

PBMVC 4.24.18

ITEM H.4.

From: Smart Growth <smartgrowthmadison@gmail.com>

Sent: Monday, April 23, 2018 4:24 PM

To: Zellers, Ledell; Skidmore, Paul; Kemble, Rebecca; hiwayman@chorus.net;
aaron.crandall@yahoo.com; eclewandow@aol.com; grantxyz@gmail.com; devos@ssc.wisc.edu

Subject: April 24 meeting - Legistar Item 51078 - Referral Requested

Pedestrian/Bicycle/Motor Vehicle Commission members, I am writing to you on behalf of Smart Growth Greater Madison.

I am requesting a referral of Legistar item 51078 - Including a 1/2 traffic diverter at the intersection of Blair St and E Mifflin St be modified as part of the pending street reconstruction.

After reading the underlying Traffic and Engineering report, our position is there is no justification for a permanent diverter at this time. I have met with the Alder as well as Traffic and Engineering twice on this issue to make our concerns known.

The proposed reasoning for the diverter is flawed and the data in the report proves that a diverter does not solve the stated issue of speed and safety on East Mifflin Street.

1) There has not been an accident involving a bike and car since July of 2014, and there have only been five such incidents since the bike boulevard was formed in 2011. There simply is not a safety issue on East Mifflin.

2) The perceived issue of speed is not solved by a diverter. Before the diverter was installed, 89 cars were recorded going over 30mph on 9-14-2017. During the test diverter installation, 79 cars were recorded going over 30mph on 11-8-2018. This data was recorded on the 600 block of East Mifflin Street. Clearly such a small reduction in speeders cannot conclude a diverter was effective.

3) The overall traffic count on East Mifflin is currently extremely low. The traffic count recorded before the diverter was 1,526 cars. The definition of a low volume street, which a bike boulevard must be, is 3,000 cars. This means the traffic on East Mifflin could double and it would still meet the definition of a bike boulevard.

Smart Growth is in favor of and fully supports the other options suggested by the Tenney Lampham Steering Committee; literally every other option besides the diverter:

Painted Intersection at Blount and Mifflin

4-way stop at Dickinson/Dayton and Dickinson/Mifflin

4-way stop at Ingersoll and Mifflin

A bike traffic signal at E. Mifflin and North Blair

On Ingersoll between E. Washington and Johnson, the options were prioritized:

PBMVC 4.24.18

ITEM H.4.

best = table tops

second best = humps

third best = stop signs

All these options should be employed prior to a diverter.

45 emails were received by Traffic and Engineering opposing the diverter and 48 emails were in support. Permanently closing access to a street should have much more support than 50/50. This is a very dangerous precedent to set with very little underlying supporting data.

The request for a diverter was born out of the subjective reasoning of feeling "safe" on the street versus imperial data proving a problem actually exists, and the perfect timing of North Blair being scheduled for reconstruction this summer.

It simply is economically convenient to install the diverter while the street is under construction.

This proposed diverter is a solution in search of problem that simply does not exist.

The continuation of this proposal through committees without additional dialogue will be viewed as precedent being formed to close streets with very little, if any, justifiable data to serve a specific subset of a neighborhood. This notion is extremely concerning to property owners and the involvement of the development community will be forced to increase dramatically to get a better understanding of what is occurring and the possibility for broader implementation in other areas of the city and how such implementation might impact existing or planned development.

Please review my attached letter and enter it into the record. Thank you very

much for your time and consideration.

To schedule a meeting or phone call with me, [Here's my calendar link.](#)



Matt Brink
Executive Director
Smart Growth Greater Madison
608-658-7431 www.smartgrowthgreatermadison.com
701 East Washington Avenue
Suite 107
Madison, WI 53703

April 23, 2018

To: Pedestrian/Bicycle/Motor Vehicle Commission
From: Smart Growth
RE: Proposed Diverter at North Blair Street and East Mifflin Street

Dear Pedestrian/Bicycle/Motor Vehicle Commission, I am writing on behalf of Smart Growth Greater Madison. Our organization represents the majority of developers in Madison along with the surrounding region.

Smart Growth is requesting the proposed diverter at the intersection of North Blair Street and East Mifflin Street to be tabled in consideration of other less drastic options proposed by the Tenny-Lapham Safety Steering Committee. We are making this request after viewing the issue through three specific lenses:

PBMVC 4.24.18

- 1) Does adding a diverter solve the stated objective and are there other applicable options that have shared support?
- 2) Is it reasonable to install a permanent diverter before other options are considered and implemented?
- 3) Is a reasonable precedent being set for adding a permanent diverter based on the totality of evidence?

1) Solving the Problem:

The Tenney-Lapham (TL) neighborhood convened a safety steering committee to consider options they felt would “improve the East Mifflin Bike Boulevard.” A comprehensive list was put together for consideration and presented to Traffic and Engineering for feedback. Some options were rejected, some were supported and the diverter required additional study.

The primary deduction to draw from the extreme request for a traffic diverter is the TL steering committee feels there are too many cars presently using East Mifflin. The data in the traffic report however, draws the clear conclusion that East Mifflin Street is not heavily used by cars, no safety issue exists at this time and adding a diverter does not adequately solve the perceived problem of car traffic on East Mifflin or the speed at which cars are traveling.

All the diverter accomplished was forcing eastbound cars onto East Washington Avenue at peak travel times, and then forcing those drivers to make a more dangerous left turn against inbound traffic to access East Mifflin Street or other side streets. **During the diverter test, a 23% increase in car traffic was experienced on Livingston Street.**

In other words, drivers simply went around the diverter via East Washington Avenue, and no impact study was conducted for additional cars pushed onto East Johnson Street and then forced to turn right to access East Mifflin. There are seven cross streets from Blair Street to Dickenson Street that would allow any diverted traffic from Blair Street to enter or cross East Mifflin, and **once those cars have returned to East Mifflin or cross over East Mifflin, there would be no additional safety measures to slow those vehicles down.** Resources should be allocated to ensure traffic traveling on East Mifflin or crossing East Mifflin is controlled at every intersection with the implementation of additional four-way stops and along the boulevard with speed humps.

The potential inconvenience to the bike community for having to stop at a few extra intersections that are currently not 4-way stops is outweighed by guaranteeing cars are traveling at a lower rate of speed.

And while East Mifflin is technically a bike boulevard, bikes do not heavily utilize it and the street has significantly less car traffic than the adjacent thoroughfares of East Washington Avenue and East Johnson Street. The closure of the Madison Dairy also significantly reduced truck and ancillary traffic on East Mifflin from historic norms.

The bottom line is that East Mifflin receives less traffic now than it did in the past and it is in no way a dangerous thoroughfare for bikes. This includes the additional apartment buildings that have been constructed in recent years.

- Since attaining Bike Boulevard status in 2011 there have only been five incidents involving a bike and a car colliding. Three of those incidents were because stop signs were not clearly visible, and another incident involved a resident backing their car out of their driveway and hitting a biker. The stop sign visibility issue was rectified, and **there haven't been any incidents involving a bike colliding with a car since July of 2014.**

These facts invalidate any safety argument as it relates to attempting to justify a diverter.

So if it's not safety, then why are we here?

We are here because the plain objective of the TL Steering Committee is to reduce car traffic on East Mifflin to better suite their desired reality of what a bike boulevard should be; however, East Mifflin currently meets every requirement of the formal definition of a bike boulevard:

- The definition of a “bicycle boulevard” is a low traffic volume, low speed street that has been designated by the city with signs and pavement markings as a street that is to be shared by motorists and bicyclists.
- **Low traffic volume streets have up to 3,000 cars per day whereas East Mifflin registered only 1,526 cars before the diverter was installed. E. Mifflin could double in traffic counts and still be a low volume street.**

PBMVC 4.24.18

This definition ~~ITEM 114~~ require the elimination of access to a bike boulevard by cars, and adding permanent diverters to a street should only be considered in extreme circumstances where safety is clearly an issue.

The data present in the report also clearly shows the diverter has a minimal impact on reducing speed. On the 600 block of East Mifflin (the block immediately east of the proposed diverter) the diverter resulted in only 10 fewer cars traveling over 30mph:

- **Before Diverter - 9/14/17 - 89 vehicles over 30 mph**
- **During Diverter - 11/8/17 - 79 vehicles over 30 mph**

Installing the diverter as a means to control speed is an invalid argument.

The most practical and reasonable options that should be considered for East Mifflin are ones that control the traffic as much as possible, but do not needlessly force traffic onto other busy streets and inconvenience residents that use East Mifflin regularly. Tenney-Lapham's Steering Committee made the following requests of Traffic/Engineering and Smart Growth fully supports all options:

- Painted Intersection at Blount and Mifflin
- 4-way stop at Dickinson/Dayton and Dickinson/Mifflin
- 4-way stop at Ingersoll and Mifflin
- A bike traffic signal at E. Mifflin and North Blair
- On Ingersoll between E. Washington and Johnson, the options were prioritized:
 - Best = table tops
 - Second best = humps
 - Third best = stop signs

All these options should be employed prior to a diverter.

2) Reasonableness?

The obvious reality is that a very minimal amount of streets are available on the isthmus, and East Mifflin is a needed part of the equation. East Mifflin should never have chosen as a bike boulevard because it cannot support an independent bike lane. That would require on-street parking to be removed, and that option is a non-starter for the neighborhood and the Alder. **The irony and logistical challenge presented by a bike boulevard not being able to support an independent bike lane should not be solved by making another bad logistical decision.**

If access to streets leading out of downtown are going to be closed to through-traffic, the bar must be set to a very high threshold and the reality of the traffic counts on East Mifflin presented in the traffic study do not rise to that level.

The installation of a permanent diverter would inconvenience an exponentially larger number of individuals not using bikes than the small number of bikers utilizing the boulevard on a daily basis and the even smaller number of people actively advocating for the diverter to be installed.

Most importantly, a key component of the high bar that should be established to install permanent diverters needs to be overwhelming support of the initiative, and that is not the case here:

- The public feedback received by Traffic and Engineering was 48 emails for the diverter and 43 emails against the diverter

It is not reasonable to proceed with a permanent option when the votes of residents are nearly 50/50.

3) Precedent

Only a handful of diverters are present in the city – A small handful of people are asking for this diverter – there is no safety concern to support the request – there is nearly 50/50 opposition versus support for the proposal – there are very viable alternatives that are supported.

These facts cannot lead to the conclusion that installing a permanent diverter at this time is warranted.

The timing of this request also cannot be overlooked. East Mifflin has been a bike boulevard for seven years and there has been no increase in safety related concerns; however, North Blair is going to be reconstructed during the summer of 2018. This is the best, if not only, time that the TL Steering Committee could request the expense of a permanent diverter. **Simply put, the request of a permanent diverter is a solution in search of a problem.**

The process and resources applied to the diverter test must be scrutinized:

- This study was conducted in the middle of winter, from November to January, and the conclusion was solely based on traffic counts collected during the test period. The problem with this timeframe is that those counters are not reliable below 32 degrees. This test diverter should have been installed in summer of 2017, which was possible because initial data was collected in March of 2017.

PBMVC 4.24.18

ITEM H.4.

- Manual counting is the most accurate method to employ for vehicle counts. This was especially true for this test because of the time of year rendering hose counters useless; however, only three total days of manual counting were applied to the intersection for the entirety of the vetting process that began in March of 2017 and concluded in January of 2018.
 - The “before” data was collected on March 28, 2017. No other manual counts were conducted prior to the test diverter installation
 - The “during” data was only collected on November 9, 2017. No other manual counts were conducted during to the test diverter installation
 - The “after” data was only collected on January 25, 2018.
 - Hose counters are ineffective in below freezing temperatures which naturally occur in the middle of winter and should invalidate any data that might have been recorded
- Even with the designation of a “bicycle boulevard”, East Mifflin does not have a lot of bike traffic.
 - Max inbound traffic for bikes was 146 bikes over a 6-hour, peak travel, period during the "before" period which equals only 24 bikes per hour
 - During the "after" period, the maximum inbound traffic for bikes was reported at 75 bikes over a 6-hour period. This equals 13 bikes per hour
 - § These data sets conclude East Mifflin is not a heavily traffic bike corridor, and a permanent diverter is not required at this time.
- There are very few east/west corridors on the isthmus. Cutting off traffic access to a thoroughfare is a major inconvenience to property owners and residents. Access to dwelling on arterial streets opposed to major highways and thoroughfares is a key reality that impacts the viability of a property and leasability to prospective tenants. **The negatives to limiting access to East Mifflin Street are not outweighed by the positives.**

Traffic and Engineering did recommend for the diverter to be installed; however, context is critical here. The decision to support was put forth because adding a diverter will not negatively impact the neighborhood. That point is understood, and not contested. Forcing the reduction of cars in any neighborhood would not negatively impact the residents, and **all residents will say they prefer fewer cars in their neighborhood. That desire does not warrant a permanent diverter.**

A much higher standard must be applied, and precedent must be considered when permanently closing streets. Smart Growth requests and supports the implementation of speed humps as a primary alternative to the proposed diverter. Two speed humps can be installed for the exact same price as the diverter according to Traffic and Engineering. Those speed humps are recommended to be placed between Blair and Blount and one between Blount and Livingston.

These speed humps will slow traffic traveling on East Mifflin, they will not needlessly force cars onto the burdened thoroughfares of East Washington and East Johnson and they will not increase traffic on side streets such as Livingstone Street as the test diverter proved would occur.

Thank you for your consideration

on this important matter. Matthew

Brink

Executive Director – Smart Growth Greater Madison