

**From:** [Nicholas Davies](#)  
**To:** [Transportation Commission](#)  
**Subject:** Yes to recommendations on Slow Streets Program (65355)  
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Dear Transportation Commission,

I hope to speak at your meeting, but I want you to have my testimony and info in writing as well.

First of all, thank you for taking this up. You all do a lot of important work, and I know your agendas have been quite full.

I largely concur with what's in the staff presentation on the Slow Streets program, and I support the staff recommendations. I just want to add a couple of my direct experiences, and some context for why this matters to me.

Regarding **Shore Dr**, my partner and I lived downtown last summer, living and working in a one bedroom apartment. To stay sane and active, one of our main exercise routes--whether on foot or on bike--was to circle Brittingham Bay.

I saw Shared Streets in action there, and it did change behavior. People could walk, bike, skate, or roll however they wanted to in the roadway, as first-class users, not as momentary borrowers of car real estate. That Shared Streets location provided a crucial outlet for people not only in the neighborhood to the south, but in the apartments to the north, including one of Madison's highest concentrations of reduced rent units.

You can see on Street View, or even from satellite imagery, the desire lines worn into grass on the lake side of the street. There's a clear need for more non-motorist infrastructure here.

**Atwood Ave** is a different situation, but no less important. I've heard stories of bikes and pedestrian groups all trying to squeeze past each other on a sidewalk that forms part of the Lake Loop (commonly used for recreation and commuting), and inevitably someone ends up having to bail into a traffic lane.

Atwood is also in need of traffic calming. It's a 25 mph zone, but if you weren't paying attention to your speed, your instincts would say otherwise. Narrowing the vehicle width by a lane will make 25 mph feel more appropriate. Lowering the road's throughput also helps: the most effective way to slow down a speeder is to put another car in front of them.

[Why does this matter?](#)

**We're still in a pandemic**, and we don't have any reliable, finite timeline for when it's expected to end.

**Some changes due to COVID will outlast it.** Many of the people working from home now aren't going back. Many people who started getting out and active daily aren't going to drop that practice.

**We know what's possible.** At the same time we started the Shared Streets program last year, cities around the world were doing similar things, in Barcelona, Paris, London, and Tokyo, just to name a few. And while we dismantled ours in the fall, other places continued and expanded their programs, and have made a lot of the new lanes and closures permanent. Madison residents conveyed their support to do the same.

Because this is a new makeup of this Commission, I also want to convey more broadly why we as a city should value and promote active recreation/transit, even to the point of reallocating roadway to it.

**Active recreation/transit has enormous benefits** for people who use it and those who don't.

1. **It's good for the environment.** Cars emit greenhouse gases (unless they don't), but they also have more local impacts, like noise pollution, light pollution, air pollution, water contamination, and so on. They require more pavement per person. They kill wildlife. They require finite materials during manufacturing and maintenance. Someone travelling on foot, on bike, etc. has practically none of these impacts.

2. **It's more equitable.** There are people who can't drive, due to disability, age, immigration status, criminal record, or a variety of factors. There are also people for whom licensing, insurance, and car ownership are insurmountable economic and practical barriers. We need a transportation system that works for all of these folks, and doesn't put them at a disadvantage when they try to get where they need to go.

3. **It's good for public health.** Reducing car traffic reduces pollution, but also, for the person walking or biking, that physical activity has immediate and long term benefits for their physical and mental health. Bike and/or pedestrian accidents do happen, but they operate at lower speeds, so they lead to less severe injury.

4. **It promotes democracy.** Two neighbors, passing each other on the street, can stop to have a conversation. They can dispel misinformation, and prevent polarization. None of that can happen effectively if they're each in cars.

5. **It supports local business.** Not only is a cyclist or pedestrian more likely to notice a local business, they're more likely to support that business, because for them, that local shop isn't competing with a big box store out on the highway.

6. **Car-centric infrastructure is destructive to our communities.** When you look at a freeway like the Beltline or Stoughton Rd, at the amount of land that it takes up, and the limited places to cross it, it might as well be a rushing river, but with none of the benefits.

Not only does the noise and light and air pollution impact and impoverish adjacent neighborhoods, but the practical barrier between the two sides of the road can become an economic barrier and ultimately a line of racial segregation. Freeways also enable the export of wages at jobs in the urban center to become spending and tax revenue in the suburbs, which has cascading impacts. It shortchanges our schools, our homeless assistance, our violence prevention, and so many other vital programs. We need to fundamentally reevaluate the idea that a road's high-speed vehicle throughput is ever a virtue.

**Please vote to move forward** with the staff recommendations for this program. Especially

since this is currently planned as a seasonal program, and we're well into the season already.

With that said, I would also fully support expanding the program to locations in neighborhoods that didn't get to participate last year, and making this a year-round program, so that city staff don't have to start from scratch in 2022.

Thank you,

Nick Davies  
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