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To: [McGuigan, Patrick](mailto:McGuigan.Patrick)
Subject: FW: University Ave reconstruction
Date: Wednesday, July 10, 2019 7:18:15 AM

From: Robbie Webber <robbie@robbiewebber.org>
Sent: Tuesday, July 9, 2019 12:40 PM
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Cc: Tom Wilson <tlwilson1986@gmail.com>
Subject: University Ave reconstruction

All -

I note that the geometrics for the University Ave reconstruction project are on the agenda of the Transportation Commission tomorrow night. I will be writing longer, more detailed comments at a later date, but wanted to be sure to point out a glaring problem with what was presented at the public information meeting on June 13.

There are no bicycle facilities on this section on the south side of the road.

This is a grave problem, as I see many people biking on the sidewalk in this area -- a sign that the needs of bicyclists are not being properly met in the area. There are bike lanes on University Ave as far east as Shorewood Blvd -- the western extent of this project. Many bicyclists want to connect with "old" University Ave, which is a decent bicycle connection to many destinations such as the many apartment on University, dining establishment, the UW Engineering campus, etc. (The fact that there are no bike lanes until east of Walnut St is a bit problematic, which also leads to sidewalk-riding in this section as well, but many bicyclists use the road comfortably every day.)

City staff with whom I have spoken seem to think that the bicycle facilities on the north side of the road are adequate to serve all who wish to traverse the corridor. However, it is absurd to expect someone to cross a gigantic roadway twice -- in many places without a signalized intersection -- just to travel a few blocks. There are apartments and destinations that are directly on University Ave in the area to be reconstructed, with a new building recently constructed adding to this density. And there is no good parallel alternative on the south side of the road.

What are the alternatives?

The Kendall/Bluff bike boulevard is several blocks away at the eastern end of the project. At the western end, it is much farther away and separated from University by Quarry Park and a very steep hill. Bicyclists facing the end of the bike lanes on University Ave at Shorewood Blvd and Hill St -- by Whole Foods -- have the choice of riding on the extremely narrow sidewalk or detouring up a steep hill to Harvey St. Or they can cross to the north side, possibly traveling away from their intended destination and requiring another crossing farther down.

If one does travel up the hill to Harvey St, traveling parallel to University works OK until one reaches the area behind the IHOP and Spirit gas station. Harvey then turns into Franklin Court -- really an alley -- for one more block. And then it ends. Those in the know -- it took me several frustrating attempts and experimentation to figure this out after I moved to the area 25 years ago -- can then detour another two blocks away from University Ave to Stevens St and then back to "old" University at Grand.

Given the poor options, many bicyclists take to the sidewalk until past Grand. As a pedestrian and transit users in this corridor as well, I can attest to the fact that the sidewalk is a dangerous place to ride -- for both bicyclists and those who share the narrow sidewalk. At the cross streets and driveways, motorists are often looking only for a break in the traffic on University and are not looking for those on the sidewalk. The sidewalk itself is substandard, and there is not space to safely bike when pedestrians are walking and transit users are boarding or waiting for the bus. University Ave and Farley is one of the busiest stops outside the downtown/campus area (and the one I use), and when BRT is implemented, it will get even busier.

The city and the MPO both have a complete streets policy, and the lack of appropriate bike facilities on this project flies in the face of that commitment.

The need for appropriate bicycle facilities was brought up by several people at the public information meeting, as noted on the presentation materials. However, except for a note about "next block streets," I do not see anything that addresses that need.

I realize that University Ave is an important corridor, and one of the only through east-west connections in the city. However, it is also a dangerous and unsightly barrier to better urbanism, infill development, and attempts to reduce our use of single-occupancy vehicles. We have a once-in-a-lifetime chance to get this right. We cannot let the chance go by to make this road more humane and safe for all users of the road and the neighbors and businesses nearby.

What is the solution?

I note that a sidewalk is planned for the north side of the road. While I would normally rejoice in this addition, I note that there are no destinations on the north side that directly abut University Ave; the railroad tracks are between the buildings and the road. Why not take the right of way needed for that sidewalk and devote it to bike facilities on the south side? The sidewalk could be widened and a cycletrack installed, ala Bassett St between Johnson and Mifflin. Or just extend the bike lanes east from Shorewood Blvd to Farley. Or narrow the median.

Any of these solutions would serve better than the road without any facilities. Widening the sidewalk and/or adding a cycletrack would seem the easiest, and it would also serve pedestrians and transit users in this section. However, I will leave the solution up to the professionals and the appropriate deliberative bodies.

Transportation geek

All opinions are my own, and not necessarily those of any group or organization with which I am affiliated.

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