

Jefferson Avenue Bikeway FAQ

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

What is a brief background of this project?

The Jefferson Bikeway will provide a key east-west bicycle and pedestrian connection, by providing a safer roadway for drivers, cyclists, and walkers alike. Creating safe space for biking and walking is a critical component of a balanced and flexible transportation system, which itself is an important priority for the City of Saint Paul. Such a system means that residents of and visitors to Saint Paul have the benefit of choice and options in getting where they want to go. These policies are codified in the Transportation Plan of the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan.

The Jefferson Avenue Bikeway extends from Mississippi River Boulevard to the west, to the Sam Morgan Trail and Smith Avenue High Bridge to the east. The Jefferson Avenue Bikeway is a project funded through the Federal Non-Motorized Transportation Pilot Program (for \$750,000) to provide improved bicycle and pedestrian accommodations on Jefferson Avenue. Those dollars account for 75% of the funding for construction costs; the rest of the funds will come from City CIB dollars. Construction for the Jefferson Avenue Bikeway is planned for the Summer of 2012.

Why are we building this bike boulevard on Jefferson Avenue?

The project will make choosing to walk or bicycle a more inviting, more comfortable, and more convenient option along the project length. To do this, the Jefferson Avenue Bikeway project provides improved east/west pedestrian and bicycle facilities on Jefferson Avenue and local streets east of West Seventh to the West Side via Cliff Road and the Smith Avenue High Bridge. The project advances a variety of adopted City policies, including Transportation Plan Policy 3.4, "Develop and maintain a complete and connected bikeway system."

Wouldn't alternate routes work as well as Jefferson?

Jefferson Avenue presents a unique opportunity for a continuous east-west facility on a relatively low-volume street that is unmatched by the other streets located nearby. It is the best location in this area to place a bikeway.

Why do we need an additional east-west facility on Jefferson when we have bike lanes on Summit and Marshall?

Summit is an excellent facility, but it serves as a complement to Jefferson, rather than a replacement. According to adopted City policy, "generally, bikeways should be no more than a half-mile apart." Summit is located 0.8 miles away from Jefferson. Adopted City Policy goes on to say that "It is the desired goal of the City to increase the bicycle mode share from 2% in 2000 to 5% in fifteen years and increase the mode share of bicycling commuters from 0.6% to 2.5% during the same period" (Transportation Plan, Policy 3.4).

PROCESS

www.stpaul.gov/jefferson

How was the neighborhood notified about this project?

The City used a variety of communications techniques, both new and traditional, to notify the community about the Jefferson Avenue Bikeway over the last several years. Details on the 23 community meetings and past notifications can be found at www.stpaul.gov/jefferson. In the last six months alone, official communications included: five resident mailings for those living within two blocks either side of Jefferson Avenue. Those five mailings totaled approximately 7,000 notifications (1,400 households * 5 mailings). Notifications were also provided via the Ward 3 Council Office; the Macalester Groveland Community Council and the Bicycling Saint Paul e-Newsletter. Additionally, various media outlets and local groups have sent out notice of these meetings. Those outlets included the Pioneer Press, the Highland Villager, Minnesota Public Radio, Transit for Livable Communities, Bike Walk Twin Cities, and St. Paul Smart Trips.

How were residents able to provide input about the Jefferson Avenue Bikeway?

There have been 23 community meetings pertaining to the Jefferson Avenue Bikeway so far during the life of the project. Since the design process for the project west of Snelling was “re-started” in August 2011 alone there have been nine different public meetings. Six of these were geared toward soliciting community input on the design for the portion of the project between Mississippi River Boulevard and Snelling Avenue. Two of these public meetings included a status update on the project, next-steps, and a forum for general public comment. Three meetings and an online survey in December 2011 were geared toward gathering input on specific traffic calming treatments as they could be applied at particular locations along Jefferson Avenue. The most recent opportunity for public input was an open house to share the final design for the Jefferson Avenue Bikeway and answer questions on March 6. There have also been three more public meetings at which the Jefferson Avenue Bikeway project was discussed, including Transportation Committee, Planning Commission, and a meeting at Macalester Groveland Community Council. The final opportunity for public input will come at the City Council public hearing on April 4.

What process was used to arrive at the design proposal for the western section of the project (between Mississippi River Boulevard and Snelling Avenue)?

After electing to “re-start” the design process for the section of the Jefferson Avenue Bikeway between Mississippi River Boulevard and Snelling Avenue in August 2011, City staff held three public meetings and opened a companion online survey to gather input on the design. Each of the public meetings included a presentation on traffic calming treatments and a facilitated discussion regarding the application of those treatments along a particular segment of Jefferson Avenue, as described below. The online survey was open during the month of December and allowed residents to share their opinion about specific traffic calming treatments at specific locations along Jefferson Avenue. In general, we heard that residents were open to sharrow pavement markings and signage along the length of the section to help communicate that Jefferson Avenue is a bike route and increase awareness for sharing the road among all users. We also heard feedback on other treatments in specific locations, which shaped the design proposal.

COST

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How does the cost for this project compare to the cost for other road projects?

The cost of this project as proposed is \$1,000,000, using \$750,000 of Federal grant money (using the gas tax) and \$250,000 of City funds (using CIB). The items that are funded using City funds include the installation of pavement markings, route marker signs, destination/directional signs, and two dynamic speed display signs. The City funds also pay for the work associated with changing the speed limit between Lexington Parkway and Victoria from 40mph to 30mph as well as costs associated with engineering, inspection, and administration. While this sounds like a lot of money for project costs, it is actually relatively inexpensive for a road project. By comparison, to reconstruct a street without any traffic calming elements, the cost is approximately \$130K - \$230K for a short block (330 feet) and \$260K - \$460K for a long block (660 feet). For a basic residential street, the cost of maintenance alone is a bit over \$4000 for a long block and \$2000 for a short block. This project is 4 miles long, covering the equivalent of 64 short blocks.

Could we use this money for something else?

No, these dollars cannot be used to pay for something else, like public schools or more police officers. The project is funded primarily through a Federal Non-Motorized Transportation Pilot project grant. That grant is born out of the Federal Transportation Bill and funded by the Federal gas tax. Since the funding is dedicated to the grant program, this means the money will have to be used on a bike walk project in the metro area. If we don't use this money in Saint Paul on this project, another neighboring community will get the dollars to use for a bike walk project there.

Are there assessments for this project?

As approved by the City Council in May 2010, a portion of the costs of the Lantern Style Street Lighting to be installed on Jefferson between Lexington and West Seventh Street will be assessed to abutting property owners. There will be no other assessments to property owners for the project.

Will this project be expensive to maintain?

The annual maintenance cost above and beyond that for a typical street for the entire length of Jefferson between West 7th and Mississippi River Boulevard is estimated to be \$5,300. This cost will be rolled into the city's general pool for right-of-way maintenance which is applied citywide. The City of Saint Paul has a \$40 million budget for maintenance of the right-of-way. The additional maintenance for the proposed design represents a .01325% increase in that budget.

NEIGHBORHOOD TRAFFIC CIRCLES AND PROJECT DESIGN

Why might a neighborhood traffic circle be better than a stop sign?

Neighborhood traffic circles are traffic calming devices, whereas stop signs are traffic control devices. When stop sign use is "warranted" according to MUTCD standards, they can be very effective in assigning right-of-way at the intersection, or controlling traffic. Stop signs may be "warranted" in locations with specific hazards (e.g., a sight line issue, etc.), or where a lower volume street intersects

a higher volume street. When stop signs are used in situations where they aren't "warranted," crash rates can actually increase. Stop signs have other draw backs, including increased speeds midblock downstream from a stop sign, increased noise pollution and air pollution from the acceleration and deceleration of vehicles. Often there is low compliance with stop sign which creates a false sense of security for all road users. Simply "turning" stop signs, so that intersecting streets have to stop at Jefferson without installing any traffic calming isn't an ideal solution because speeds may increase as drivers recognize it is a street without stops signs to get east-west. This would create a speedway.

Neighborhood traffic circles, on the other hand, are traffic calming devices located in the center of an intersection of two low-volume local residential streets. These small, 22-foot diameter traffic calming devices are sometimes confused with roundabouts, the latter of which are seen in Europe or even some suburbs of the Twin Cities. Neighborhood streets will not need to be widened or reconstructed to accommodate the neighborhood traffic circles. However, a neighborhood traffic circle is similar to a roundabout only to the extent that all traffic travels in a counter clockwise direction. When traffic circles are installed, other intersection control devices (i.e. stop signs) are removed. We currently have nine neighborhood traffic circles in Saint Paul, located at Macalester & Stanford, Wheeler & Wellesley, Albert & Portland, Laurel & Saint Albans, Finn & Lincoln, Albert & Charles, Fry & Shields, Shields & Wheeler, and Wilder & Iglhart.

Neighborhood traffic circles calm traffic by physically reducing vehicle speeds and sustaining these lower speeds through the intersection. Neighborhood traffic circles positively affect the type and severity of accidents at an intersection, eliminate non-compliance issues related to stop signs, improve through-movement for all users, and provide space for enhancements such as gardens and other landscaping. Installing a neighborhood traffic circle in the middle of a four legged intersection decreases the number of possible conflict points at the intersection. Vehicle-to-vehicle conflict points are decreased by 75% from 32 for a typical four legged intersection to 8 for an intersection with a neighborhood traffic circle. Pedestrian conflict points are decreased by 67% from 24 for a typical four legged intersection to 8 for an intersection with a neighborhood traffic circle.

Every traffic calming element or form of traffic control has advantages and disadvantages, which must be factored into the decision making process. For the Mississippi River Boulevard to Snelling Avenue section of the Jefferson Bikeway project, the main goals are to give some advantages to bicyclists, improve safety for bicyclists and pedestrians, calm traffic, and avoid substantially changing the motor vehicle traffic patterns in the neighborhood. Our Traffic Engineer recommends neighborhood traffic circles be installed at locations as proposed to achieve these goals.

Do vehicles come into more conflict with pedestrians because of their path of travel at intersections with neighborhood traffic circles?

No, in fact, the potential for conflict between vehicles and pedestrians decreases by 67%. For example, a vehicle making the southbound to eastbound movement would not encroach upon the pedestrian zone of the west leg or the south leg of the intersection. Similar to making a southbound to eastbound movement at a typical intersection, a vehicle would cross the pedestrian zones of the north leg and the east leg. The diameter of the neighborhood traffic circle is such that all movements are contained within the intersection, not the pedestrian zones.

Are school bus stops and emergency vehicles compatible with neighborhood traffic circles?

Yes, large vehicles like school buses and emergency vehicles (e.g., hook and ladder fire trucks, etc. are compatible with neighborhood traffic circles. These vehicles are able to maneuver around these neighborhood traffic circles without creating safety hazards or a substantial reduction in response time. This type of maneuvering does require more deliberate driving than a traditional intersection without traffic controls (e.g., stop signs) or traffic calming (e.g., neighborhood traffic circles).

The Saint Paul Public School's Operations Manager for Transportation made this statement to City staff: "I do not have any opposition to neighborhood traffic circles as they have been implemented thus far in St. Paul. I am very familiar with the existing neighborhood traffic circles such, as those at Iglehart and Wilder and Macalester and Palace. Those circles have not caused any difficulties to our buses, so as long as any new neighborhood traffic circles conform with that basic style and design I do not see any issues." Neighborhood traffic circles do not create safety issues when making stops at intersections with neighborhood traffic circles, in fact, buses will pick up in the middle of street to pick up students, rather than at the curb as they do now. This spacing will reduce the possibility of buses sliding into waiting children on wintry days.

Similarly, Saint Paul's Fire Marshall states, "the 'typical' traffic circles do not significantly impede our emergency vehicle access."

In Saint Paul we have constructed nine similar neighborhood traffic circles at various residential street intersections across the city. While no reported issues have occurred at these locations, we will continue to coordinate with the Saint Paul Public School District and Saint Paul Fire Department on any issues or concerns if they do arise in this case.

Will neighborhood traffic circles be an eye sore?

Not at all. Residents typically see neighborhood traffic circles as a neighborhood enhancement because they allow for plantings. The neighborhood traffic circles for this project will be maintained by the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Will the design elements for the Jefferson Avenue Bikeway, like neighborhood traffic circles, be compatible with snow plowing?

Yes, selected designs would be compatible with snow plowing. The Department of Public Works, which has been staffing this project, is the same department responsible for snow plowing. This means we work very closely with our partners in that division to ensure our projects don't compromise their ability to do their jobs. In this spirit, we have conducted tests with our snowplowing division to ensure our designs allow for sufficient maneuvering for effective snow plowing. These tests have led us to use 22 foot diameter neighborhood traffic circles, rather than a smaller size. Snow plowing is more challenging with neighborhood traffic circles, but the division head for Street Maintenance, Kevin Nelson, has assured our engineers that his staff can handle plowing around neighborhood traffic circles, saying, "It is true that neighborhood traffic circles are more of a challenge to plow, but we do have the personnel and equipment to do the job." The snow plow drivers maneuver their vehicles up and down the intersection of one of the streets crossed by a

neighborhood traffic circle and then up and down the other street. A snow plow supervisor with a plow mounted on a pick up truck would do any clean up that plows missed. Snow will not pile at the neighborhood traffic circles because the snow plows send snow toward curbs, not the centerline of the street. This procedure is similar to that for medians. If a given winter has a large volume of snow, like the winter of 2010-2011, snow removal could take place as needed. Generally, we're always working to improve our snow plowing efforts across the city.

Will the design proposed by the Department of Public Works for the western portion of the project (between Mississippi River Boulevard and Snelling Avenue) cause traffic to divert to other nearby residential streets?

The proposed design shouldn't cause traffic to divert to other nearby residential streets. None of the proposed treatments are known to have a traffic diverting effect. They are known to have a traffic calming effect, so they will make it more difficult to speed down Jefferson.

Does the proposed project include bike lanes?

The project includes bike lanes between Lexington Parkway and West 7th Street. It does not include bike lanes at any other point on the project length.

Will this project result in parking loss?

The project would not result in parking loss on Jefferson Avenue. In fact, the project includes adding parking between Prior Avenue and Kenneth Street and between Fairview Avenue and Snelling Avenue.

Is Jefferson too narrow to accommodate 2-sided parking where it is proposed west of Snelling?

No, Jefferson is not too narrow to accommodate 2-sided parking. Jefferson is a comparable width as the residential streets adjacent to it, like Wellesley and Juliet, which also have two-sided parking.

What is the rationale in including 2-sided parking as part of a bike boulevard?

Two sided parking has two key benefits that are important for a bike boulevard: Traffic calming and residential character enhancement. One way to achieve traffic calming is to narrow a road space, to a certain point. This narrower design causes drivers to slow down the speed at which they travel. One of the key goals of a bike boulevard is to help all road users travel at a more similar speed to each other, especially by making it harder for motor vehicles to speed. This enhances safety for everyone, no matter how you like to get around. Two-sided parking is typical of a residential street, while one-sided or no parking conditions are more typical of a collector or arterial street, where drivers seek to move through an area and move quickly, in order to get where they would like to go. We heard from neighbors on Jefferson that the one-sided parking today makes the street feel like a drag, and makes it harder to interact with neighbors on the other side of Jefferson. It is exciting that this project can help mitigate these community barriers.

Why does the design include a recommendation for a blinking LED sign at the marked crosswalks at Cretin and Cleveland as opposed to a non-lighted or actuated sign?

We heard from the neighborhood in this areas that the intersections at Cretin and Cleveland should be improved to make them easier and safer to cross through our public meetings and the online survey and the latest in engineering best practices points us toward a blinking LED sign as a tool to help make that happen. A blinking sign increase driver awareness of the sign which allow drivers to act sooner in advance of the crosswalk and make it more likely they will respond appropriately. A continuous light does not attract driver attention in the same way. The steady flashing helps address compliance issues experienced with actuated signs, where people need to push a button in order to cause a sign to blink. The nearby residents will not be inconvenienced by the steady flashing because the signs will be pointed facing the oncoming cars on Cretin and Cleveland, and LED lights have very little spillover or light pollution. If a problem does occur, the Department of Public Works is committed to making adjustments to the sign in order to eliminate the problem.

Will this project include storm water management?

While the project will be disturbing less than 1 acre and as such would not require storm water management, the neighborhood traffic circle and bumpout elements east of Lexington Parkway reduce the amount of impervious pavement, which will help with storm water management.

CONSTRUCTION

What parts of this project have already been built?

From Mississippi River Boulevard to West 7th, wayfinding and route marker signage has been installed. Nothing else has been constructed at this time west of Snelling. East of Snelling, the following have been completed to date: Striped bike lanes between Lexington Parkway and West 7th Street, bicycle related pavement markings (sharrows) between Lexington Parkway and Snelling, bicycle related destination/directional signs, street name signs that include a bicycle logo which identifies Jefferson Avenue as a bikeway, a dynamic speed display sign near Edgcumbe and one just west of Saratoga and reducing the speed limit between Lexington Parkway and Victoria Street from 40 mph to 30 mph.

What parts of the project remain to be built?

Items included in the project and not yet constructed include whatever is approved for construction west of Snelling following the public hearing at City Council on April 4 and various treatments east of Snelling. These treatments include: Sidewalks on the south side between Lexington Parkway and Victoria Street, pedestrian scale lighting on both sides between Lexington Parkway and West 7th Street, bump outs at various locations between Lexington Parkway and West 7th Street (Milton (2), Victoria (4), View (2), Vance (3) and Bay (2)), sharrows west of West 7th Street on Jefferson, Duke, Colborne, Grace and Western. Construction of all of these elements, besides the sharrow pavement markings, is contingent upon maintaining the federal Non-Motorized Transportation Pilot project funds.

When would the rest of the project be constructed?

If approved by the City Council, the rest of the project would be constructed during the summer and fall in 2012.

BICYCLIST BEHAVIOR

What is the City doing about cyclists who disobey traffic laws?

The City recognizes it is a serious problem to have road users who chronically disobey the rules of the road. To address this issue, the City is working with regional partners on five different education and enforcement campaigns to get out the word about the rights and responsibilities of road users, especially those who bike and walk.

How long is the cycling season in the Saint Paul?

It may surprise you to hear people ride their bicycle in Saint Paul year-round! In fact, the non-profit Bike Walk Twin cities has conducted bicycle counts that indicate that a full 20% of bicyclists in the Twin Cities continue to bike throughout the winter, despite our frigid and snowy weather. Bicycling is not a seasonal activity, but rather a mode of transportation and as such is needed all year round.