

Appendix D

Content Analysis: Correspondence and Comments Received for June 12, 2018 Public Hearing to Adopt TIP

Introduction

NVivo qualitative analysis software was used to code the content of all emails, voicemails, Facebook comments submitted on the TIP ‘events’ page, and public comments made during the public hearing. The correspondence received does not necessarily constitute a representative sample of the general public.

Leading up to the June 12th, 2018 public hearing on the TIP adoption, the MPO received 39 emails, 6 Facebook comments, and 6 voicemail messages. At the hearing, 39 speakers provided public comment, 3 written comments were submitted to the record, and 1 comment was entered into the live chatroom.

General Overview of Email & Facebook Comments

Many of the email comments received were templated responses that had been pre-prepared for commenters. In journalistic parlance, pre-prepared letters are often disdainfully referred to as “astroturf,” which reinforces the perception that such responses are “canned” and may be indicative of an artificial grass-roots campaign.¹ Advocates of templated responses, on the other hand, argue that pre-prepared letters are a useful tool for encouraging public participation and staying on-message.^{2,3} Many of the pre-prepared letters received in 2018 specifically identified safety improvements to be implemented along Bayshore Blvd, a corridor in Tampa which experienced two high-profile pedestrian fatalities just weeks before the TIP hearing. Several additional letters were pre-prepared with a different template and identified safety-related problems and solutions in the Tampa Heights and Seminole Heights neighborhoods in Tampa.

The prevalence of templated responses compared to ‘unique’ responses suggests a proliferation of organized campaigns focusing on specific calls-to-action at the corridor or neighborhood-level. Of the 39 emails received, 20 were templated letters related to a campaign entitled, *Make Bayshore Safe*. Another 8 emails were templated letters related to a safety campaign focusing on the Tampa Heights and Seminole Heights neighborhoods.

Themes Emerging from Email & Facebook Comments

The most common themes emerging from the emails and Facebook posts received include:

- Traffic
 - “Closing traffic lanes”
 - “Traffic flow”

¹ Reader, B. (2008). Turf wars? Rhetorical struggle over ‘prepared’ letters to the editor. *Journalism*, 9(5), 606-623.

² Bimber, B. & Davis, R. (2003). *Campaigning online: The internet in U.S. elections*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press

³ Klotz, R.J. (2007). Internet campaigning for grassroots and astroturf support. *Social Science Computer Review*, 25(1), 3-12.

- “Slowing traffic”
- Safety
 - “Pedestrian safety issues”
 - “Safety concerns”
- Complete Streets
 - “Complete streets resolution”

Across these comments, the theme of **traffic** occurred most frequently. The frequency is attributable to its appearance in a line of text from the pre-prepared letters asking for “a study of pedestrian safety on Bayshore...including the option of closing traffic lanes...”. Others advocate for safety improvements at the intersection of Hillsborough Ave and Florida Ave in order to “improve traffic flow.” See Figure 1 below.

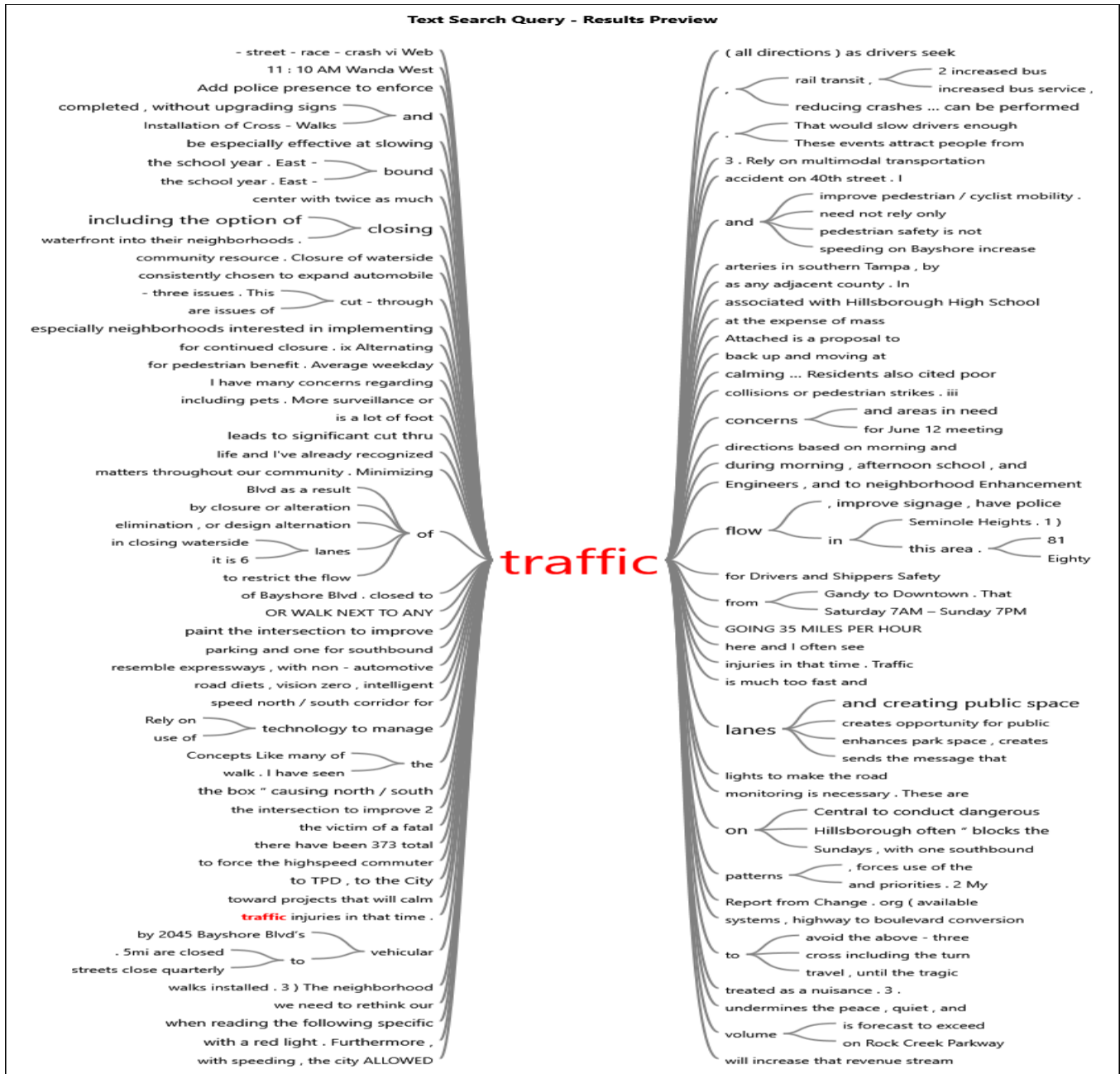


Figure 1: Textual Word Tree of the comments related to "traffic" and its stemmed words. The larger font size indicates that a sub-theme emerged, which was often stemmed to the predominant theme.

Like the previous two years, **safety** was again cited as one of, if not the most, critical/important issue for the region, especially with respect to the future development of the region. Commenters sympathize with the calls-to-action for implementing car-centric safety improvements along Bayshore Blvd, while simultaneously expressing that Tampa's safety challenges are multimodal and not limited to a single corridor. In these emails and Facebook posts, the theme of **complete streets** is often connected to safety-related comments, which extoll the Vision Zero initiative and advocate for an expanded Compete Streets program to address safety issues.

General Overview of In-person Comments and Written Comments

MPO Board to remove Tampa Bay Next projects from the TIP, while another criticized FDOT's conduct regarding the SEIS, namely that the study is "improper" and that the maps presented to the public during SEIS outreach are not accurately displaying the City of Tampa.

The content analysis performed in 2017 noted that "the vastly-diminished number of comments received may be an indication of the community's collective weariness with the process, also known as 'activism burnout.' Several studies have found that those engaged/involved in public activism may find the lengthy process to be a significant stressor, often leading to mental exhaustion and withdrawal from their activism.^{4,5} Given that the TBX project experienced a reset, and as mentioned earlier, it may also be possible that the community is adopting a wait-and-see approach toward Tampa Bay Next.

In light of that assessment, it appears that this year comments have shifted priorities toward safety advocacy, specifically for pedestrians and cyclists. Recent high-profile crashes have engaged a different segment of the community to provide comments toward the TIP than those who appeared in previous years to discuss TBX and Tampa Bay Next. Unlike the interstate modernization projects, safety is a populist and unifying priority, and one which may continue to motivate community members to become more engaged in transportation planning in the future.

⁴ Gomes, M. (1992). The Rewards and Stresses of Social Change: A Qualitative Study of Peace Activists. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 32(4): 138-146.

⁵ Schaufeli, W.B. and P. Buunk. (2002). Burnout: An Overview of 25 Years of Research and Theorizing. In M.J. Schabracq, J.A.M. Winnubst and C.L. Cooper (eds.), *The Handbook of Work and Health Psychology*: 383-425. Chichester: Wiley.