

9/27/16 FORWARDED TO
TPC MEMBERS/STAFF

Benishek Clark, Anne

Subject: FW: Concerns from Williamson St. residents about proposed bus route change

From: Kamp, Charles
Sent: Tuesday, September 27, 2016 8:39 AM
To: Benishek Clark, Anne
Cc: 'Gary Poulson (gary.poulson@gmail.com)'
Subject: FW: Concerns from Williamson St. residents about proposed bus route change

For the TPC.....

From: Loren Peabody [mailto:lorenpeabody@gmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, September 27, 2016 1:30 AM
To: Kamp, Charles
Subject: Concerns from Williamson St. residents about proposed bus route change

Dear Transit and Parking Commission Members,

I would like to provide some perspective from a Williamson St. resident regarding this evening's Metro Transit Meeting about the proposed bus route change from Jenifer St. to Williamson St. I am reaching out directly to the Transit and Parking Commission as I have had not received a response from the letters that I have written to my local alder, the Marquette Neighborhood Association or the Metro staff and my alder was not present at the meeting tonight to take note of residents' concerns.

Many small business owners raised the issue of suffering severe losses to their flows of customers immediately following the temporary re-routing of busses to Willy St. due to a loss of street parking. These are very important concerns, not just because of their own profitability, but because the failure of their businesses would be a severe loss to the neighborhood as a whole. Yet there are other issues with the re-routing that seem to have received less attention from officials.

One problem is that a narrative is taking shape that poses the dilemma as Jenifer St. residents concerned about the need for traffic calming on their street in opposition to Willy St. businesses concerned about parking (see for example http://host.madison.com/wsj/business/business-owners-alarmed-by-talk-of-permanently-relocating-buses-to/article_00dfb744-2dcb-5824-a613-475b371077f0.html). This framing omits the possibility that traffic calming could be achieved for Jenifer St. without moving the bus line. Moreover, it neglects the perspective of all of the Williamson St. residents, of which there are many--it is not just a commercial street, it is both commercial *and* residential. Willy St. residents may be less organized and may tend to come from less privileged demographics, but I believe their concerns are no less important. Some of my neighbors have actually asked me to write officials to voice these concerns on their behalf. From their perspective, any benefits to the Jenifer St. residents would come at the expense of Williamson St. residents in the form of worsened traffic congestion, loss of parking, safety hazards for pedestrians and children in particular, the noise of busses, cigarette smoke and garbage near the bus stops, and so on. Still, there are reasons why it is not just a zero-sum "not in my front yard" issue--moving the bus to Willy St. would present several harms to the community as a whole.

One stems from the fact that Williamson St. was not designed for buses while Jenifer St. has been a public transit route for over a century (when a street car was present). Specifically, Willy St. simply does not have room on the sidewalk terrace to build a bench, let alone a shelter. On several occasions I have seen elderly and disabled riders struggling to stand in the sidewalk waiting for their bus. During the commute hours, bus riders

are also uncomfortably close to fast-moving traffic. These problems will become even worse during the winter months. Some bus riders understandably become frustrated and sit on the porches of adjacent houses. At first I did not mind people resting on my porch because I understood that they had no alternative. However there have been two times just in the past week where members of my household have felt uncomfortable coming home in the evening to find middle-aged men sitting on the porch physically blocking the entrance to the front door. That places me in a difficult position because I do not want people in my household (two of whom are young women) to feel uncomfortable entering their own home, I do not want to start an altercation with the bus rider, and I do not want to call the police on anybody unless it is absolutely necessary. Jenifer St. by contrast has spacious terraces with ample room for benches and shelters, buffered by a row of parked cars, and will even have curb bump-outs at intersections. Waiting for the bus should be comfortable for everybody and it must be accessible for those with limited mobility.

Another set of issues revolve around fairness in the spatial distribution of public goods. Jenifer St. is a nice residential street that hosts one public good that the rest of the neighborhood relies on--the bus. Willy St. is also a nice residential street, but it hosts many public goods that benefit everybody in the neighborhood--it is a major commuting artery, it is a commercial and entertainment center, it carries the fire trucks, it hosts festivals, it provides a number of social services, it experiences heavy demands for parking, and so on. Concentrating too many public goods on Willy St. will detract from the livability that has made it a beloved hub of the community; on the other hand, keeping the bus line on Jennifer St. maintains a more equitable and balanced distribution of public goods within the neighborhood.

There is also the question of what is needed to justify a change to the urban planning. Jenifer St. has been a public transit route for over a century; people who bought their homes there did so knowing that it hosted a bus line. By contrast, those who put down roots on Willy St. did so with a different set of expectations. This means that moving the bus line not only transfers a cost on to Willy St. businesses and residents, it transfers an *unexpected* cost onto them. For instance, businesses made investments and signed long-term leases with the expectation that there would be adjacent street parking; my next door neighbor said that she never would have bought her house if she had known that a bus stop would be placed in front. In the absence of some sort of compensation scheme, moving the bus line would violate basic principles of fairness. These costs to some individuals could of course be out weighed if there was a strong and clear overriding public interest. Yet promoters of moving the bus route have at best argued that doing so would be only marginally better for the neighborhood (and even that argument I do not believe holds up to scrutiny). The burden of proof for making the change should be very high.

Finally, if it is true that we want to thoroughly study all options before a permanent decision is made, I do not see any reason to maintain the bus route on Williamson St. after construction on Jenifer St. is complete. We already know what the effect of running the busses on Willy St. is. What we need to find out is what will conditions on Jenifer St. be like after the construction dust has settled and improvements like bump-outs and road narrowing have been implemented. Since a large majority of survey respondents stated a preference for less stops on Jenifer St., we could see if that will alleviate concerns. Still other low-cost traffic calming improvements could be made, such as radar speed limit signs or high-visibility crosswalks. Trying these measures on Jenifer St. would provide a complete comparison of the two routes; on the other hand, extending the timeframe of the bus line on Williamson St. will be seen by many people as a cynical attempt to make the route change a fait accompli.

I really appreciate your consideration of these issues. It would also mean a lot to me if somebody could briefly respond just to let me know that this letter has been received. Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Loren Peabody
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