



BEST PRACTICES: SPECIAL EVENTS & VISITOR MANAGEMENT

Nashville is a hub of music, sports, and entertainment, with over 16 million visitors in 2019, including almost 5 million at Downtown events.¹ Recently, the World Travel and Tourism Council named Nashville one of two “safe travels” destinations in the U.S., and in June 2022, National Geographic called Nashville the [best destination to travel](#). This publicity is likely to attract even more visitors to the Music City.

While Nashville’s tourist appeal and cultural attractions generate tremendous economic benefit for the city and the region, the regular and special events that attract large numbers of visitors routinely disrupt Downtown Nashville’s transportation systems. Transit routes in Nashville are forced to operate on detours almost as often as they operate on their regular streets, and people walking, biking, and driving must continuously adapt to localized street and sidewalk closures, as well as large volumes of people in concentrated areas.

To manage special events and large numbers of visitors, municipalities can use a number of tools, including developing a comprehensive visitor management strategy focused on maintaining traffic flows, orienting pedestrians, and providing reliable transit service. Both Nashville residents and visitors should be able to reach their destinations efficiently, and detours must be clear and intuitive, supporting easy navigation. Special events can be less disruptive when managed holistically with a focus on providing transportation options.

Visitor & Event Management Strategies

Special Events Permits

Most cities, including Nashville, require event organizers to submit an application to close streets for a special event. Permit conditions typically require placing barricades around entry points, alerting the community of closures and detours, and managing traffic during the event. However, permitting processes and enforcement vary across cities. Some municipalities require only that applicants submit a traffic control plan to ensure the consistent flow of traffic. Others are active event-management partners, adjusting traffic signals to support street closures.

¹ <https://www.visitmusiccity.com/research>



Detours and Alternate Routes

A common tool to manage special event street closures is implementing detours or alternate routes. When cities have a clear understanding of an event's requirements, staff can work with the organizers to plan temporary routes and even build temporary infrastructure, such as bike lanes or pedestrian paths, to mitigate the impacts of the closures. Temporary bike lanes should prioritize legibility and safety over complex infrastructure, ensuring that critical connections remain accessible for both event-goers and day-to-day travelers.

Street closures have a significant impact on transit routes, and rerouting buses requires extensive coordination between transit agencies and departments of transportation, as well as onsite coordination with traffic officers to ensure safe movement through a detour. Additional signs are needed to alert people of new stop locations and routes, and these should provide as much information as possible. Special event organizers sometimes fund the service changes.

For any street closure, it is important to identify the most vulnerable travelers who would be affected and consider their interests as a top priority. This may include setting constraints on closures to ensure that people who aren't attending an event—the "regular" travelers—are not overly inconvenienced by a detour or alternate route. These constraints could be based around priority corridors and key connection points, ensuring that transportation networks maintain a baseline level of functionality for those who depend on transit routes and active transportation infrastructure to reach their destinations.

Parking Management and Pricing

In addition to congested roadways, visitor reliance on vehicles can impact parking supply. Particularly in key destinations where parking is free or highly subsidized, visitors are encouraged to drive, leading to parking in informal overflow lots, spillover onto adjacent streets, and conflicts with people walking, rolling, and biking at access points (lot entrances, on-street parking stalls).

A holistic approach to parking management—as described in the Parking Management Best Practices paper—can help match supply with demand. One of the most effective ways to shift visitor travel behavior is to "right price" parking by charging for parking in key destinations and setting the price based on desired utilization targets. Charging for parking can encourage visitors to use more sustainable modes of transportation.

Wayfinding & Accessible Information

Wayfinding refers to the system of signs, road markings, and guideposts that orient people and provide navigation information. Good wayfinding systems help people reach their destination successfully, even without knowing the exact location of the destination. Wayfinding first positions a traveler in relation to their environment, then identifies nearby destinations of interest, and finally points to the most efficient route to the desired destination. While a developed wayfinding network benefits everyone, it is particularly useful for visitors.

Beyond wayfinding signs and kiosks on city streets, cities or business districts can also provide information about destinations and travel options through a visible and accessible website. Providing transportation resources and trip-planning services can help encourage visitors to explore alternatives to driving and try new ways to get around Downtown Nashville.



Visitor-Focused Transportation Options

Alternatives to automobile travel must be affordable, accessible, and easy to use to encourage a shift to more sustainable modes. The recent proliferation and widespread adoption of ride share, shared micromobility services, and car share illustrates increasing demand for the convenience and flexibility of on-demand transportation. On-demand transportation can help to promote broader mobility and sustainability goals while also meeting the travel needs of target populations, such as tourists.

Visitor-focused transportation options often operate like on-demand services, mirroring ride-share options and operating within a specific district. They can also blend the flexibility of on-demand services with the consistency of fixed-route services. Circulators, one example of this type of service, typically have special branding and are most appropriate in high-density areas where visitor travel behavior is well understood. In areas with established visitor travel patterns, circulators can provide fixed-schedule, fixed-route, high-frequency service, typically every 10 minutes. Pricing for circulators and on-demand services should be structured in ways that are competitive with private ride-sharing options.



Nashville's Visitor Management Needs

As a center for music and sporting activities and a home for tourist attractions like concerts, festivals, and other large-scale events, Downtown Nashville can benefit from management strategies that address both special events and visitors. Record numbers of tourists coupled with Nashville's significant population growth places a heavy burden on Downtown's roads, sidewalks, and transit routes.

A proactive approach to accommodating the impact of visitors will preserve Nashville's reputation as a premier tourist destination without sacrificing transportation efficiency, safety, or accessibility. An effective visitor management strategy sets high expectations, accounts for competing interests, and ensures that people can get to where they need to go, whether they are attending an event or going to work. Other American cities with large numbers of events and high visitor volumes provide examples of forward-thinking and successful visitor management techniques for Nashville to consider.

Case Studies

NYC's Open Streets Program (New York, NY)

New York City's Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) launched its Open Streets Program in April 2020 to offer space for safe, socially distanced activity. In 2021, the City Council made it a

permanent program, offering opportunities to close streets around the city to create public spaces. This program was used to double temporary protected bike lanes in June of 2020 in response to increased cycling during the pandemic. NYCDOT is now using the Open Streets Program to respond to special events, providing safe and accessible temporary facilities for people walking, biking, or rolling in areas impacted by event closures.

Lessons Learned

- **Special event management means being responsive and adaptive.** A week before a special event street closure, NYCDOT issued a press release announcing a temporary bike lane installation. This communication strategy notified both current cyclists and also encouraged motorists to consider alternative strategies, especially during periods of congestion related to the special event. NYCDOT's awareness campaign was complemented with ample on-street signs along the temporary route.
- **A program to easily implement temporary bike lanes can keep cyclists safe.** NYCDOT's temporary bike lanes ensured that cycling infrastructure was keeping up with demand caused by the pandemic. Having a program like Open Streets to facilitate efficient implementation can address needs associated with special events as well.



Source: <https://nyc.streetsblog.org/2020/06/24/breaking-city-doubles-temporary-protected-bike-lanes-in-response-to-covid/>

Applicability to Nashville

Nashville's current greenways and bike lanes are heavily concentrated downtown, meaning they are regularly impacted by events and closures. Nashville can follow NYCDOT's example of implementing a coordinated strategy to provide safe and temporary facilities for cyclists and pedestrians and prioritize active transportation during street closures and special events.

Los Angeles Tourism Master Plan

The City of Los Angeles' Department of Convention & Tourism Development published its Tourism Master Plan in 2020 to ensure the tourism industry delivers strong benefits to the community. The Master Plan includes a chapter devoted to tourism mobility, with a strategy to reframe Los Angeles as a destination that visitors can explore without a car, despite its reputation as a sprawling, car-centric city.

The tourism mobility management strategies focus on education, communication, and innovative programming to shift the movement of visitors away from the region's already-burdened freeway infrastructure. One suggested action in the tourism mobility chapter is to develop an integrated attractions and transportation pass that provides discounts for citywide venues, experiences, and a full range of public transportation options. Other suggested actions include investment in micromobility and a visitor communications program that advocates for auto-free visits to Los Angeles.



Source: Los Angeles Tourism Master Plan

Lessons Learned

- **A proactive approach to visitor management aligns objectives with broader mobility goals.** Los Angeles developed the Master Plan's section on tourism mobility with the intention of shifting the city's reputation and transportation mode split. By addressing the transportation impacts of visitors, Los Angeles can further its transportation goals.
- **Visitor management is a multi-faceted strategy.** The tourism mobility strategies do not rely on one intervention or solution. Rather, communications, marketing, creative service design, and cost considerations all play a role in providing a cheaper, safer, and more sustainable transportation experience for LA's residents and visitors.

Applicability to Nashville

Nashville can draw from the strategies and guidelines in Los Angeles' tourism plan to create its own tailored visitor management strategy. A coordinated plan for understanding and addressing the impact of visitors on the city's transportation infrastructure would allow Nashville to prepare for visitors while still pursuing its broader mobility goals.

Washington, D.C.

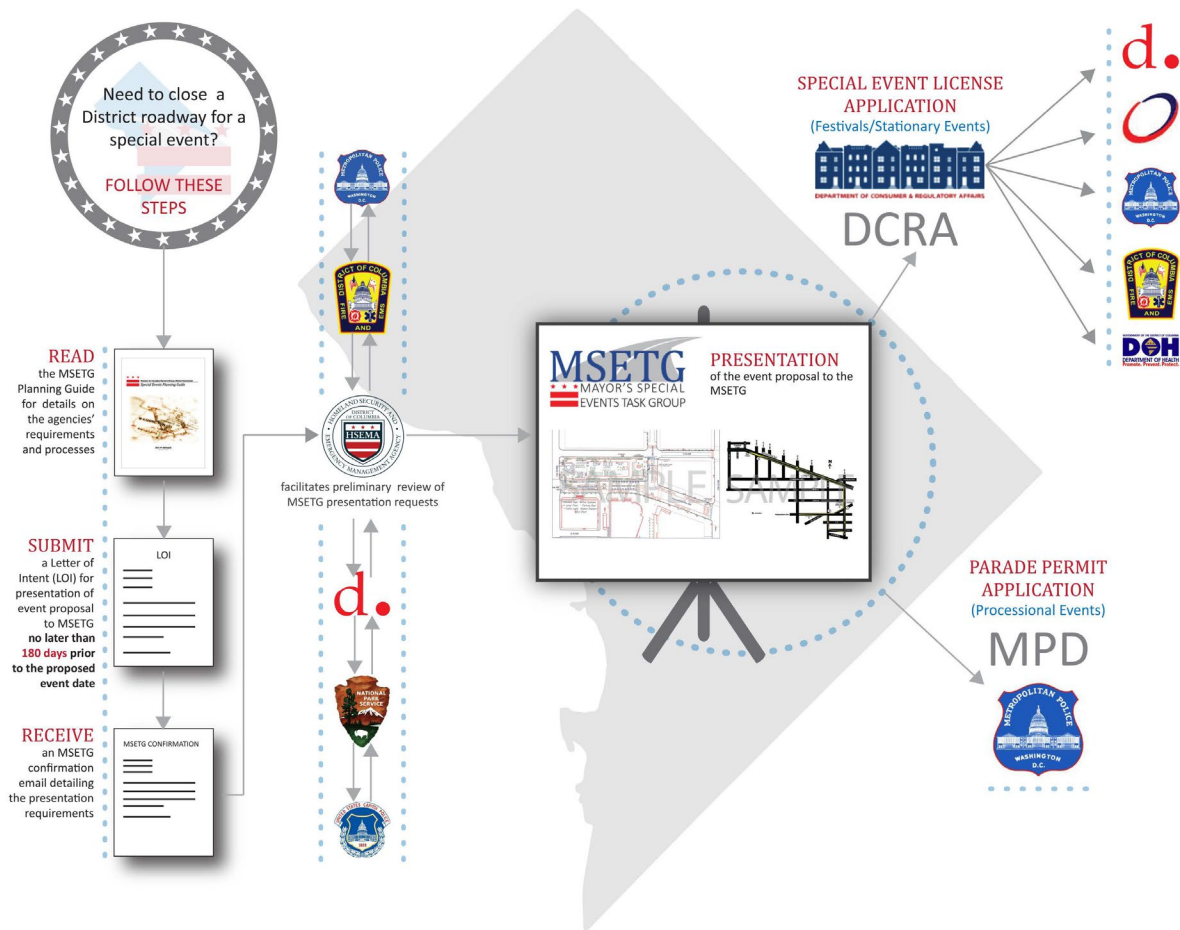
As the nation's capital, Washington, DC hosts numerous special events each year. The Mayor's Special Events Task Group (MSETG) is responsible for coordinating public safety planning for efforts that require interagency coordination and publishes a "Special Events Planning Guide" to support applicants.

The MSETG meets to review presentations of proposed events the second and fourth Monday of each month. Organizers of proposed special events are required to present event proposals to the MSETG and receive approval prior to the issuance of permits or licenses. Applicants are required to request the opportunity to present to the MSETG no less than 180 days prior to the date of their event.

The MSETG includes the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), which requires a Traffic Control Plan (TCP) for each special event permit application that involves street closures or disruptions to the movement of vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians.² TCPs ensure that permit applicants have considered how their event will affect transportation in D.C. and require applicants to craft a strategy for traffic management based on the Federal Highway Administration's Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. Every TCP must provide

²https://ddot.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ddot/publication/attachments/ddot_work_zone_temporary_traffic_control_manual_2006.pdf

information impacted public spaces, identify streets to close, and specify bike lanes, truck, and bus restrictions created due to the event. After the TCP has been accepted, DDOT periodically inspects the special event area to ensure compliance.



Source:

https://hsema.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/hsema/publication/attachments/2018_MSETG%20Special%20Events%20Planning%20Guide.pdf

Lessons Learned

- **TCPs focus on more than just vehicular movement.** DDOT's Traffic Control Plan places pedestrians and cyclists on equal footing with vehicles in the prioritization of safe and efficient travel options.
- **DDOT requires preparation and ensures that commitments are implemented.** The TCP must be submitted with other application materials 30 days prior to the event, providing ample time for DDOT review. DDOT is an active enforcement body and reserves the right for random inspections.

- **Expert coordination translates to excellent outcomes.** The TCP must be tailored to fit the event's specific situation. A special event permit applicant submits their Traffic Control Plan to DDOT for initial review and verification, but both the Public Space Management Administration and Traffic Services Administration also review most TCPs.

Applicability to Nashville

Nashville should consider developing a Special Events Planning Guide to direct the activities of all event organizers, especially those planning events in Downtown Nashville. While the Mayor's Office convenes regular meetings for special event permits that include Metro departments, WeGo, and key partners, the committee's approach should be adjusted to better prioritize vulnerable travelers and to serve as an implementation tool for Nashville's Vision Zero Action Plan.

Additionally, by requiring very early notice of planned events, Metro would have more time to work across departments and agencies and with organizers to develop traffic control plans that have minimal impacts on people walking, rolling, biking, and taking transit. NDOT could also explore opportunities to use its Traffic Management Center to support the development of traffic control plans through advanced signal control capabilities and sensor-based traffic monitoring technologies.

Las Vegas

The City of Las Vegas's Downtown Loop is a free shuttle that serves the many attractions in downtown Las Vegas.³ The circulator service is wheelchair accessible and operates Monday through Thursday from 11 AM to 6 PM, and Friday and Saturday from 3 PM to 10 PM. Through the GoVegas mobile application, riders can track the circulator's location in real time. The Downtown Loop operates independently of the rest of the Las Vegas transit system, underlining its mission to move visitors and residents who may be visiting local attractions. The Downtown Loop is a free service, and it uses smaller vehicles to reflect the targeted customer base and limited service area.

³ <https://www.lasvegasnevada.gov/Residents/Parking-Transportation/Downtown-Loop>



Source: lasvegasnevada.gov/Residents/Parking-Transportation/Downtown-Loop

Lessons Learned

- **Free service removes all barriers to entry.** The Las Vegas Downtown Loop provides visitors with a free service to explore the city's attractions and provides an accessible option for people who want to avoid using taxis or rental cars. Visitors have little incentive to pay for private vehicle transportation when the free circulator stops at the most common destinations.
- **The visitor-focused service relieves stress on other transit routes.** Commuters are less likely than visitors to use the downtown circulator because it only services tourist attractions and cultural event spaces. The circulator plays a role in ensuring that "regular" transit service is available to serve residents' needs by ensuring that visitor travel is accommodated separately.

Applicability to Nashville

WeGo transit previously offered a free, downtown circulator service via the Music City Circuit, which provided access to visitor-focused destinations. The circulator was eliminated in 2019 due to budget shortfalls and low ridership,⁴—and it was challenged to effectively serve visitor

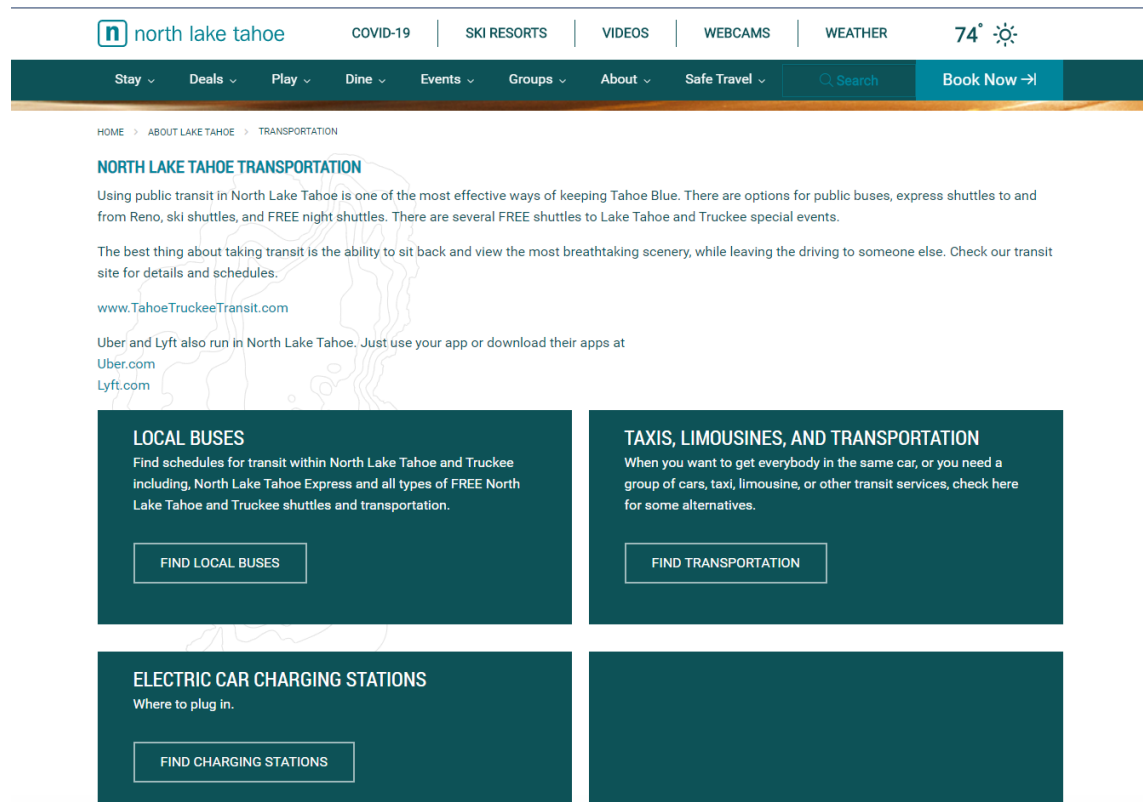
⁴ <https://www.newschannel5.com/news/free-buses-cut-as-part-of-wego-public-transit-system-restructuring>

(and resident) needs due to the proximity of many destinations and the speed of the service, which was often slower than walking.

While there are private transportation options that fill some of the visitor-focused transportation need, Nashville could explore approaches that would replace the function of the Music City Circuit and provide a fare-free option for people making visitor-focused connections in Downtown Nashville. Any future investments—whether services or infrastructure (e.g., transit priority corridors)—should consider the efficiency of the offering compared to other modes of transportation, along with new tactics to market to and promote visitor use.

Go Tahoe North (Lake Tahoe, CA)

North Lake Tahoe is known for its beaches and expansive ski resorts that draw thousands of visitors each year. To help people navigate transportation to and within key resort areas, the North Lake Tahoe Convention and Visitors Bureau created [Go Tahoe North](#). The region’s main tourism website, [Go Tahoe North](#) provides a comprehensive list of mobility options with detailed descriptions about each service as well as links and contact information for providers. Visitors can also browse the website for local dining options, upcoming events, trip recommendations, and available lodging, creating a one-stop travel planning resource.



Source: <https://www.gotahoenorth.com/>

Lessons Learned

- **Providing information early can change travel behavior.** Visitors to North Lake Tahoe have the transportation-options information they need before their trip begins, making it easy for them to plan to vacation without a car.
- **Encouraging visitors to use more sustainable forms of transportation requires effective communication and education strategies.** The Convention and Visitors Bureau has aggressively marketed the Go Tahoe North website. The website includes a “Traveler Responsibility Pledge” that invites visitors to commit to six pledges that advance sustainable travel.

Applicability to Nashville

The Nashville Downtown Partnership’s website is an excellent resource for Nashville visitors and residents. It includes multimodal transportation information to help people get around Downtown. The City could help the Partnership expand this resource. The City should also work with partners who currently provide transportation information for visitors—such as the airport—to broaden their messaging related to transportation options. For example, instead of focusing visitors on renting a car at the airport, partner websites could promote WeGo services or shuttle options to ensure that people are getting information about downtown transportation options before they leave the airport.

Breckenridge Town-Wide Pricing Program (Breckenridge, CO)

Breck Forward, Breckenridge’s parking and transportation task force, worked with the Town Council to create a comprehensive Parking and Transportation Program to reduce traffic downtown. As part of their efforts, the Town of Breckenridge implemented a parking pricing program that charges fees for the use of most public parking spaces, including those that were previously free, and a park-once strategy that encourages visitors to park and use transit or active transportation to move between destinations.

Rates are set to the lowest level necessary to achieve a parking availability target of approximately 15%. Prices vary by location, time of day, day of week, season, and observed demand. The Town of Breckenridge also implemented a smart parking system to improve the local, guest, and visitor experience and to improve parking enforcement. Parking revenues are used to introduce new technologies to help improve transit and parking.



Lessons Learned

- **Use strategic parking policies to prevent overcrowding.** By implementing a responsive price for parking, Breckenridge can reduce demand to manage the traffic volumes in busy areas and during peak periods.
- **Consider creative and flexible parking solutions.** The Town's approach to pricing and parking management was one of precise and adaptable interventions. Changing prices for parking depending on location, time, day, and observed demand allows parking to be managed dynamically.

Applicability to Nashville

Many garages and lots in Downtown Nashville offer free parking after normal business hours and on weekends. Nashville has an opportunity to set pricing that better meets the demand for parking and encourages people to try non-driving modes. Implementing a new parking pricing approach should be done in conjunction with improvements to non-driving modes, including expanding transit service, improving the reliability of existing service, and building more high-

quality active transportation infrastructure. Metro should also consider a sophisticated information program that shows available spaces or allows drivers to reserve parking on their phones to reduce congestion and control traffic flows.

Implementation in Nashville

Large numbers of visitors and special events can limit downtown transportation options with street closures and detours, but a comprehensive visitor management system, such as LA's Tourism Master Plan, can help to mitigate congestion, improve the transit, pedestrian, and cycling experiences of both locals and visitors, and signal to event planners that Nashville is a city that can host major events while maintaining a high-functioning transportation system.

Nashville has many tools available to enhance visitor and special events management in Downtown. The City's new Traffic Management Center provides NDOT with the capacity to respond to visitor and event impacts in real time, adjusting strategies based on congestion levels. Nashville can also take inspiration from New York, Washington DC, and Las Vegas, three cities that are known for special events and are some of the most visited cities in the world. As in New York City, Nashville can incorporate temporary bike lanes in all street closure decisions, requiring that event organizers include these routes in their traffic control plans.

Nashville should also consider more targeted strategies to encourage visitors to travel without a car, including a privately funded circulator, enhanced public information, demand-responsive parking pricing, and targeted transportation demand management programs. For example, the City could work with event providers to offer a free WeGo bus pass with an event ticket. The City should expand its partnerships to advance creative strategies and ensure that visitors to Downtown Nashville understand the full breadth of transportation options available to them.