

RE: Milwaukee St. Plan

TPPB 10.29.18
ITEM E.1.

Members of the TPPB:

I am unable to attend the meeting tonight but wanted to share some thoughts about the Milwaukee St. plan which will be discussed tonight.

Overall, I believe the plan meets the needs of the Eastside as a whole and at the same time makes improvements in the uses of Milwaukee St. itself. The avenue is currently an undifferentiated mix of farms, abandoned strip malls, single-family homes built in a wetland, a major supermarket, etc. This plan is not only necessary, it is long overdue.

The transportation elements of the plan appropriately focus on the uses of Milwaukee St. Currently, the major use of the street is as an access road to Woodman's. Traffic that is not coming off of Hwy 51, speeds down Milwaukee St- which until a few months ago, had no lane lines and thus, shuffled between two to four lanes.

The plan creates space for the many buses from the Transfer Center, a bike lane and importantly, pedestrians for which there is now a sidewalk only on the south side of the street. A wider terrace on the south side of the street will better allow larger trees to provide shade of pedestrians. A wider median (pedestrian refuge) may allow use of a green area and even smaller trees.

In the new development, Chicago Ave. crosses Fair Oaks and extends into the new development. That makes sense. This draft also improves on a prior draft that had Buckingham St. (in Eastmorland) extend through Eastmorland Park to Milwaukee St. That has wisely been changed.

Similarly, the plan proposes extending Schenk and Leon St. across Milwaukee St. and into the new development. In this instance, extending one of the streets makes sense. However, the rationale for the measure is worth debating. The plan states that (page 18) "As these highways are reconstructed over time, the city should explore and possibly pursue local street construction to break down superblocks created by highways and link neighborhoods."

Obviously, linking neighborhoods and breaking down barriers created by highways is a worthwhile goal. My concern is whether the elimination of "superblocks" is an objective that we should, as a policy, pursue. The policy of creating vehicle-based street "smaller, walkable blocks" results in more cars that bi-sect neighborhoods. When the policy of "connectivity" is discussed, we should evaluate what is actually being connected. Better connectivity for vehicles is too often a trade-off for people.

Many European (and a few American) cities are restricting the use of minor streets to local traffic only and limiting speed to 10 mph. This article and video indicate that opening a neighborhood to pedestrian/bike uses does require reducing the dominance of cars which is usually the "default" position.

<https://www.citylab.com/transportation/2018/08/inside-a-pedestrian-first-superblock/566864/>

The planned development on the north side of Milwaukee St. offers a clean-slate to work with. Rather than “smaller walkable blocks” we can have longer blocks, fewer through-streets, go-slow areas and other strategies to de-emphasize the speed and convenience typically accorded to cars. I believe this is a more plausible path to neighborhood cohesion than tight grids with greater space accorded to driving and parking cars.

Thank you for considering these comments in advance of the meeting.

David