

**APPENDIX J:**  
**Little Mekong CCLRT Impact Study**

# Little Mekong CCLRT Impact Study

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documentation of CCLRT construction impact on the small businesses on University Avenue in the Little Mekong business district between March-July 2012

**August 1, 2012**

Prepared by the Asian Economic Development Association (AEDA) for the Metropolitan Council and Federal Transit Authority for inclusion in the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Central Corridor Light Rail Transit Project, Minneapolis and Saint Paul, MN.

## Table of Contents

Intro	3
Methods	3
Results	5
Discussion	8
Appendix A. Maps	10
Appendix B. Data collection tool	13
Appendix C. Case studies	18
Appendix D. Charts & graphs	28
Appendix E. Business Quotes	32

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## Little Mekong CCLRT Impact Study

A documentation of CCLRT construction impact on the small businesses on University Avenue in the Little Mekong business district between March-July 2012

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The Little Mekong CCLRT Impact Report represents the work of Asian Economic Development Association (AEDA) and its monitoring of the acute impacts by the Central Corridor Light Rail Transit (CCLRT) project on the small businesses that make up the Little Mekong business district - a 5 block strip of University Avenue from MacKubin Street to Galtier Street in Saint Paul.

Little Mekong has a unique makeup compared to the business districts surrounding the rest of the Central Corridor line. Little Mekong emerged on University Avenue surrounding Western Ave, due to its high concentration of Asian-owned businesses, most of which are very small both in revenue and staffing, as seen in Table 1. Little Mekong's unique ethnic makeup also reflects the diversity of its surrounding neighborhoods, Frogtown and Summit-University. Appendix A. Maps 1 and 2 show the density of the Asian community in these neighborhoods and the ethnic makeup of business owners in Little Mekong, respectively.

**Table 1. Demographics of Little Mekong<sup>1</sup>**

Race of owner (n=74)	
<i>Asian-owned</i>	56 (76%)
<i>Other "minority"-owned</i>	11 (15%)
Total "minority"-owned	67 (91%)
Annual Revenue (n=23)	
<i>\$0 - \$250k</i>	15 (63%)
<i>\$250k - \$500k</i>	4 (17%)
<i>\$500k - \$2M</i>	4 (17%)
<i>Greater than \$2M</i>	0 (0%)
Number of full-time employees (n=37)	
<i>0-10 FTE</i>	31 (84%)
<i>10-99 FTE</i>	5 (14%)
<i>100+ FTE</i>	1 (3%)

AEDA was founded in 2006 by a group of Asian small business owners concerned with the development of the CCLRT project, and is a community driven nonprofit organization with special emphasis on Asian small businesses in low-income communities. AEDA's mission is to cultivate vibrant, diverse communities by creating economic opportunities for thriving sustainable multicultural neighborhoods based on strong community leadership and economic justice.

### **METHODS**

The design for this study was developed by AEDA staff with input from an advisory committee made up of persons with research and construction monitoring experience. Additional input was sought from businesses who experienced CCLRT construction in 2011. Agreements made regarding the design, based upon the unique immigrant population of the Little Mekong business community, included:

- Use of semi-structured interview rather than strictly structured interview format or use of close ended or multiple choice questions– the reason for this is because of cultural preference by business owners to tell stories rather than answer very narrow questions,

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<sup>1</sup> Asian Economic Development Association, ECONOMIC JUSTICE MONITORING PROJECT: Business Impact Study (T0). March 2012.

use of scales are challenging across different cultures, and felt a more open format would allow for deeper understanding of the impact of construction.

- Use of in-person interview rather than written or online surveys - given multiple languages used in Little Mekong, a written survey would be costly to translate, would be challenging to translate equally across languages and cultures
- A case study design is ideal for this study where we do not know what we will find. As case studies can lead to testable hypotheses and are a solid source of empirical evidence.<sup>2</sup> Thus, a case study design is well suited for drawing conclusions about the impact of the construction on Little Mekong businesses.
- The data collection tool is specially designed for the interviewer to allow them to quickly record any troubles experienced by the business and collect anecdotal information (see Appendix B)

Business owners were the targeted interviewees, but when not available, interviewers spoke with managers or available staff. When a business refused, interviewer would try to speak with a different individual at a later time. If a business was empty or no one responded to the interviewer’s doorknock, nothing would be left behind at the property. It was to the discretion of the interviewer to go back.

The data collected reflected issues that occurred as a result of construction activities as well as on estimates of business revenue losses. Most data were collected anecdotally, and as it is the easiest way to capture firsthand information from business owners. When available we used business income records or loan application materials to get more accurate estimates. However, these records were not available in all situations.

Some interviews were written up in the form of case studies (see Appendix C)

**Table 2. Ethnicity of owner for participating businesses compared to total population of Little Mekong<sup>3</sup>**

	Study Sample (n=64)	Businesses in Little Mekong (N=80)
Asian-owned business	45 (70.3%)	56 (70.0%)
Minority (non-Asian) owned business	9 (14.1%)	11 (13.8%)
Caucasian owned business	7 (10.9%)	7 (8.8%)
Don’t know race of owner	3 (4.7%)	6 (7.5%)

**Table 3. Types of participating of businesses compared to total population of Little Mekong<sup>4</sup>**

	Study Sample (n=64)	Businesses in Little Mekong (N=80)
Arts / culture	2 (3.1%)	2 (2.5%)
Beauty service	9 (14.1%)	11 (13.8%)
Grocer retail	4 (6.3%)	4 (5.0%)
Health-related service	12 (18.8%)	12 (15.0%)
Non-grocery retail	7 (10.9%)	9 (11.3%)
Religious place of worship	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.3%)
Restaurant	11 (17.2%)	13 (16.3%)
Social services / nonprofit	7 (10.9%)	9 (16.3%)
Other	11 (17.2%)	16 (20.0%)
Don’t know	n/a	3 (3.8%)

<sup>2</sup> Eisenhardt, Kathleen M. “Building Theories from Case Study Research.” *The Academy of Management Review*. 14.4 (1989): 532-550.

<sup>3</sup> Asian Economic Development Association, ECONOMIC JUSTICE MONITORING PROJECT: Business Impact Study (T0). March 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Asian Economic Development Association, ECONOMIC JUSTICE MONITORING PROJECT: Business Impact Study (T0). March 2012.

## **RESULTS**

The data reflected in this report was collected between March 30, 2012 thru July 25, 2012. We found that most businesses experienced issues that interrupted their normal activities which may have caused revenue loss, while some businesses did not report any impact from the interruptions on their business activities. Appendix D contains graphs and charts to give a visual display of the counts and the percentages of the reports we found.

### **Respondents**

During the data collection period, we made contact with 64 businesses one to three times, totaling 102 contacts. Contact means we were able to speak with a staff of the business. Of the 64 businesses with whom we made contact, three refused to participate. Table 3 shows the count breakdown of type of businesses participating in the study. The types of businesses represented in this sample mainly include restaurants, beauty services, and health services. Tables 2 and 3 compare the study sample in this report compared to all of the businesses identified in snapshot survey conducted by AEDA in February 2012, with every business in Little Mekong.<sup>5</sup>

### **Reports of trouble with utilities**

During the data collection period, we had 36 reports of “no trouble” or “don’t know” with utilities, and 47 reports of some form of trouble with a utility.

Water shut-off was the most common utility issue with 33 reports. Duration of shut-offs ranged from 10 minutes to 8.5 hours spanning the work day. Only two businesses reported not getting notice of the shut-off, but neither of those incidences resulted in a significant impact. Impacts reported include:

- Three businesses cited loss of customers due to water shutoff, including a laundromat who estimates loss of approximately \$50
- Two businesses cited inconvenience of water shutoff due to inability to use bathroom by customers during shutoff
- One restaurant spent \$100 on bottled water as an alternative.

**Table 4. Utility disruptions reported**

<b>Utility/Service disrupted</b>	<b># of reports</b>
<i>Water</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Gas</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Electricity</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Internet/Phone/Fax</i>	<i>4</i>
<b>Total disruptions</b>	<b>47</b>

No significant impact was reported as a result of the 6 gas shut-offs.

One business closed for the day and owners went home since they could not fix an electricity issue. Thus, they lost business for the day.

Four businesses had their internet, phone, and/or fax interrupted during construction. One of these businesses reported the internet being disconnected for an entire month, but they did not know about the Metropolitan Council Construction Hotline so did not know how to get help. Once their internet provider came to fix the problem, the provider said construction vibrations

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<sup>5</sup> Asian Economic Development Association, ECONOMIC JUSTICE MONITORING PROJECT: Business Impact Study (T0). March 2012.

had loosened and disconnected the wires. This business estimates a 30-40% revenue loss for the month without internet. Another business whose customers rely upon the telephone to reach them felt they lost customers do to their phone lines going in and out.

### Reports of trouble with construction activities

During the data collection period, we had 17 reports of “no trouble” with construction activities, and 77 reports of some form of trouble with construction activities.

Of the 52 reports of trouble with “Noise/Vibration,” four cited items vibrating and falling off shelves causing breakage of dishes or shelves. One restaurant estimates the damage costing “hundreds of dollars”. Eight reports cited impacts of customer disturbance.

One business reported the vibration causing their internet to be disconnected for one month (see further explanation under “Reports of trouble with utilities” section). Additional impacts include:

- basement flooding resulting in mold growth on walls;
- crack in building wall;
- cancellation of 15 customers’ appointments at a health service business that conducts MRIs (magnetic resonance imaging), costing them about \$22,000 each day.

**Table 5. Trouble with construction activities**

Trouble reported	# of reports
<i>Dust/Air</i>	19
<i>Noise/Vibration</i>	52
<i>Other</i>	6
<b>Total reports</b>	<b>77</b>

There were 19 reports of dust and air quality trouble. Eight reports cited no impact, while 4 reported customer complaints. Others cited allergies, dirtiness, and having to keep the door closed as impacts.

Other troubles from construction activity included loss of pedestrian lighting outside of a business resulting in an estimated 30% customer decrease, and an offensive smell from sewer grates disturbing customers as they walk into the business.

### Reports of trouble with access

During the data collection period, we had 22 reports of “no trouble” with access, and 79 reports of some form of trouble with access, including access to parking lot, pedestrian pathways, crosswalks, and access for delivery trucks..

Of the 44 reports of trouble with parking access, eight cited inconvenience for customers as primary impact. While four reported loss of street parking as the issue citing the following impacts:

- Manager has to pay a fee to park in adjacent lot (only 10 spots) for customers to have access otherwise they have to use streets.
- People do not want to carry laundry long distances, only street parking on Mackubin and University available. Business down on weekends up to 40%.

**Table 6. Trouble with access**

Trouble reported	# of reports
<i>Parking/parking lot access</i>	44
<i>Traffic</i>	10
<i>Sidewalk/handicap access</i>	14
<i>Truck access</i>	11
<b>Total reports</b>	<b>79</b>

Eleven reports were concerned about pedestrian pathways and four were concerned about crosswalks. Four of the businesses cited narrowed and blocked sidewalks as an inconvenience for customers, of which two felt it caused a loss in business. Another business helps community members cross streets when needed.

Ten businesses cited traffic as an issue, of which two reported sales loss as an impact. One estimated 30% sales decrease. Another reported a \$10,000 decrease in April from the month before and a \$30,000 decrease in May from a year ago.

There were eight reports of trouble with truck access. Impacts of this include trucks needing to park far away, disgruntled delivery drivers, and two reports of trash removal vehicles unable to access bins so trash could not be picked up. One business had to hire more people to deliver supplies as the delivery van could not get access to the business and some delivery trucks refused to come to the business to deliver goods.

Other troubles include road closure resulting in an estimated 30% decrease in business during the closure, sidewalk ramps were insufficient so the business needed to help people, and an overall frustration with driving through the construction zone.

### **Reports of trouble with way finding signage**

There were 33 reports of orange way finding signage being sufficient and 24 reports of such signage being insufficient. Twenty-four people reported they did not know if the orange way finding signage was sufficient or had no opinion. Of those finding the signs insufficient, 4 cited limited English skills preventing customers from understanding the signage. There were 6 reports that the signs were confusing due to either not providing enough information about re-routes or conflicting detour signs, and 8 reports of signage not being helpful. Four businesses reported feeling that the signs were not big enough or were hard to see.

An additional challenge for businesses is ensuring customers know they are open and how to access their business. Nineteen businesses made their own signs, spending between \$20 and \$300. Eight businesses plan to make signs, while two do not have the money to make signs.

### **Reports of trouble with safety**

Forty-six reported no problem with safety due to construction, and 19 reported safety concerns. Of the safety concerns, 4 included hazards to pedestrians such as rocks on sidewalks and uneven surfaces and 5 cited dangerous pedestrian crossing conditions. Other concerns included crime, air quality, poor lighting, cars parking on sidewalk, and access to bus stops.

### **Reports of trouble with communication of construction activities and resources**

When asked if businesses felt they received sufficient communication regarding construction activities, 35 said yes, 8 said no, and 5 had no opinion. Comments made included:

- Construction is working hard to finish the project so there is nothing they can do. Each business is suffering.
- Need more connection and status of construction progress. Never get any updates about construction.
- Don't know about the hotline.
- The fence put up in front of business was sudden. Saw holes being put in front of business and had no prior notification.
- Not certain if business owners know about hotline but will share at staff meeting.
- Had 3 - 4 days' advance notice a number of times about construction.
- Notifications in advance of water being shut off since it is usually shut off at night
- Good notice ahead of time. Left note on door about water.



- No major complaints about Met Council but construction needs to work on better communication.
- Very pleased with Walsh.
- Very good. Gets emails about the progress of construction every Friday and share this with all employees.
- Have gotten notice in person and this works well for us.
- Really good with meetings, and helping with information.
- Feels more comfortable if approached directly.

Several immigrant business owners had difficulties in understanding information being distributed because of language barriers, they believe language is also a barrier to their customers thus affecting access and business activities.

Many businesses were unaware of the construction hotline and therefore had not utilized it when they experienced issues, while some who were aware of the hotline did not because of language barriers. Of the 237 troubles related to construction captured in this study, only 11 reported calling the construction hotline.

Many of the businesses were unaware of the assistance available to them from U7 or were unaware of how to apply for the Ready for Rail forgivable loan.

### **Other troubles identified**

Additional findings worth noting include:

- Threatened moves and closures of businesses
  - one business is looking for a new location to move to and intends to leave University Avenue due to difficulties.
  - one store is about to close if nothing improves.
- Instability for workforce
  - 6 instances of employee lay-offs or reduced staff hours due to the inability to maintain staff employment on decreased business revenue.

## **DISCUSSION**

*“Our business can’t afford to lose. We lost 40-50% and it’s not only me! Many businesses experienced that.”*

*“I know you are trying your best and I understand that there are not many things we can do about the construction, but I hope they will speed it up”*

*“In the past, we had 15 - 20 customers per day, but now it’s only 4 - 5 customers per day. We’re thinking of closing after 5 good years in business.”*

*“Whatever is good for citizens and businesses please do. I’m happy to see the streets looking prettier and cleaner”.*”

*“Walsh construction does a great job with communication. Very pleased with Walsh.”*

*“Walsh Construction is doing a horrible job.”*

When asked what the hardest part of construction aside customer access, 24 still reported customer access as the hardest part. Traffic, including navigation, was second most reported, followed by parking. Eleven reported nothing being hardest.

These impacts could result in the loss of this thriving small business district and this violates the economic justice importance of maintaining the sustainability of small businesses.<sup>6</sup> Some of the businesses in Little Mekong rely on customers physically coming to their location, whereas others are able to provide their services offsite. Our study found that the businesses that rely on customers coming to them, which make up the majority of businesses in Little Mekong<sup>7</sup>, were affected more than those that do not rely on these customers' physical presence as fewer customers are coming to the avenue during construction. Reasons for customers avoiding the avenue include confusing signage or lack of sufficient signage, language barriers in understanding signage, and difficulty in finding or accessing parking.

**Table 7. Greatest challenge during construction**

Loss of customers	24
Traffic	14
Parking access	12
Construction activities	6
Safety	1
Property taxes	1
Truck access	1
Broken promises	1
Nothing	11

Business owners believe that most of the issues they encountered could have been minimized if the contractors had carried out more community engagement and communication before and during the construction. Business owners also had complaints about notifications concerning forthcoming changes and hoped for better notices in the future so they could plan ahead. In addition, business owners for whom English was not the primary language would have benefited from communication in their native language. Access issues were said to have been worsened by insufficient signage, making it quite difficult for customers and deliveries to find access to businesses. However, with the help of U7 and the Ready for Rail forgivable loan, there appears to be a ray of hope for business owners who hope to regain some of the losses with the aid of the loan.

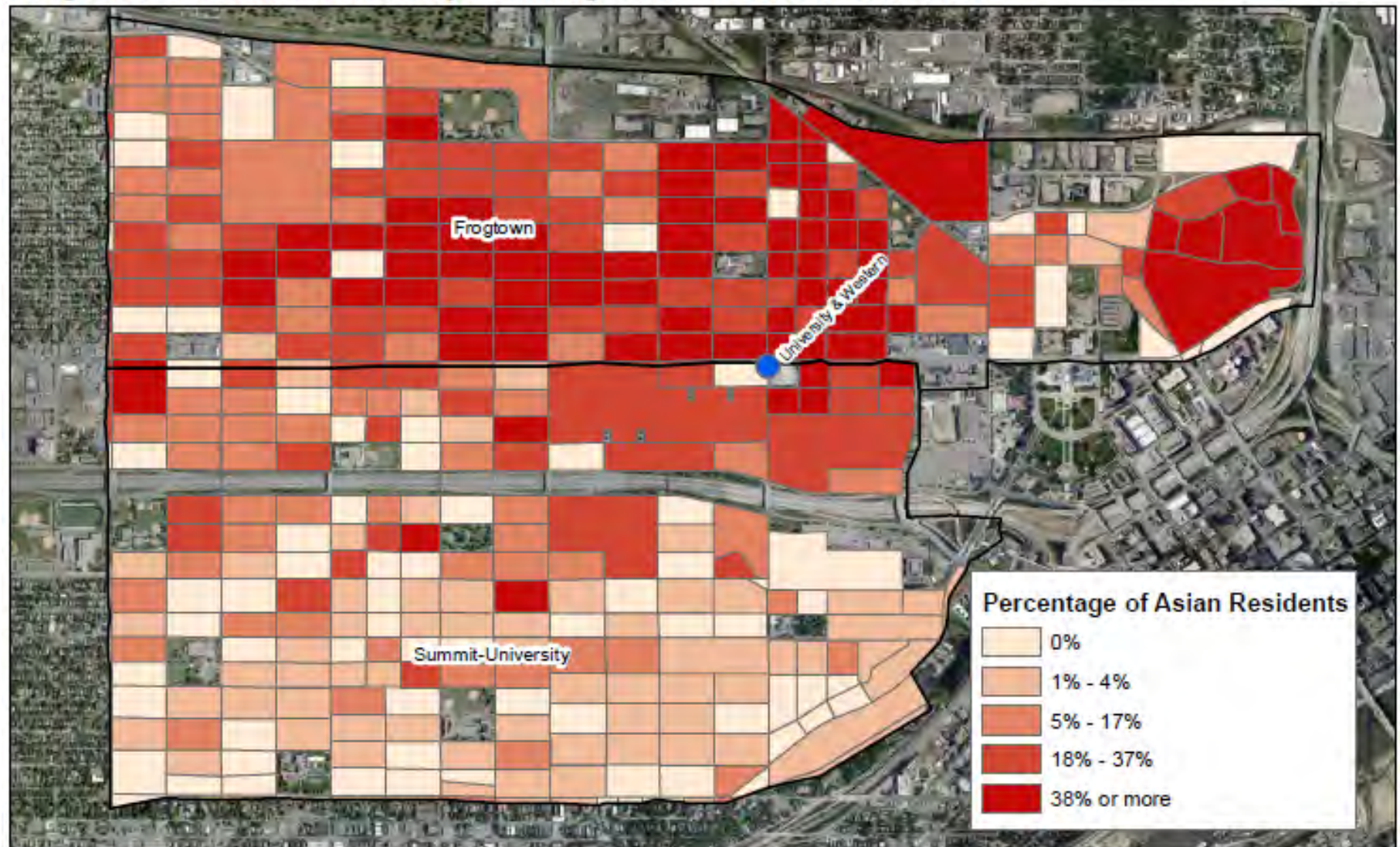
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<sup>6</sup> Council on Environmental Quality. *Environmental Justice: Guidance Under the National Environmental Policy Act*. 10 December 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Asian Economic Development Association, ECONOMIC JUSTICE MONITORING PROJECT: Business Impact Study (T0). March 2012.

## **APPENDIX A. Maps**

# Frogtown & Summit-University Planning Districts: Asian Residents



## Percentage of Asian Residents

Frogtown: 34.1%

Summit-University: 9.8%

St. Paul: 14.9%

## Other Planning Districts along the Central Corridor:

Downtown: 4.9%

Hamline-Midway: 5.3%

St. Anthony Park: 11.0%

Union Park: 3.2%

0 0.125 0.25 0.5 Miles



Map made by CURA Staff, July 2012

Data Source: US 2010 Census (block level data), Compass Neighborhood Profiles (District Council percentages)

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Regional Affairs (CURA)  
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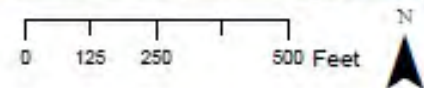
## Little Mekong Area: Asian-Owned and other Immigrant-Owned Businesses



### Business Ownership in Non-Vacant Properties

- Asian-owned Businesses (Cambodian, Chinese, Hmong, Lao, Thai, Vietnamese), 54 Total
- Other Immigrant-owned Business (African, Hispanic, Jamaican, Latino, Nigerian, Somali), 10 Total
- Non-Immigrant Owned Business (African-American, Caucasian), 8 Total
- Don't Know or No Response, 6 Total
- Unoccupied commercial property

□ Surveyed Properties



Map made by CURA Staff, July 2012  
 Data Source: AEDA (February 2012 Business Survey), Ramsey County (parcel data)

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**APPENDIX B. Data collection tool**

Business Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Street#: \_\_\_\_\_ Suite#: \_\_\_\_\_ Spoke to:  Owner/Mgr  Staff  
 Number of attached pages: \_\_\_\_ Interviewer: \_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

**1. In the last month, any trouble with utilities?**

- |   |   |  |  |   |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electricity    | <input type="checkbox"/> Gas              | <input type="checkbox"/> Water         | <input type="checkbox"/> Phone           | <input type="checkbox"/> Sewer          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Internet       | <input type="checkbox"/> Trash collection | <input type="checkbox"/> Mail delivery | <input type="checkbox"/> Cable Satellite | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't remember | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know       | <input type="checkbox"/> Refused       | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>NONE</b>     | <input type="checkbox"/> Nominal Impact |
- Use additional form (When? Did you receive any notice? Did you call hotline? Impact on business?)

**2. In the last month, any trouble with construction activities?**

- |   |                                       |  |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dust/Air       | <input type="checkbox"/> Litter/Trash | <input type="checkbox"/> Noise/Vibration | <input type="checkbox"/> Sewer grates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____    | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>NONE</b>  | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know      | <input type="checkbox"/> Refused      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nominal Impact |                                       |  |                                       |

**3. In the last month, any access issues?**

- |  |   |  |   |                                     |
|--|---|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sidewalk              | <input type="checkbox"/> Parking lot    | <input type="checkbox"/> Incoming deliveries | <input type="checkbox"/> Handicap ramps | <input type="checkbox"/> Crosswalks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2-way traffic on Univ | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____    | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't remember      | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know     | <input type="checkbox"/> Refused    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>NONE</b>           | <input type="checkbox"/> Nominal Impact |  |   |                                     |

**4. Please tell us your experience with customers finding your business during the past month.**

<p>4a. Have <b>orange direction signs</b> been kept up to date for navigating this area?</p> <p>If not, please tell us what happened and how that impacted your business.</p> <p>Have you ever called the <b>hotline</b> about this? Talked to a construction <b>coordinator</b> about this? If yes to either, please tell us the result.</p>	
<p>b. Have you been able to ensure people know you are open for business? What is helpful to ensure customers find your business?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Orange Construction signs</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Personally made signs (<i>How many?</i> ____ <i>Cost:</i> ____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> "Open for Business" signs</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Met Council marketing (Mod &amp; Co)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> U7 tech assistance</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Little Mekong support</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Talking to customers on phone</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Providing maps to customers</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Website: _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____</p>	

5. Have you had any **safety concerns** due to construction? (i.e. unmarked holes in ground, heavy loads being hauled overhead, flooding, etc.) If so, please share any actions you may have taken.

Have you ever called the **hotline** or talked to a construction **coordinator** about this? Please tell us the result.

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6. Aside from customer access, what are the **hardest things** for your business during this reporting period? What can be done to prevent or reduce these challenges? Please be specific.

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7. If you had the opportunity to speak to the Metropolitan Council or other decision makers today, what would you want to tell/show them about the **impact** and **process** of construction on your business

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8. Do you feel the construction project provides sufficient notice of activities that will directly affect your business, like utility disruptions, road closures, removing your sidewalks, etc.?

Yes       No

Comments:

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How would you prefer to receive notices?

Email       Phone       In person       Notes on the door       NO EMAIL       Others \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_



Business Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Street#: \_\_\_\_\_ Suite#: \_\_\_\_\_ Spoke to:  Owner/Mgr  Staff  
Number of attached pages: \_\_\_\_\_ Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Utility/Issue: \_\_\_\_\_ Date(s) \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ How long? \_\_\_\_\_ Days \_\_\_\_\_ Hours

Notice: How many days advance notice did you receive?  None  same day  \_\_\_\_\_ # day(s)  
How did you get notice?  No notice  (e-)Mail  Verbal (name \_\_\_\_\_)  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Hotline: Called?  No  Yes Why/why not? \_\_\_\_\_  
Response Time:  No response  \_\_\_\_\_ Day(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Hours  
Result: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Business Impact / Cost of Impact (lost sales/customers? Staff expenses? Add'l costs to overcome issue?):  Min. Impact  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Utility/Issue: \_\_\_\_\_ Date(s) \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ How long? \_\_\_\_\_ Days \_\_\_\_\_ Hours

Notice: How many days advance notice did you receive?  None  same day  \_\_\_\_\_ # day(s)  
How did you get notice?  No notice  (e-)Mail  Verbal (name \_\_\_\_\_)  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Hotline: Called?  No  Yes Why/why not? \_\_\_\_\_  
Response Time:  No response  \_\_\_\_\_ Day(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Hours  
Result: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Business Impact / Cost of Impact (lost sales/customers? Staff expenses? Additional costs to overcome issue/disruption?):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## **APPENDIX C. Case studies**

## Central Corridor Construction Impacts on Little Mekong Businesses (MacKubin to Galtier)



*These sample case studies are the result of face-to-face interviews conducted by the Asian Economic Development Association from April 2, 2012 through July 13, 2012.*

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### April 2-20

#### **Case #1: Restaurant**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Significant loss of customers
- No lighting outside of storefront
- Alley behind store is closed to parking lot
- No signs to show open access

After a slow winter season, and countless efforts to recover from the recession of 2008, this small restaurant needed a strong spring and summer season to stay in business. So far they have had the slowest year in their 10+ years on University Avenue. Business has been down an estimated 50-60%, and shows no signs of improving. As a result, the owner has had to reduce the hours of most employees, and lay off others. Employees used to working full time now find themselves working only two or three days out of the week.

When asked about the forgivable loan, the owner explicitly stated that [\$20,000] would not be enough to cover the damages of the current, and future construction seasons.

#### **Case #2: Service-based business**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Dust/Air quality
- Adapting to changing traffic directions

Amidst a flurry of complaints from near-by small businesses, the couple at the law office had more positive input than negative. The only disturbances to speak of were a gas shut off, that had virtually no effect, and a complaint that the dust was giving them allergy-like symptoms. Aside from that the business was happy to admit that they were impressed with how the construction crews were handling traffic complications and damaged sidewalks. Citing the Minneapolis portion of the corridor as having messy, and potentially dangerous conditions, the business believes overall the construction has a very good logistical structure, and was especially happy when they were told they may have a chance to have a back entrance opened up free of charge.

Although the office is located in the thick of construction, they are at an advantage relative to their neighbors. They explained that they have been in this location for nearly fifteen years, and at one point bought thick, glass windows from a former neighbor, which now insulate them from the noise outside. And, since they are only a two-person operation, working mostly from computers, they have no need for any large shipments, or even commercial garbage disposal (evidently it is easier just to bring garbage home). They also own the building and rent out the upstairs for extra income.

#### **Case #3: Service-based business**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Loss of Univ. Ave parking

- Loss of customers
- Water shut-off

For a laundry service that has served the community for years, the 2012 construction has made a costly impact. The loss of parking on University Avenue is likely to be a big reason for the loss of customers. The owners explained that many of the people who come in are carrying laundry with both hands, and are not willing, or able to walk long distances like that. The nearest cross street is also torn up where it meets University, and customers are more or less forced to walk through a portion of it. Business is estimated to have decreased about 40% on weekends since construction started. In addition, there was an instance where their water needed to be shut off on a Sunday morning, which is one of their busiest times of the week. [Wasn't the shut-off rescheduled??] Resulting loss from the shut-off was estimated at just over \$50.

#### **Case # 4: Religious center**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Loss of Univ. Ave Drive in Customers
- Loss of customers
- Lack of signage

The religious service place has its regular customer base. The local community would visit at a regular basis. The construction on one side of the University Avenue, however, makes it seem like that the service center is closed. The center could tell the people who come on a weekly basis that the center is still open, yet those who come once a month cannot get the message. The lack of signage made it difficult for drivers to find the path to the center, so the center has made their own map to distribute to the community.

One group of the center's principle customers is taxi drivers. They would stop at the center for their daily religious activities when they pass through the avenue. After the construction, however, this customer group is lost—they drive to centers elsewhere. And this is the very customer group that pays. The loss of taxi driver leads to a direct reduction in revenue.

Although there are water shut-offs, the center's operation is not seriously affected. It is only an increase of workload, for the center has to now prepare water for use in the morning sometimes.

#### **Case # 5: Retail business**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Significant loss of customers

A video shop located on the first floor of the International Plaza is heavily dependent on customers that walk inside into the plaza. The construction on the south side of the University Avenue has caused a significant decrease of the number of people visiting the plaza. The video shop suffers a significant loss of customers. Customer traffic is down 70-80% per day; while sometimes not a single customer show up for a whole day. The owner is very much worried, and does not know how long the shop can stand such circumstances.

#### **Case #6: Service-based business**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Loss of customers
- Lack of signage

The travel agency is less reliant on on-site customers. The owner of the agency is not so worried as other business owners in the same building. The construction, however, still causes a loss of customers for the agency. The owner reports an estimated 30% loss of customers.

When asked about the presence of signage, the owner said he did not notice any. He believed that the building owner might put a large sign for the whole center.

#### **Case #7: Retail business**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Inconvenience
- Noise

The jewelry store has dedicated customers. The store, however, still suffers major loss of revenue after the construction with an estimation of 50-60% loss. The owner believes that the inconvenience for traffic and the noise has driven the customers away to go for jewelry stores in Minneapolis instead. The owner is quite pessimistic about the situation and does not think the difficulties can be mitigated.

#### **Case # 8: Restaurant.**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Significant loss of customers
- Lack of signage

The restaurant gets a significant customer loss after the construction—with only one table per day being the norm, the daily revenue falling to \$50 from an average of \$400. The owner says that people cannot drive to the restaurant from the west, yet often do not know it. He believes that there are not enough signs to guide the drivers. The owner has considered making his own signs, yet was not sure if the city would approve what he does and wanted to avoid violation.

Although there have been water shut-offs, it is usually during the morning, and does not cause much disruption to the business.

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### **June 18-24**

#### **Case #9: Restaurant**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Significant loss of customers
- Dirt and vibration
- Access issue
- Employees deduction
- Confusion of signage

The owner expressed negative feeling about the construction. For her, \$20,000 forgivable loan is not enough especially when the business decrease about 40-50% in comparison with last year. This May compares to last May, they lost \$30,000. This May compares to this April, they lost \$10,000. The owner is frustrated about of the dirt and vibration. They stopped cleaning the window and customers were really unhappy about the noisy and unclean environment. The owner also had to reduce the numbers of employees in half without anyone dressing in traditional clothes which used to be a unique part of that restaurant. Even though cutting a lot of spending to maintain business, the owner also had to deal with access issue due to the confusion of signage (For example: two

signs at the same place shows different directions) and the blocking of construction trucks. The owner calls the hotline but it always takes so long for the problems to be solved.

#### **Case #10: retail store**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Slower business
- Truck delivery access
- Parking space
- Big concern about the impact of construction when it's moved to this side of the street.
- Difficulties for people walking and taking the bus

The construction hasn't moved to the business's side of the street so the owner hasn't experienced a lot of effect from the construction. Even though there is noise and vibration, the owner doesn't think that it makes a big influence on their slow business. According to the owner, he thinks that slow business is mainly because they don't have off street parking. The parking at front with several spots seems to be not enough. The delivery truck has to park far away from the store. Same with people who take the bus, they have to walk far distance carrying heavy grocery, which is not convenient.

#### **Case #11: Restaurant**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Significant loss of customers
- Access issues (deliveries, parking lot and sidewalk blocked)
- Lack of signage

Since construction began in early March of this year, the restaurant has struggled to compensate for the losses. The major concerns are the lack of customers, which has quickly decreased in numbers since the start of the construction season. With the lack of access through the back alley, deliveries and customer parking are limited. Additionally, the sidewalk has been torn up for several days, with no access for foot traffic. The owner worries that customers will not be able to see if the business is open even if there are signs up.

#### **Case #12: Service-based business**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Construction has not affected the business yet
- Minimal impact concerning safety/utilities

Despite the decrease in customers, the business has been doing well during this time. The construction has yet to affect any sort of business and the owner does not have many complaints other than the noise and vibration. The water turned off one time. However, the owner did not use the hotline because it turned back on and continued on with business as usual.

#### **Case #13: Service-based business**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Loss of customers
- Sidewalk access

The owner emphasized the loss of business over the last few months alone. Many customers do not visit the shop because of the overwhelming traffic and the imminent switch of construction zones to the opposite side of University Avenue. The owner fears that if business should proceed like this as usual, the shop will have to close for awhile and re-open at another time. Additionally, the owner feels that the sidewalk access is extremely dangerous, especially for children. The edge of the sidewalk that meets the street was once used for street parking along the avenue. The cars and

public transportation (especially buses) that drive by every day can easily collide with anyone who is walking too close to the edge.

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## June 25-27

### Case #14: Service-based business

Impacts/Concerns:

- Significant loss of customers
- Internet and phone disconnection
- Access issue
- Lack of information about the construction

Access issue is one of the biggest problems for this business. The construction makes it really hard for customers to get access to the business especially this travel agent have many out of town customers (20% of their customers are from other states. 30% are not from the twin cities.). Also, reading construction signs is also a big challenge for older customers or customers with limited English. The manager said that some customer told her that they came to University Ave but couldn't figure out the way to get to the business so they normally ended up going back home or moving to other travel agent. Things got even harder when the business suffered internet and phone disconnection for a month. No business transaction and communication was done during that time. Finally, the internet and phone company came and concluded that the problem was caused by vibration from the construction. However, the business has no idea about the hotline and what to do when they have problems relating to the construction.

### Case #15: Retail store

Impacts/Concerns:

- Vibration causing damage property
- Significant loss of customers and sales
- Difficulties with finance and maintaining the store
- Language barrier

Due to the vibration, a speaker dropped on a display cabinet and caused it to break. The owner is really mad about the whole damage from the construction. Before, they made about \$200-\$300 a day. Now, they make around \$20-\$30 a day. The business has to reduce the store size in half. They still owe the building manager \$10,000 rent fee. They are tired of too much road closure and long process of applying for help. When trying to complain and asking information about the construction, the business owner has a big language barrier because there is no option for their language (not offered on hotline).

### Case #16: Retail store

Impacts/Concerns:

- Concern about space rent increase
- Tremendous decrease in business
- Worry about shutting down the business

The owner showed big concern about the tremendous loss of their business. Besides the recession, the construction activities add up to make their business off about 70%. It has been 6 months since their last time ordering new stuff. At the same time, the building manager mentioned with the owner that the space rent might be increase during or after the construction due to the increase of tax. With all the difficulties, the owner is afraid that they will have to close the business soon.



**Case #17: Service-based business**

Impacts/concerns:

- Noticeable noise and vibrations though no impact on business
- Grateful that they have their own off-street parking lot

Thus far this business has no concerns with the construction and has not noticed a significant impact. They have had no trouble with utilities or access and do not have any safety concerns. They believe the construction signage is sufficient and have received sufficient notice about construction activities.

**Case# 18: Health provider**

Impacts/concerns:

- Phone and fax issues
- Parking lot issues

This business has had difficulties with their phone line losing customer phone calls. They have not contacted the construction hotline as they were unaware of it. Customers are having trouble finding the parking lot now that they can no longer park along the street. The staff member interviewed also had concerns that drivers do not pay attention to the construction signs which makes the area dangerous.

**Case #19: Service-based business**

Impacts/concerns:

- Noticeable noise and vibrations though no impact on business

This business has noticed very few impacts from the construction so far. The business owner noted that navigating the road under construction is difficult, especially now that it is only one lane in each direction and states that it is important for construction workers to keep signs posted and make sure that the signs are understandable.

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**July 1-10****Case #20: Health provider**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Upset with light rail construction
- The construction project is unnecessary
- Rising tax rates
- Many patients complain that there is limited access

The owner expressed negative feedback about the light rail project. Due to rising tax rates, the owner is upset that the light caused the clinic and surrounding businesses to experience significant loss. Many patients complain that there is limited access and avoid University avenue altogether.

**Case #21: Restaurant**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Loss of customers
- Struggling to pay high tax rates
- Cutting costs but still making less

Although business is struggling during this time, the manager believes it is a hard time for all. Since the beginning of the year, sales have decreased with a loss of over 70-80%. There is another restaurant in Minneapolis that the management opened to keep the St. Paul business afloat. The

management and staff have done all they can to cut costs even with rising tax rates. However, they do not know how long they can stay.

#### **Case #22: Service-based business**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Families can choose to have their service elsewhere
- Impressed with construction outcomes
- No major concerns/complaints

The business manager did not express any major concerns with construction during this time. Also, the funeral home has the convenience of relocating if the family does not feel comfortable with the noise and vibration of construction outside. If a service is scheduled for a specific day, the construction crew is very respectful and continues their work elsewhere. Overall, there are no general complaints other than speeding up construction to install the light rail.

#### **Case #23: Restaurant**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Staff concerned with dust/air entering building
- Loss of customers
- Business has slowed down

Staff member expressed concern with dust and air entering the building during business hours. Many customers complained that the sidewalk access was limited and narrow, with occasional flying rocks overhead. Staff also stated that business decreased from 25%-50% over the past months adding to the loss of customers.

#### **Case #24: Retail store**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Significant loss of customers
- Incoming deliveries issue for UPS
- No trash collection for a week due to access issue
- Lack of parking lot
- Sufficient notice about the construction

This business suffers a significant loss of customers from 60-70 transactions/ a day to about 3 transactions/ a day. In general, this business location loses \$20,000-30,000 a month. Access issue also causes a big impact on the business. The trash collection company couldn't access the business for a week. The hotline was called and problem was solved. However, until the date of the interview, UPS delivery still couldn't get access to the business. The delivery truck has to park far away and deliver person needs to walk a far distance. The manager also expressed concern about the lack of on street parking lot which for him might be a reason for the loss of customers. Nevertheless, the manager complimented on sufficient notice given by the construction company which made it easier for their business to get prepared.

#### **Case #25: Service-based business**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Significant loss of walk in customers
- Longer and inconvenient test drive

The manager expressed a big concern about losing all of walk-in customer which caused about 25-30% of their income. Besides, the business also has to deal with longer and more inconvenient test drive for their customers' cars. This not only caused more financial loss but also made it more time consuming for the business.

### **Case #26: Cultural Center**

#### Impacts/Concerns:

- Flooding and mold in the basement room
- Significant loss of prayers and donations
- Violation of private parking and lack of parking spot
- Safety concern for kids' activities
- Distraction/ no quiet environment for religious purpose

There are a lot to say about the construction from this religious center especially the property damage and the significant loss of people visiting the center which leads to a big decrease in the income of the center. The construction causing noise, vibration creates distraction for prayers. At the same time, inconvenient parking and violation of the center's parking lot contributes to decrease the numbers of visitors. Friday is a big praying day but due to the construction, there are only around 100 people coming in comparison with more than 200 people before the construction. The interviewee, on behalf of other people coming to the center expressed the concern about the safety for outdoor kids' activities especially with many cracks on the sidewalk. Besides, the biggest issue relating to the construction is property damage in the basement room. The center reported the flooding issue in the basement about 2 months ago but it has not been addressed. Now, after cleaning all the water by their own, the center has to deal with mold on the walls. The room which was used for office and classroom now has to be closed because the center worries that people will get sick being in that room.

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**July 11-16, 2012**

### **Case #27: Health provider**

#### Impacts/ Concerns

- No major concerns at the moment

After following up for a second time in three weeks, the owner did not express any major concerns about construction but suggested that checking in at another time would be more beneficial as construction continues.

### **Case #28: Retail store**

#### Impacts/ Concerns

- Business is very slow
- Personal signs are helping guide traffic/ customers

The manager expressed little concern about the construction other than a significant loss of customers and business is very slow. Also, the neon signs are helpful for customers who do not know where the shop is located. Otherwise, everything is going well for now.

### **Case #29: Service-based business**

#### Impacts/ Concerns

- Parking access blocked
- Problems accessing internet/cable

Since the start of construction on the salon's side of University Avenue, the owner is concerned about the business's survival in the upcoming months due to the lack of customers. Also, parking access is limited because of the start of construction. Customers complain about the need to walk around the building just to access the front door of the shop. There are also problems with internet

and cable signals during the transition that are noteworthy but the owner does not know if it because of construction.

### **Case #30: Service-based business**

Impacts/Concerns:

- Significant loss of customers
- Vibration causes property damage
- Incoming deliveries and parking lot issue

Even though the business experience some troubles with electricity, water and dust, the manager doesn't think it made a big impact on her business. For her, the vibration and the lack of parking lot as well as incoming deliveries are more noteworthy. The vibration made her display cabinet fall off. It wasn't damaged and it's wasn't too hard for the store to hang it up again but it made the manager really worried. She also concerns that the vibration might break her doors and windows which made it easier for people to break in. Besides, there is not enough parking lots for her customers. The truck deliveries of other businesses often block the alley and the parking lot. Her business no longer has incoming deliveries but they drive and pick up products by themselves. Thus, her business suffers significant loss of customers. Out of state customers who take about 30% don't come any more. Before, she has 15-20 customers/ a day. Now, just about 4-5/ a day. The manager has mentioned to the owner the idea of closing the service after 5 good years in business.

### **Case #31: Service-based business**

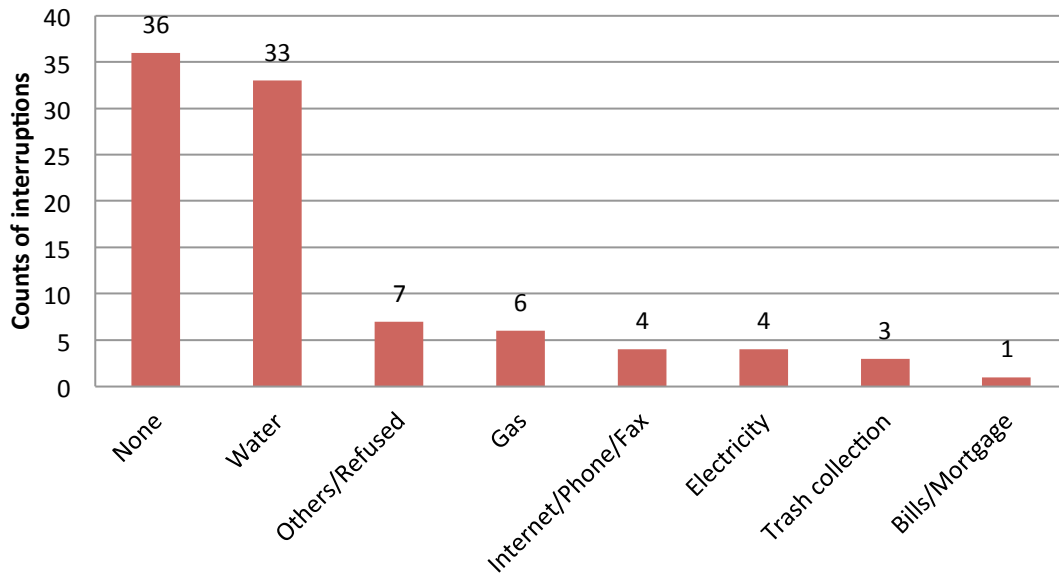
Impacts/Concerns:

- Vibration
- Loss of customers
- Expectation to get more help from the city

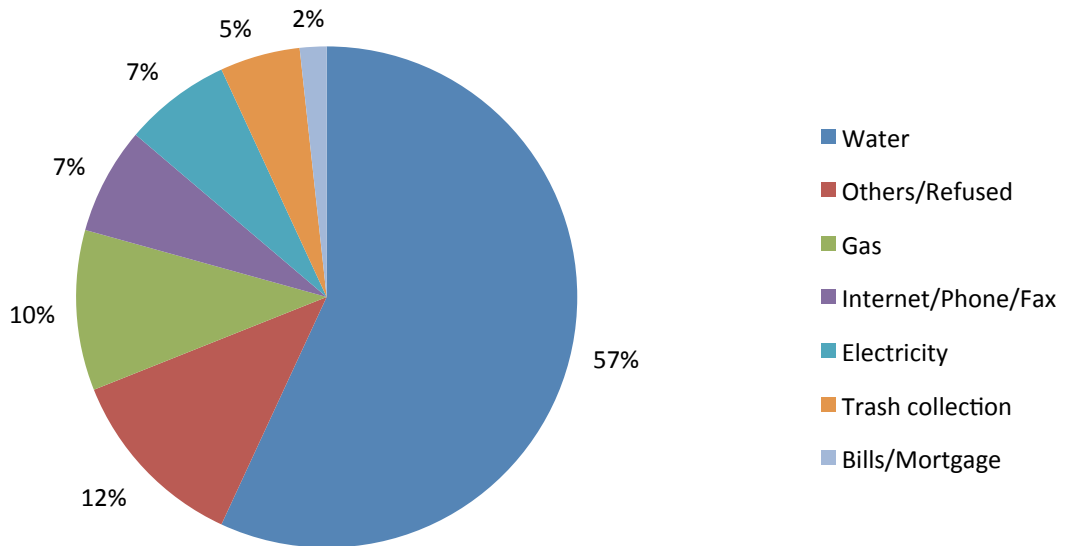
The building was too shaky that people can't concentrate on working. It's also very time consuming for the manager to come out to pick up customers or give them the directions. Many of this business's customers have limited English vocabulary so they just avoid to deal with traffic on University Ave. The manager also expressed the need of getting more help from the city with instruction on how to apply for the forgivable loan as well as help for people with language barriers.

## **APPENDIX D. Charts & Graphs**

**Figure 1- Utility Interruptions (April-July 2012)**

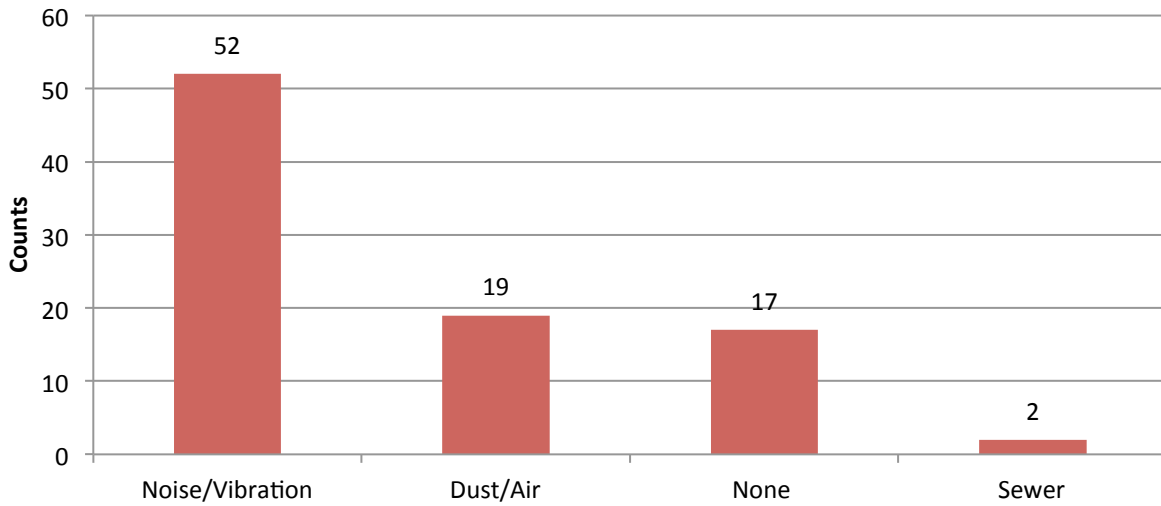


**Figure 2- Utility Interruptions (April-July 2012)**

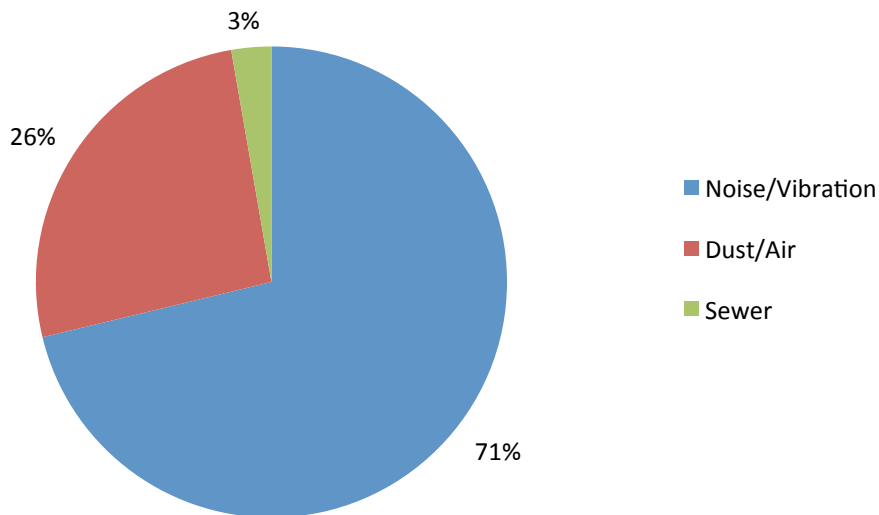


Percentages of all utility issues reported

**Figure 3- Construction Activity Issues (April-July 2012)**

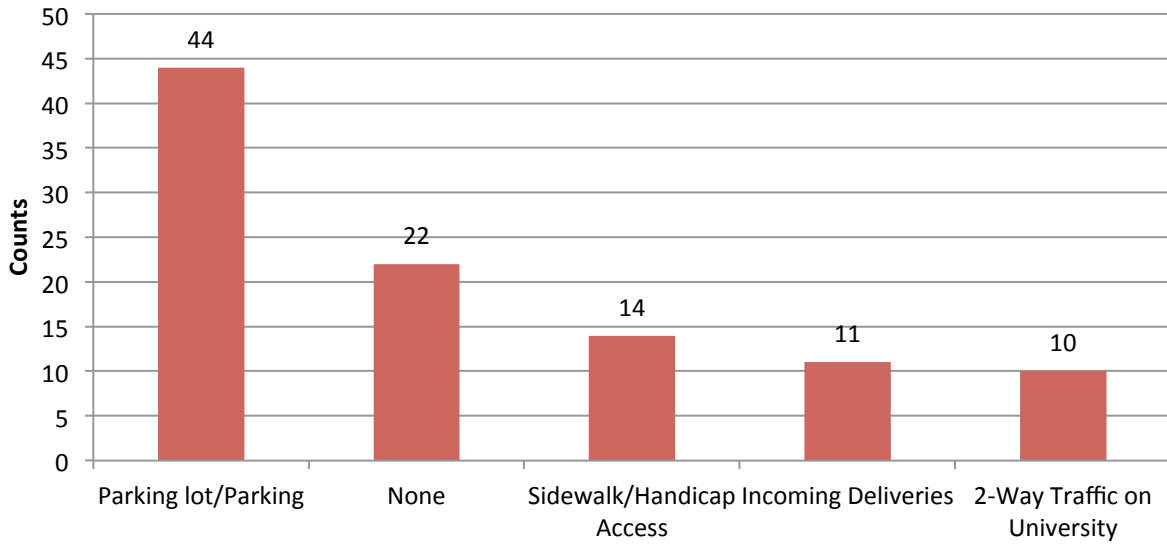


**Figure 4- Construction Activity Issues (April-July 2012)**

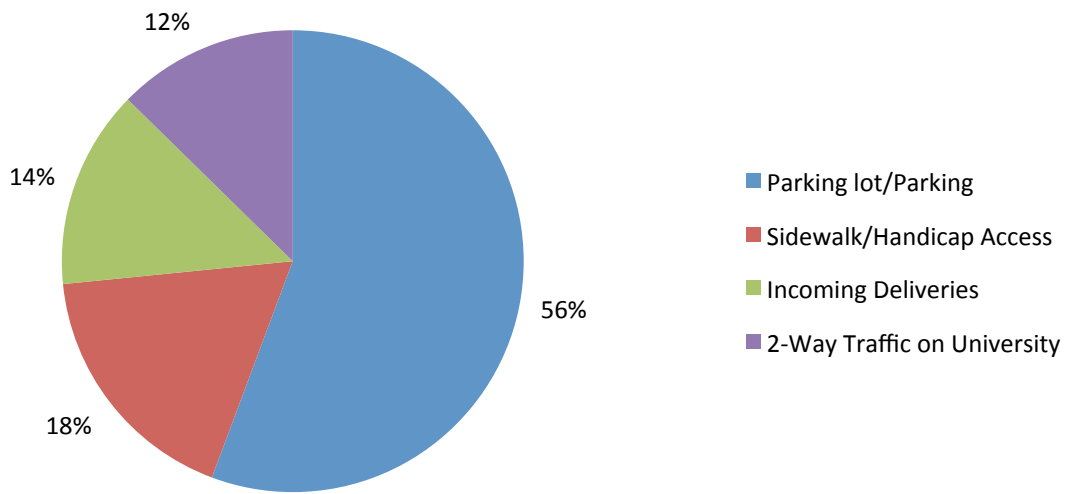


Percentages of all construction activity issues reported

**Figure 5- Access & Parking Issues (April-July 2012)**



**Figure 6- Access & Parking Issues (April-July 2012)**



Percentages of all access and parking issues reported



**APPENDIX E. Business quotes**

*What businesses want the Met Council and decision-makers to know or see*

**Businesses' response when asked: "What do you want to TELL or SHOW Met Council or decision maker?"**

- Don't approve. Wants beauty. Needs tourism, LRT does not promote tourism.
- Good directions, hole coverage (good sidewalk maintenance)
- About loss of parking on University Avenue, could be positive or negative for light rail.
- Workers seem to be working as fast as possible; entrance access; communication by construction workers are good and responsive. Would be worth the hassle if it gets done quicker.
- No comments
- Knows they are doing their best, but they should speed it up and keep up the work so they can be done by this year.
- Flow of traffic/road closures during construction
- Pollution from dust/air affects business some days
- Construction should be done faster. Work 7 days/week if possible
- Nothing for now
- Keep signs posted and make sure signs are understandable
- Nothing yet
- Create more signs otherwise it will be a major concern since construction has not moved to their side yet
- Make the construction schedule better. Do not operate construction during busy lunch rush.
- The Met Council gives bonus for the construction crews, why not for us? The construction damaged us a lot and \$20,000 is not enough. We lost 40-50% and it's not only me because many businesses experienced that. Our business can't afford to lose. We need Met Council to take action right now. We have been waiting for so long. Help us advertise in local newspapers or advertise who is open via newspaper or radio. The survey finding no significant impact was a waste of time and money because she had not idea about construction yet.
- We can not do much, no parking.
- About our loss of customers and financial loss.
- Not yet affected so there is not a lot to say. However, when construction moves to this side, we hope decision makers make it easier for students to arrive by bus & driving. Hopefully no sidewalk will be closed and maybe more assistance for people with limited English.
- Advertise/market with Met Council directly to bring more customers/business. Provide more resources for small businesses for marketing/promotions.
- Nothing to say
- Not yet with their business but they want the Met Council to know how desperately businesses need customers (businesses put up signs miles away from their businesses). Also, it's hard for their customers, many of whom are refugees. These people have to take the bus and thus have to walk a lot.

- Maybe they would help with the shaking to fix stuff that got broken from shaking (fixed previously by owners but it opened up again)
- Property value is decreased/property taxes increased
- Customers are scared of University Ave. construction; provide signage, financial support, marketing plan to support small businesses. Feel like they are neglected. City not doing enough to engage community; expects city to go out & ask small businesses what they need.
- I want to show them all the report data and significant impact of the construction on us. Our business is clearly slower. Also, I want to ask them 3 questions: 1) Why build light rail again when we had them and got rid of them before? 2) Why University Ave? 3) How effective will the light rail be?
- Nothing Met Council can do specifically; we are cutting costs but still making less; we opened another restaurant in Minneapolis to keep St. Paul business going.
- No one will use the Light Rail System; waste of money at the owner's expense.
- None, was not too happy with the LRT project in the beginning but okay with how it's been handled. Very satisfied with progress and communication among construction workers and funeral home.
- Nothing now.
- Nothing now.
- Hope the construction will be done soon so things will be normal.
- \$20,000 loan is not enough. These construction years are the hardest of their 24 years in the business.
- "I'm mad, LRT for what? Meeting for what?" Says people are moving; too many lies, nothing is being done to help; they had to narrow their store in half; used to make \$200 - \$300/day but now make \$10 - \$15/day; can not even pay rent; owe the building owner \$10,000. If the surveys, talks and meetings are to help then do it, but if no help, don't bother them.
- Not sure how to get help and loan. Have no idea about the support from the city. Business is so slow, not enough customers. 3 employees quit.
- Whatever is good for citizens and businesses, please do them. I am happy to see the streets look prettier and cleaner.
- Business is slow (down 30-40%)
- Want to show them our financial difficulties
- Show them the financial report, significant losses, tell them we've lost customers. All small businesses are impacted. It takes many years to finish the construction and for small businesses to recover. Hope they can be more understanding.
- Show loss of financial support, \$20,000 loan is not enough, Ask for smooth traffic, Ask to reduce property tax
- Hopefully when it's done there will be more business. Show them the financial report to show significant loss of 30-40%.
- The construction people did a good job but we lost a lot of customers.
- Significant loss of income 2) Damage to property because we now have mold on walls

- Loss of business, loss of 25-30% at least, financial report, loss of all walk in customers
- Thinks the light rail will be beautiful when completed. Wish it could be over faster. Construction workers are respectful. However, sometimes get no notification.