

June 12, 2023

Dear Members of the Finance Committee, the Common Council, and other Boards, Commissions and Committees who have yet to review this proposal:

I have had email exchanges and a Zoom call with City Traffic Engineer, Yang Tao, over the past 10 days or so, and was glad to hear from him that the federal Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) proposal will include some demonstration (i.e., evaluation) activities. I greatly appreciate the time and attention to the proposal that I know staff are knee-deep in pulling together. Without yet knowing what exactly is being proposed, however, I am attaching this letter to Legistar item #78172 for your consideration and hopefully your support in guiding the direction of this proposal as it comes together.

#### Demonstration Activities

Some things that I would very much like to see included in the evaluation components of the proposal:

- Analyses of crash data over a 10-year period along the street segments where VZ projects have or will be implemented to get a better sense of the context-specific trend data (which in many locations, was already trending downward before 2019);
- Plans for before and after observational studies for select projects so that the City can grow an understanding of whether and to what extent various strategies are influencing driver, pedestrian, and bicyclist behaviors;
- More rigorous analyses that account for things like changes in traffic volume, which was heavily influenced by the pandemic and continues to be affected by population growth and societal shifts in work locations;
- More in-depth analysis of contributing factors like teen driving and impaired driving, which will help us understand whether there are different types of crash prevention strategies that are just as important to consider in the future, even if they don't fall under the street engineering umbrella.

The City is data-driven to the extent that this means data are used to determine where to locate projects and prioritize them. But I have not seen much related to outcome evaluation other than city-wide trends, which have many obvious flaws. While there is an overarching hope that the publicity around the Vision Zero initiative will reduce crashes throughout the City, we would expect that VZ project areas are more likely to have an impact on downward trends in crashes. This can and should be evaluated.

If we approach VZ with a learning mindset, we need to assume that not everything will work as planned and we should take additional steps to evaluate outcomes. Even evidence-based strategies don't work the same way or even work at all in every context. And to the extent we innovate and try something new, evaluation is critical. Madison residents should see the City taking this learning approach to major investments. It is a critical ingredient of public

accountability. It is also beneficial to the traffic safety field, in general. The perfect evaluation that enables conclusions about causality is not necessarily possible, but we can improve quite a bit on what the public has seen, so far, and this proposal is an opportunity to build in funding to do the necessary work.

#### Climate Change and Sustainability Considerations

On another point, I am asking that we give strong consideration to nature-based stormwater solutions as an integrated component of planned SS4A projects. On p. 27, the NOFO states that: “[t]his program's focus on equity and safety is also advanced by considerations of *how applications address climate and sustainability considerations*, as well as whether applications support economic competitiveness. DOT will assess the extent to which the projects and strategies *use safety strategies to support the Departmental strategic goals of climate change, sustainability, workforce, and economic competitiveness...*” (italics added).

Under Selection Criteria #4 (p.27), climate and sustainability goals include an emphasis on: “...evidence-based climate resilience measures or features such as enhanced storm water management practices, upgrading infrastructure using the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard, *and nature-based solutions that improve the built and/or natural environment*” (italics added).

As a City that strives to be a leader in addressing climate change, it is important that street and road redesign activities prioritize the integration of nature-based stormwater solutions as an essential tool for reversing the effects of climate change. We could position ourselves in this application to pilot and evaluate projects that intentionally integrate, from the start, nature-based stormwater elements with street safety. I personally feel that this should be our modus operandi on every street project. There is much more we can do to ensure this practice becomes the standard.

A budget request for ensuring sufficient staffing and/or subcontracted vendors with the requisite expertise informing project designs with nature-based components will be necessary if we choose to make this federal selection criteria a priority.

Thank you for your time.

Kristen Slack