users—including but not limited to pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit users of all ages and physical abilities—to safely use and traverse the right-of-way

**Charrette:** A rapid design technique that typically involves intense, possibly multi-day meetings involving all stakeholders in the design and planning process

**Bike Lane:** A portion of a roadway which has been designated by pavement markings and, if used, signs, for the preferential or exclusive use of bicyclists

**Pop-up:** A temporary, short-term business, used to build interest, try a new location, or try a new concept with little financial risk

**Parklet:** A very small urban park, designed to provide a place for passersby to relax and enjoy the atmosphere of the city around them, in places where either current urban parks are lacking or where the sidewalk is not large enough to accommodate vibrant street life activities

**Stage 0 Feasibility Study:** The first of seven stages in Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LaDOTD)'s project delivery process. The purpose of

Stage 0 is to reach a decision regarding the project's feasibility and whether the project should continue further through the project delivery process

**Traffic Calming:** The combination of mainly physical measures that reduce the negative effects of motor vehicle use, alter driver behavior and improve conditions for non-motorized street users. Traffic calming objectives include achieving slow speeds for motor vehicles, reducing collision frequency and severity, increasing the safety and the perception of safety for non-motorized users of the street(s), reducing the need for police enforcement, enhancing the street environment (e.g., streetscaping), encouraging water infiltration into the ground, increasing access for all modes of transportation, and reducing cut-through motor vehicle traffic

**Tax Increment Financing District:** A public financing method that is used as a subsidy for redevelopment, infrastructure, and other community-improvement projects. A TIF district uses future projected gains in taxes to subsidize current improvements, which are projected to create the conditions for the tax gains

**Infrastructure:** Public facilities such as roads, bridges, water supply, sewers, electrical grids, and telecommunications





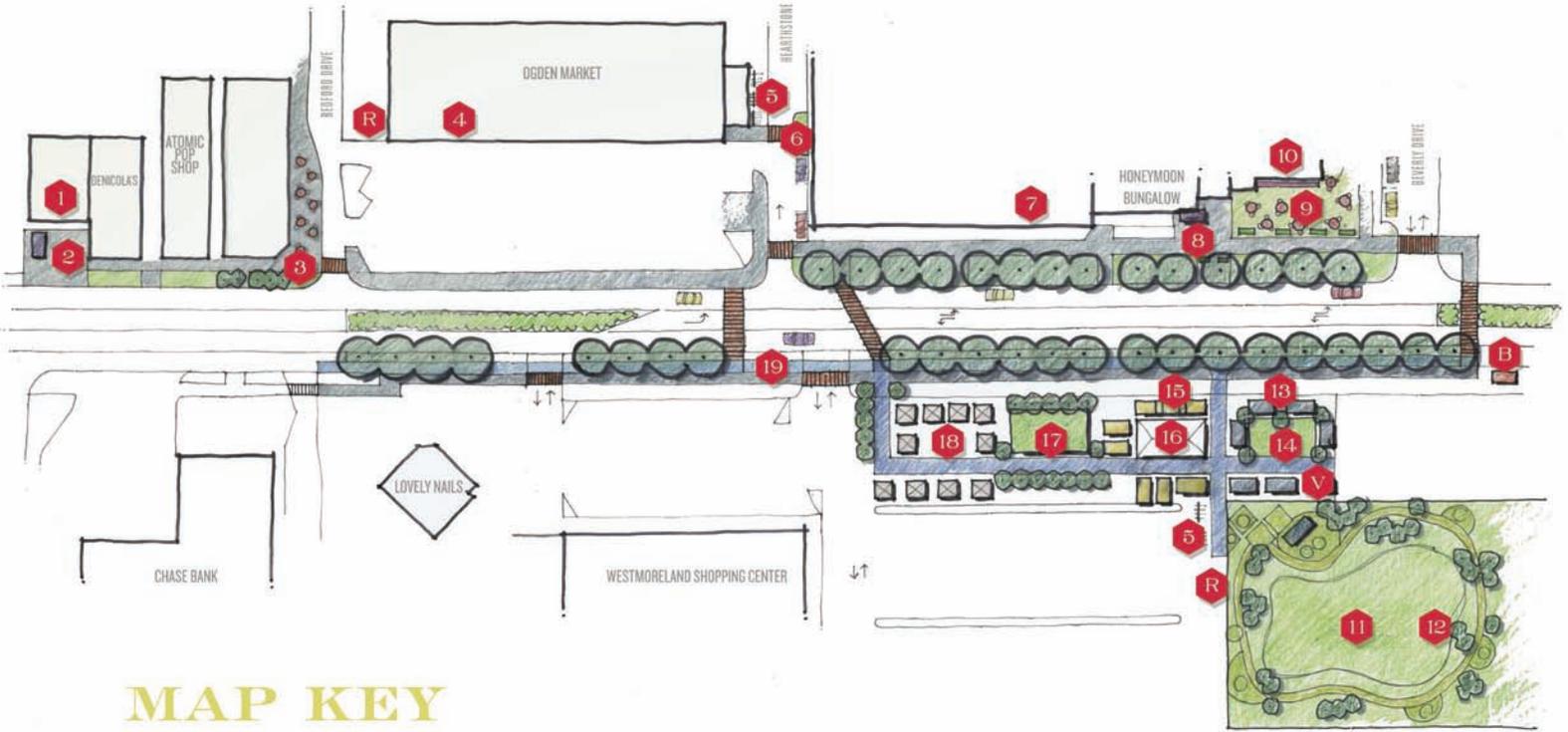
THIS PAGE:

An attendee adds his sticker to one of the installation walls that was designed to encourage community outreach through collaboration and interactivity. The stickers read "I want ... in my neighborhood."

OPPOSITE PAGE:

Visual preference boards were used during the public planning sessions

# SITE PLAN



## MAP KEY

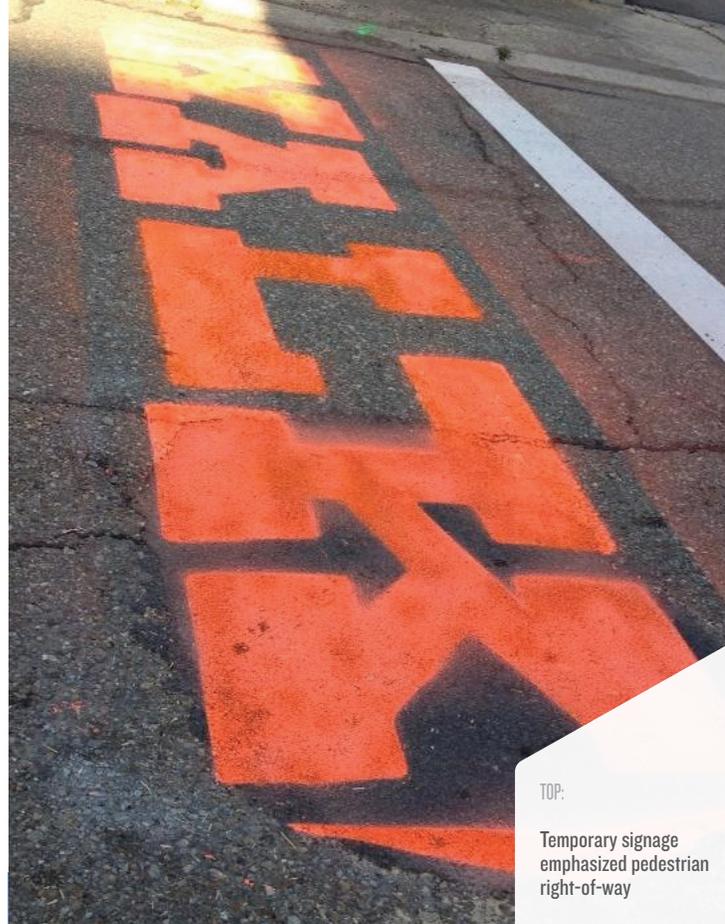
- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <b>B</b> Bus Stop                 | <b>9</b> BierGarten                      |
| <b>R</b> Restrooms                | <b>10</b> Before I Die I Want to... Wall |
| <b>V</b> Volunteer Check-in       | <b>11</b> Neighborhood Park              |
| <b>1</b> Pop-Up Shop              | <b>12</b> Walking Trail                  |
| <b>2</b> Pop-Up Shop              | <b>13</b> Food Trucks/Pop-Up Restaurants |
| <b>3</b> Outdoor Cafe             | <b>14</b> Picnic Parklet                 |
| <b>4</b> Real Estate Pop-Up       | <b>15</b> Pop-Up Shops                   |
| <b>5</b> Bike Parking             | <b>16</b> Information Lounge             |
| <b>6</b> Better Block Merchandise | <b>17</b> Urban Parklet/Artist           |
| <b>7</b> Pop-Up Shop              | <b>18</b> Pop-Up Shops                   |
| <b>8</b> Pop-Up Restaurant        | <b>19</b> Bike Lane                      |

## WHY MID CITY AND WHY GOVERNMENT STREET?

The two-block section of Government Street between Bedford and Beverly was selected for Better Block BR for several reasons:

- Government Street Master Action Plan (GoMAP!) identified area as a focus for economic development improvements
- FutureBR, the city-parish's comprehensive plan recommended Mid City as a urban renewal pilot location because of its potential for growth and investment opportunities
- It has successful businesses with a concentration of public and private educational institutions
- It links established historic neighborhoods, businesses and a major medical center to downtown and I-110

Better Block BR helped to leverage these opportunities and provide a vision for continuing the momentum of Go MAP! and FutureBR.



TOP:

Temporary signage emphasized pedestrian right-of-way



BOTTOM:

The bike lane extended throughout the entire two-block demonstration

# SITE CONSTRAINTS

1

## ECONOMICS

- » UNDERUTILIZED RETAIL SPACE
- » LACK OF MAINTENANCE
- » SPARSE BUILDING MASS SOUTH OF GOVERNMENT STREET
- » LARGE PARKING LOTS CREATE A SUBURBAN FEEL
- » SOME EXISTING BUSINESSES LACK CURB APPEAL
- » DISCONNECTED BUSINESSES FROM BLOCK TO BLOCK

2

## INFRASTRUCTURE

- » EXCESSIVE CONCRETE
- » TOO MUCH OFF-STREET PARKING
- » NO SIDEWALKS OR POORLY MAINTAINED SIDEWALKS
- » DANGEROUS INTERSECTIONS AT HEARTHSTONE AND ACADIAN
- » INFRASTRUCTURE POORLY MAINTAINED
- » UNSIGHTLY ABOVE-GROUND UTILITIES
- » LACK OF CROSSWALKS
- » OVERSIZED DRIVEWAYS AND UNCONTROLLED VEHICULAR ACCESS
- » HIGH VOLUMES OF COMMUTER TRAFFIC (24,000 CARS DAILY)
- » MAINTAINED BY LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND DEVELOPMENT (LADOTD)

3

## EXPERIENCE

- » NEIGHBORHOODS TO SOUTH NOT CONNECTED TO COMMERCIAL AREA
- » SOME RETAIL STRUCTURES ARE OUT OF SCALE
- » NO PEDESTRIAN-SCALE SIGNAGE, LIGHTING OR AMENITIES
- » LACK OF GATEWAY ELEMENTS TO IDENTIFY AREA
- » FAST TRAFFIC
- » UNFRIENDLY TO PEDESTRIANS AND CYCLISTS
- » NOT DOG AND KID FRIENDLY
- » LOUD
- » HARSH AND NOT INVITING
- » PERCEIVED AS BEING AN UNSAFE AREA
- » LACK OF TREES AND LANDSCAPING

# BEFORE



CLOCKWISE  
FROM TOP:

Abandoned buildings  
line Government Street  
and offered little  
promise of economic  
vitality

Multi-lane streets  
with heavy traffic  
leave pedestrians and  
cyclists with very  
few options

Crosswalks are barely  
visible making it  
difficult for residents  
to walk to businesses



# SITE OPPORTUNITIES

1

## ECONOMICS

- » IDENTIFIED IN HORIZON PLAN, GOMAP!, AND FUTUREBR AS A GROWTH AREA
- » HIGH TRAFFIC OFFERS VISIBILITY FOR BUSINESSES
- » VISIBLE SITE
- » OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE BUSINESS VIABILITY
- » MAJOR REINVESTMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL
- » LEVERAGE RECENT LOCAL INVESTMENT AND REVITALIZATION EFFORTS
- » VACANT BUILDINGS AND BLIGHTED ARCHITECTURE
- » ARTIST/BOHEMIAN/ CULTURAL AREA
- » SUPPORTIVE EXISTING BUSINESS OWNERS
- » POSSIBILITY FOR ROOFTOP VENUES
- » GRASSROOTS SPONSORSHIPS
- » SCHOOLS UNITE AREA

2

## INFRASTRUCTURE

- » AMPLE ROOM FOR ON-STREET PARKING
- » PLENTY OF OFF-STREET PARKING
- » MAINTAINED BY LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND DEVELOPMENT (LADOTD) - FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR IMPROVEMENT
- » ACCESS FOR COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS
- » ROAD NARROWING POSSIBLE
- » OPPORTUNITY TO COORDINATE WITH CITY-PARISH DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS (DPW)

3

## EXPERIENCE

- » MIXED-USE
- » COMMERCIAL AREA BUFFERS BUSY ROAD FROM NEIGHBORHOOD
- » PROXIMITY TO SCHOOLS (BATON ROUGE HIGH SCHOOL, ST. JOSEPH'S HIGH SCHOOL, CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL)
- » ADJACENT TO MATURE NEIGHBORHOODS (OGDEN PARK, GARDEN DISTRICT, WESTMORELAND, CAPITAL HEIGHTS, BERNARD TERRACE)
- » LINKS HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS TO DOWNTOWN
- » CONNECTIONS TO NORTHERN NEIGHBORHOODS
- » INCLUSIVE, DIVERSE COMMUNITY WITH A VARIETY OF DEMOGRAPHICS
- » ENGAGED MERCHANTS AND NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS
- » POTENTIAL FOR SHORT-TERM SUCCESS
- » MANY WAYS TO DRAW PEOPLE TO AREA
- » MODERN VINTAGE CHARACTER

# AFTER



CLOCKWISE  
FROM TOP:

A temporary outdoor cafe activated the sidewalk in front of a vacant building

Street trees, planted medians and bike lanes slowed traffic and provided access for cyclists and pedestrians

Adding stripes to the crosswalk and defining the bike lane with green paint makes crossing and riding down Government Street safer for pedestrians and cyclists



# EVALUATION

## PHYSICAL

During the LA 73 Corridor Stage 0 Feasibility Study, Stantec obtained safety crash data for Government Street from January 2008 to December 2010 from LaDOTD for safety analysis. On average, there are 270 crashes per year from I-110 to Jefferson Highway on Government Street. The predominant crash types on the studied segment are rear end, left turn, right angle and side-swipe related crashes. The geometric features of Government Street, such as the lack of medians and turning lanes, contribute to the overrepresentation of side-swipe and rear end crashes.

The study also states that these types of crashes can be reduced with the provision of left turn pockets to give turning vehicles refuge from passing vehicles. Based on this study, the Better Block BR Government Street redesign created two through lanes separated by a two-way-left-turn-lane (TWLTL), which would potentially reduce the number of conflict points and therefore potential accidents. The removed lanes were converted to bike lanes and street tree planting areas, which not only enhanced the safety of the corridor, but its character and appeal. Temporary bus shelters were also added.

The reconfiguration of the street, introduction of pedestrian crosswalks, and on-street hub of activities heightened the area's safety, social engagement, and economic activity.

## ECONOMIC

There is no doubt that creating opportunities for transit, walking and biking results in improved economic conditions for surrounding communities. For Better Block BR, estimated visitors were in the thousands and the temporary pop-up businesses were pleasantly surprised by their customer counts. In addition to learning the demographics of the area, several saw over 300 customers pass through their business alone and reported a 50% increase in their regular Saturday business. Culinary Productions estimated 150 customers with an average ticket of \$9.00 per person, Tiger Deaux-nuts sold over 200 doughnuts, and Raising Cane's sold 192 cups of lemonade!

Whether an existing, potential, or temporary business in Mid City for that day, vendors all agreed that the market in the area is still relatively untapped. Many agreed it could become one of the jewels of the city for arts, dining, retail and locally-owned businesses. If minor infrastructure investments and traffic calming measures such as crosswalks, median islands, bike lanes, and narrower travel lanes were applied, the area could become a destination and a true economic driver — instead of just a vehicular corridor.

## COMMUNITY

Because of Saturday's success, the event was indeed a victory. For one day, Better Block BR strengthened the community and encouraged participants to take ownership of the project. Unfortunately, the second day of the Better Block event was canceled due to inclement weather.





THIS PAGE:

Even though it was adjacent to an active street, a pocket park proved to be a relaxing place to enjoy refreshments

Bringing pop-up businesses to the front of a large empty parking lot re-activated one side of Government Street

OPPOSITE PAGE:

A temporary BREC park demonstrated how green space can be incorporated



# OUTCOMES

Since the Better Block BR demonstration project, several implementation projects have begun at the public and private level, including the following:

PROJECT	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	TIMEFRAME	PROGRESS
Apply for Safe Routes to School grant to add sidewalks, improve connections to neighborhoods, enforce speed limits, and safety education for schools adjacent to Government Street	DPW, Our Lady of Mercy Catholic School, Bernard Terrace Elementary, and CPEX	Short-term	<b>Applications in process, grants due in January 2014</b>
Recommend Complete Streets Ordinance	FutureBR Implementation Team (FIT)	Short-term	<b>Complete</b>
Complete and advance a city-parish Complete Streets policy that institutionalizes the consideration of all modes of transportation when EBR builds and maintains roads	Baton Rouge Sustainable Transportation Advisory Committee (BRSTAC)	Short-term	<b>Started meeting in September 2013</b>
Adopt city-parish Complete Streets policy	Metro Council	Short-term	<b>Awaiting BRSTAC recommendation</b>
Intersection improvements along Government Street including ADA ramps and new traffic signals	DPW	Short-term	<b>In process</b>
Redevelop 2900 block of Government Street as a "Model Block"	Private developer, RDA	Short-term	<b>Plan approved, financing approved by RDA, additional funding in place by January 2014</b>
Improve buildings in project area	Private business owners, MCRA	Short-term	<b>MCRA provided four facade improvement grants in project area to be complete by end of 2013</b>
Create a master plan for Westmoreland Shopping Center that incorporates pedestrian access and mixed use buildings fronting Government Street	Catholic High School Alumni Association	Short-term	<b>Plan in process</b>
Transfer Government Street between downtown and Jefferson Highway from a state highway to a local road	DPW, LaDOTD	Mid-term	<b>In negotiation - improvements to be made prior to transfer</b>
Upgrade Government Street to a TWLTL with bike lanes from Jefferson Highway to I-110 interchange to reduce conflict points and increase connectivity (prior to transfer)	LaDOTD	Mid-term	<b>In negotiation</b>
Restripe Government Street between Jefferson Highway and Independence Park to include bike lanes and connect neighborhoods, parks and schools	DPW	Mid-term	<b>Contracted at same time as state improvements</b>
Create a TIF district to finance improvements with additional sales tax	Merchants, RDA and Metro Council	Mid-term	<b>Recommended by the FIT team</b>
Redevelop Westmoreland Shopping Center	Catholic High School Alumni Association	Long-term	<b>Will work with developer once master plan is complete</b>
Fill vacant storefronts with new businesses on Government Street	Private business owners	Ongoing	<b>3 new businesses opened since April 2013</b>
Infill retail development on vacant lots	Private developers	Ongoing	<b>In process</b>
Plan additional demonstration and pilot projects for green infrastructure	CPEX	Ongoing	<b>PARK(ing) Day in September 2013, planning in process for additional projects</b>

Better Block BR showed that Government Street can be more than just a place for cars - it can be a destination.



## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

While Complete Streets is a long-term transformative process, it improves congestion, connects communities, creates a sense of place and revitalizes local economies. Here are some things that you can do to be a part of that transformation:

- Support your Mayor in these initiatives by calling and sending a letter to your Councilperson to let him or her know that you support the necessary public improvements to Government Street that will encourage private investment to follow. Go to <http://brgov.com/dept/council/lookup.asp> to find your councilmember.
- Be an advocate at public meetings for adoption and implementation of a local Complete Streets policy.
- Follow us on <http://betterblockbr.blogspot.com> and [www.facebook.com/BetterBlockBR](http://www.facebook.com/BetterBlockBR) to get updates and volunteer for future pilot projects.

**The City will have a Complete Streets policy statement by the end of the year to guide its creation of new streets and rehabbing existing streets.**

- John Price

I want

Better Block  
to be permanent

in my neighborhood.

[neighborland.com](http://neighborland.com)

