



April 14, 2021

Dear Transportation Commissioners:

Downtown Madison, Inc. (DMI) strongly advocates for the Madison's Central Business Improvement District's (BID) request to close State Street to traffic on weekends over the summer (agenda item 4, file number 65038).

Since the onset of COVID-19, the locally owned small businesses downtown, and throughout our entire city, are struggling. Revenues, and nearly all activity, dried up in 2020. This extreme decline in revenue is causing severe economic impacts throughout downtown resulting in the closing of dozens of downtown businesses and the loss of employment for many in our community. The remaining retail stores, restaurants, event venues and hotels are barely holding on. The situation downtown, and across all main streets in our community, is dire. We need to act boldly now to ensure the survival of the remaining businesses and the employment of thousands in our region.

The BID's proposal to close State Street over weekends this summer offers a concrete and innovative plan to help the struggling businesses and employees downtown. By allowing expanded outdoor dining, encouraging more street vending, creating areas for outdoor retail, using new spaces for programming, and opening opportunities for more active transportation, the plan creates a COVID safe space for our community to enjoy downtown while helping ensure our small local businesses survive. Encouraging more people to shop, eat and be, through a new and interesting use of public space, will truly help downtown's struggling businesses.

Over the longer term, the closing of State Street this summer will have significant positive impacts on several of DMI's, and the City's, long term goals including retaining, encouraging, and promoting a variety of commercial uses and employment opportunities impacting downtown and ensuring we are creating an equitable downtown where everyone feels welcome and can fully participate. This project will help ensure many of the current businesses remain afloat, keep downtown attractive to new diverse businesses, and allow for innovative programs, like the creation of pop-up shops, to succeed.

DMI strongly recommends the Transportation Commission support the closing of State Street to traffic on weekends this summer. The closure will help both an important commercial district in our city and the struggling businesses owned/staffed by our friends and neighbors when they need it most, now.