

Madison pilot program sets aside dedicated musician loading zones

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A musician's loading zone sign is located outside the Harmony Bar on Madison's east side.

Bottom of Form

The Madison Arts Commission program placed street signs near select music venues around town last week to help musicians load and unload equipment more easily. The program's goal is to make Madison more artist-friendly for both local and touring performers.

Musicians have few designated loading zones and often park their vehicles blocks away from venues or stop in the middle of the street and delay traffic to unload. The design of the new signs allows venue owners to uncover them whenever they host a performance and reserve curb space for vehicles. There are seven test sites.

Karin Wolf, Madison Arts program administrator, said new signage is part of a broader effort to make the city more hospitable for artists. In 2015, the commission began exploring different ways Madison could foster more interest in music through education while supporting nonprofit music events and initiatives such as [Between the Waves](#) and [Make Music Madison](#). Wolf said

most of these initiatives have focused on nonprofit music making, but now the commission is paying closer attention to commercial venues.

Wolf said she approached Mayor Paul Soglin with three potential ways the city could improve the experience of musicians before eventually settling on loading zones. After meeting with Madison musicians, she found that many of them were interested in the idea. Now that they've been installed, she said the feedback has been positive.

"Mostly I'm getting overwhelming joy from artists," Wolf said. "It's like a small token of accommodation to a pretty beleaguered group of artists who make our lives better."

Because the signs are using existing posts, not every venue's loading zone is located in an ideal spot. Wolf said she's received one complaint from Tony Castañeda, who has taken issue with the loading zone at the Harmony Bar at the corner of Atwood Avenue and Dunning Street. Wolf said the biggest obstacle to sign placement is the restrictions associated with erecting new signs and the requirements set by traffic engineering.

Wolf said she doesn't have a formal evaluation method set up to evaluate the pilot, but she plans on keeping the signs up for at least a year to evaluate feedback.

Kia Karlen, a musician and chair of the Madison Arts Commission, said she and many other musicians appreciate the new loading zones. She said the signage is especially helpful for musicians with larger instruments such as drums and vibraphones which require multiple trips to unload.

"I've seen a lot of positive feedback on Facebook about it and I'm seeing a lot of good feedback from musicians," Karlen said. "Most civic projects take a long time to put in motion so it's nice when an idea is a quick, simple and low-cost way to improve things."