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Pedestrian/Bicycle/Motor Vehicle Commission  
c/o City Traffic Engineering Division  
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Re: Suggested projects for 2011-2013 City of Madison Capital Budget

To the Members of the Commission:

In response to the Commission's request for public comments, I submit the comments below suggesting potential pedestrian and bicycle projects the City should consider undertaking in the 2011-2013 Capital Budget to increase opportunities for walking and bicycling in Madison. My comments are made entirely based on my experience as a bicycle commuter from my home in the Vilas neighborhood to my law office at Godfrey & Kahn on East Main Street in downtown Madison. For several years, I have commuted by bike many (but not all) days, in all seasons, and in all types of weather. In addition, I have biked and walked extensively through many areas of Madison.

I suggest the following projects, which are not listed in any particular order:

1. **Modifications to the intersection of Vilas Avenue, Park Street, and West Washington Avenue.** This intersection is extremely unfriendly to cyclists. This is the first traffic light for several blocks in either direction up and down Park Street, and Vilas Avenue is a natural route for cyclists from the many residential neighborhoods just to the west to cross Park Street and get onto West Washington Avenue, which has a very nice, inviting bike lane leading to downtown. There are at least three problems with this intersection for cyclists:
  - a. The lights that direct traffic on West Wash (going west onto Vilas) and Vilas (going east onto West Wash) appear to be controlled by motion sensors, such that if you are a cyclist and stop at the light, you will not get a green light until a car comes along. The motion sensors should be either eliminated or made more sensitive so that they can detect bicycles. This might be a maintenance rather than a Capital Budget issue.

- b. The light allowing traffic on Vilas to cross Park onto West Wash is very short and just barely gives time for a cyclist or two to cross. The amount of time to cross should be lengthened, I suggest, by installing bike boxes at this intersection and a light that allows cyclists to get a five to ten second jump on car traffic.
- c. Most significantly, there is no control at all of the car traffic that funnels into West Wash from Park Street. During rush hour, that means that just after a cyclist has crossed Park Street, he or she is immediately confronted by car and truck traffic merging from the right, which cuts off access to the bike lanes (while at the same time having to deal with car and truck traffic in the left lane). It is very frustrating to both cyclists and drivers to manage. I believe that this problem could be solved in two ways: First, by installing bike boxes and a light allowing cyclists to proceed through the intersection before car traffic, and second, by placing appropriate signage warning car and truck traffic merging onto West Wash from Park Street to yield to cyclists.

2. **Modifications to the intersection of Monroe Street, Regent Street, Breese Terrace, Oakland Avenue, and the Southwest Commuter Bike Path.** This intersection is a disaster for cyclists and pedestrians alike and interrupts the flow of foot and bike traffic on the Southwest Commuter Bike Path. Cyclists and pedestrians who simply want to take the path to or from downtown must cross four streets (Monroe, Regent, Oakland, and Breese) within the span of less than one city block, and two of those streets (Monroe and Regent) are major arteries for motor vehicles. The current layout of this intersection creates significant safety and traffic flow problems, the latter of which is particularly troubling if the City is serious about increasing bicycle mode share to 20%. I strongly suggest that the City consider creating an underpass sufficiently wide to permit safe bike and pedestrian passage below Breese, Oakland, Regent, and Monroe.

3. **Modifications to the intersection of John Nolen Drive and North Shore Drive/Bike Path.** Anyone who commutes to downtown via the Southwest Commuter Path must cross John Nolen drive, if they ride via bike paths and avoid streets. The major problem that I have experienced and seen is that crossing John Nolen Drive is very difficult, dangerous, and time-consuming. There are several problems:

- a. Bike and pedestrian traffic heading east on the path (toward downtown) is held up at the stoplight that controls traffic on North Shore Drive, which creates a bottleneck for bike and pedestrian traffic. There is only one small island that can accommodate, at most, four bicycles, but otherwise all bike and pedestrian traffic must remain on the path, which is separated from the small island by the right turn lane that merges traffic from North Shore onto John Nolen.
- b. The time that bike and pedestrian traffic are given by the stoplight controlling traffic from North Shore onto John Nolen is so short (about 10 seconds), that very few bikes and pedestrians can cross John Nolen at each light. Installing traffic lights that give cyclists and pedestrians a head start, lengthening the duration of the green light, and installing bike boxes would be a helpful way of addressing these problems, at least temporarily.

- c. I see a far larger problem for this intersection, however, if Madison is serious about increasing biking mode share to 20% by 2020. From the plans that I have seen, the City intends to add more bike paths flowing to downtown from the far-reaching areas of the City and from other communities to the south and west. If that happens and bike mode share increases four or five-fold, then there will be potentially thousands more bikes attempting to cross John Nolen at this intersection every day. The existing infrastructure simply cannot handle that kind of bike traffic. I assume, given the close proximity of the intersection to Lake Monona, that an underpass here would not be feasible. I therefore suggest a bridge across John Nolen Drive, similar to the one that was just installed to cross Fish Hatchery Road near the intersection with McKee Road, that would allow bike and pedestrian traffic to freely cross John Nolen Drive. Additional space could be created for the clover-leaves in the bridge by bumping out the Lake Monona shoreline at that point, if necessary, which also might allow space for an observation or fishing platform.


4. **Installation of facilities to transfer bikes and pedestrians from the bike/running path to street level at Monona Terrace.** Currently, the only way to get from the bike path up to street level downtown (without riding on very bike-hostile streets) is to take the bicycle elevator (or “bike-a-vator”) at Monona Terrace. I understand that when Monona Terrace was built, the bike-a-vator was given to cyclists as an accommodation. Although it is better to have it than not (and I ride it every day), from my experience, there are two major problems with the bike-a-vator as the sole method of conveying bike and pedestrian traffic from the path to street level:

- a. The bike-a-vator is hot, not ventilated at all, and most importantly, wholly incapable of conveying any volume of bicycles and/or pedestrians from the bike path up to street level. It can accommodate, at most, four bicycles, and takes minutes to make a round trip. Again, from the plans that I have seen for additional bike paths that will deposit bike commuters downtown via the bike path next to Lake Monona, and if Madison is serious about a 20% bike mode share in less than 10 years, there will be thousands of additional cyclists who will need to get from the bike path up to street level at Monona Terrace every day. Add in the potential complicating factor of a train station at Monona Terrace, and it is obvious that very serious thought must be given to how to convey all of that bike and pedestrian traffic from the bike path up to street level. Although I have thought about various ways to do that, I am not an engineer, and I am sure that there are others far more capable than me of devising a solution to this problem. But it is a problem that exists now and will only get worse with time.
- b. There are essentially two options for departing the bike-a-vator and reaching the streets of downtown Madison: (i) get off at the 4<sup>th</sup> level and ride through the parking structure, which puts cyclists onto Wilson Street, is a one-way street traveling west, or Pinckney Street, which is a two-way street for only one block before it becomes one-way at Doty Street; or (ii) get off at the 5<sup>th</sup> level and travel through a short indoor hallway, then a longer outdoor pathway, then the larger plaza that connects Monona Terrace to Wilson Street and Martin Luther King, Jr.,

Boulevard. Although it is possible to take either route to access downtown, neither route is at all capable of supporting even a moderate flow of bike traffic, much less the bike traffic that would be expected if the planned bike paths are built and the bike mode share increased to 20%. A much more efficient way to connect bike and pedestrian traffic from the street level of Monona Terrace to downtown streets must be planned and built.

I thank the Commission for its consideration of my comments.

Very truly yours,



Douglas M. Poland

cc: Robbie Webber, Chairperson