



4/13/2021

To: Madison Transportation Commission

From: Metro Transit, Justin Stuehrenberg

Re: Legistar Item 65038; Request from BID to close State Street on Weekends over the Summer

Dear Transportation Commission,

I am writing to outline the position of Metro Transit regarding the request by the Central Business Improvement District (BID) to close State Street over weekends this summer. In summary, we oppose portions of the plan and are neutral on other portions.

First, we appreciate the definition of weekends in the proposal being all day Saturday and Sunday. It is very challenging for Metro to communicate to riders and drivers when bus routing changes in the middle of the day, and so this definition is much preferred to one that includes Friday evening.

Last summer, Metro did not oppose a plan to re-route buses from State Street on weekends. This was during a time that Metro was running about 50% of normal service and ridership was less than 10% of normal. We also did so explicitly with the understanding that it was a one-time situation and that it would not set a precedent for the future. While our services are still less than normal, our service levels are 70% higher than a year ago, and ridership is nearly 5x higher. Therefore, our lack of opposition last year is not an appropriate proxy for the situation this year.

While Metro service runs on all six blocks of State Street (the 100-600 blocks), three of those blocks (100-300) are much more critical to our network than the remainder. Deviating from the 100-300 blocks will add travel time to the bus, extend ride times for passengers, and increase walk times for those passengers. While a deviation of 2-3 minutes for the bus may seem insignificant, operationally it can be very impactful for Metro. Metro relies on a system of timed transfers at transfer points with little margin for error. The additional time on these deviations will increase the chances of buses missing those timed transfers, which could cause some people to wait at transfer points for up to an hour.

The BID has explicitly proposed this as a pilot for a future permanent condition. However, permanently re-routing routes from the 100-300 blocks would not be possible without significant delay in our Bus Rapid Transit project. The State Street alignment was approved by council in early 2020 and our federal environmental study is underway. Permanently changing the alignment here likely would take much time and deliberation at the local level, and if pursued would reset the clock on BRT, delaying it by years.

For all these reasons, we remain strongly opposed to the closure of the 100-300 blocks on any regular basis.

A counter argument is likely to be made about how we deviate from the square and the 100 block of State Street on Farmer's Market days. This is true, but it omits the fact that the 200-300 blocks of State Street become even more critical to us on those days. The Farmer's Market deviation does not add to bus travel times specifically because we can use State Street to access the outer loop. Without those blocks of State Street, our eastbound deviation would be nearly 0.5 miles to avoid just a single block of State St, and our Farmer's Market deviations would have the same timed transfer impacts noted above.

Deviating from the 400-600 blocks will not slow bus travel times in the same way. Buses would use Gorham/University and Johnson to travel between Park Street and State Street, which will be approximately the same travel time as the current path on weekends. The impact is also lessened on these blocks because fewer routes use them. There would be an increase in walk time of 2-4 minutes for



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some passengers. We do not have accurate enough boarding data to narrow in just on summer weekends, but it is likely that these changes would affect less than 150 people per day.

Given this, we remain neutral on the question of closing the 400-600 blocks of State Street. One caveat, however, is that if this becomes a permanent change, dedicated lanes on Johnson and Gorham from State to Bassett will likely be needed to maintain travel times during the weekday peak periods.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Justin Stuehrenberg
Metro General Manager