

July 13, 2021

Common Council Executive Committee meeting item #2

Dear Alders,

I continue to be both mystified and dismayed by the efforts to remove BRT routing and BRT shelters from State Street. The city went through a long process to decide the best routing, and all alternatives were considered. There is no perfect route, but around the Square and down the first three blocks of State Street were determined to be the best option.

If a different location and route were chosen, we would then have concerns about losing parking spots, loading zones, lack of space on the sidewalk for the stations, and many other possible physical barriers. (The ridership and service time issues have also been addressed in the lengthy city meetings that have taken place.)

**Are buses on State Street bad for business?**

Now downtown businesses seem to think that having BRT buses and shelters near or in front of their storefronts will be bad for businesses. This I do not understand. Most businesses would be thrilled to have large number of potential customers left on their very doorsteps. And as people are awaiting the next bus, they will be browsing your windows and menus. Maybe they will even decide to stop in and catch the bus later. I know I've done that on more than one occasion.

As to the shelters blocking the view of the stores, remember that bus riders are actually slightly elevated as they ride. They will have a great view as they pass and remember to stop in later.

The idea that the buses are a deterrent to the enjoyment of State Street also seems odd. Sure, diesel buses passing by may be loud when seated outside, but we have a rather short outdoor dining window, and even in summer, rain or heat can make it less than ideal. In the winter or other inclement weather, no one cares that there is a bus passing close by; as a matter of fact, they are glad to not walk farther. And soon, we will have an electrified fleet that will be quieter and less stinky.

**Equity and safety**

State Street is indeed an important destination, which is the exact reason that we want transit to run straight through the corridor. This allows those with mobility issues, safety concerns, or toting packages or children to be able to board and alight as close as possible to their final destination.

As an aging woman, I know that I am less than thrilled with waiting for the bus on Dayton Street when the buses are routed off the Square. More eyes on the street -- the crowds that inhabit State Street -- make me feel safer.

And I am a fairly confident and experienced urban dweller and transit user. An older friend who walks less than me insists that I walk her to her car when we dine downtown, despite it only being a block or two off State Street. I am trying to introduce the idea of taking the bus to alleviate both parking costs and hassles and have talked excitedly about how convenient BRT will be. She would want to be waiting right on State Street, not on a less-traveled corridor. I fear a BRT not on State would deter her and many others like her.

### **Comparisons to other cities**

There have been many comments on social and print media about comparisons to other cities with either pedestrian and/or transit malls. Pearl Street in Boulder is frequently cited. But those other cities have parallel routes to their pedestrian corridors. There is no parallel route to State Street. There is no "one block over." This was what I pointed out to proponents of removing both buses and bicycles from State Street back in the early 2000s. To access a destination on State Street without using State Street is a considerable detour. Again, even those who think nothing of walking long distances in the downtown are more hesitant to undertake the trek in winter or pouring rain.

### **History of resistance to transit on State**

To draw on a bit of historical perspective, back in the 1970s, downtown businesses insisted that they couldn't survive parking and personal vehicle travel being removed from State Street.

In the 1990s, businesses insisted they need a mid-State Street parking ramp to survive. (A terrible use of scarce urban land.)

In the mid-2000s, just as Overture was opening and State Street was getting a facelift, there was resistance to both bike racks and a bus shelter in front of the Overture Center. Apparently, the Overture board did not believe their patrons arrived by bike or bus. The night that Overture

opened – a beautiful, warm fall evening – bikes were stacked against the side of the building because racks had not been installed. Buses were jammed. As an alder, I made sure that both bike and transit accommodation were provided on the 200 block of State Street and then watched as hordes of people came to performances by bike and transit.

Do businesses not realize that bus riders ARE their customers? And BRT will provide a faster, easier, less-crowded experience for even more people to easily come to State Street? Why would they not want people being delivered right to them?

Many small towns have insisted on a highway bypass in order to “get traffic out of our downtown.” But what they find is that their downtown businesses die without the drivers that pass by and see places to eat, shop, and pick up necessities. All the businesses move out to the new bypass. The equivalent of “drivers” for State Street is “transit riders.” You may rue the day you sent them away.

Please keep BRT on State Street and make sure that the shelters will be large enough to serve the crowds that will surely use them.

(Former Alder) Robbie Webber  
2613 Stevens St  
Madison