

## Item 25-0173: Approve College Avenue Lane Reconfiguration

### Municipal Services Committee

Mon, Feb 24, 2025 4:30PM

#### **Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 01:23**

So, we'll move straight into our action items, the first of which is 25-0173, Approve the College Avenue Lane Reconfiguration.

#### **Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 01:32**

So move.

#### **Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 01:33**

Second.

#### **Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 01:34**

Okay, so we have a motion and a second. I am going to throw it to Director Jungwirth.

#### **Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 01:40**

Thank you. Get myself set up here. All right, jumping in. We are here for the College Avenue Lane reconfiguration project. This would be our third and final reporting period of the 18-month pilot project. And the reporting period that you're going to see the data and information presented to you is going to be from August of 23 to December of 24.

#### **Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 02:08**

Just to kind of give perspective on what this project was and is, the College Avenue reconfiguration pilot project we introduced in January of 2023, and it was approved in spring of '23 following as a pilot project—an 18-month pilot. The introduction was followed by a number of public listening sessions and workshops that were held with both Council, committee, the general public, and largely the feedback that we received was that there were concerns related to traffic volume, traffic speeds, noise, safety, access, and parking.

#### **Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 02:50**

The project promotion and public outreach was held throughout that entirety of the pilot term, and even a bit before, from July of '23 to December of '24 through the College Ave reconfiguration marketing campaign, and we worked with a consulting on a lot of those efforts. There was attendance at our farmers markets and a number of items that our marketing consultant worked with us on. And at the end, as a part of that campaign, they also created a video for us to showcase the project.

#### **Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 03:22**

Traffic data was collected and reported in February '24, November '24. Those were the six-month status updates. So again, this is the third and final one.

#### **Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 03:33**

So, the 18-month pilot, as I stated, was approved in May of 2023 which changed the lanes from four travel lanes down to two, center turning lane, and the addition of bike lanes. Construction occurred in July of 2023, and then during the project, we did have to complete some signal timing to be able to optimize the traffic flow through that corridor. And we'll explain more of the data behind that traffic flow moving into the project.

**Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 04:04**

So just some photos before the lane reconfiguration and after. And as you can see, we have the designated left turn lanes. We've received some very favorable feedback on the addition of those. And then also the bike lanes have provided a bit of a buffer between the parking and travel lane. At this point I am going to turn it over to city traffic engineer Eric Lom.

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 04:32**

Thanks. So, many of you have heard these numbers being reported as we've come back at these different intervals, and when we compiled the final set of data, there wasn't anything that changed dramatically or continuing to—and I guess I should add that we were able to use a new data source that we have that helped us get a little bit better data for some of this.

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 04:59**

So, in terms of reportable crashes, we are seeing about a 13% decrease in the months after the project as compared to the 18 months or so before the project. In terms of traffic volumes we're seeing—and this is looking at 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We're not just looking at peak hour or week days or whatever, just kind of across the entire thing. On the College Avenue segment, we saw decrease of a little over 1%—1.4% we're showing. As I said to Director Jungwirth, it's a little dangerous to read too much into that, in my opinion, because there's a lot of other things going on downtown that influence traffic volumes, whether it be businesses moving in, moving out, construction projects, rerouting traffic and things like that. So, you take that with a little bit of a grain of salt.

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 05:57**

It's not showing on this diagram, but we did see a little bit of an increase on what we call the alternative routes, so the parallel routes of Lawrence and Franklin.

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 06:09**

In terms of average speed—and again, this is just really measuring the speed of every single vehicle, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and averaging it all out—we saw a speed decrease of about 3% for average speed and just under 3% for 85th percentile speed.

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 06:30**

In terms of delay, everybody has seen—everybody on the committee, at least, has seen this diagram before, and what this is, is the x axis is time ("time of day" I should say), the y axis is travel time. So, as the as the graph, as the lines on the graph get higher, that means it takes a longer time to get down through College Avenue. The blue line shows what was before the project. This particular one is for westbound traffic. Blue is before; orange is after. So, you can see there are areas where, particularly in the mid-day, when traffic volumes aren't at their peak, where it actually takes less time to get through the corridor, you can see that the orange line is lower than the blue line. And then as predicted, really, when we were at the very beginnings of all this, and we were talking about what the computer modeling was telling us, takes a little bit longer at certain peak times of the day, but very minimal. In the westbound direction. We're talking 10, uh per—approximately 10 seconds more.

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 07:42**

The next slide shows eastbound traffic, and we knew from the beginning that eastbound traffic was more challenging than westbound traffic. And you can see that the two of them track as you start on the left side of the screen and work towards the right. So, we're starting in the morning and working towards the afternoon. The two lines track with each other very closely, which means that the delay is staying pretty much the same. At

its worst (and that's right at just about five o'clock in the afternoon), it's about a 35 second increase—at its very worst point on a weekday. That's actually less of a delay than what we expected from the computer modeling. So, we're pretty happy about that. I think I'm gonna turn it back over to Director Jungwirth.

**Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 08:29**

So, beyond the data, a big piece of this is working with our stakeholder groups, gauging the interest of the public, how the public has felt about the project. So, we are very appreciative to have a group like ADI working with us and in constant collaboration with us, and they've been really key in engaging their business—businesses downtown in this project. So, with that said, a survey was sent out to the group, in I believe it was December of this past year, December, January. We received the feedback at the end of January, and I will, ultimately, after this, be linking that that survey results. But just to give a few snippets of some of the responses that we received from that that group and that survey were that, generally speaking, 63% of the downtown business owners were satisfied with the change. It's easier to park and get out of your car from the street side. The left turn lanes are very helpful. Also, and I think this, this statement really summarized the project in its entirety, that individuals just accepting changes can be difficult.

**Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 09:46**

Most positive comments have been on the ease of parking. I believe it's safer to park. Other negative comments have been on the flow. But from my experience, it has not affected flow that much. There's a lot less street noise and cruising, which is great. I would be interested to know if the businesses who have tables outside are pleased with the noise reduction. So again, it's not a 100% which I don't think we're going to get ever, but overwhelming majority are very happy to see the changes, and we're very pleased with the feedback that we received.

**Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 10:19**

So just some final thoughts to wrap it up, despite the initial reservations with the reconfiguration, the overwhelming majority of the public are satisfied with the outcome. We've seen a 13% reduction in reportable crashes with minimal changes noted in the average daily traffic volume. The project also inspired implementation of the Complete Streets Study that was actually approved last spring. And this lane reconfiguration is just a piece of that study, and we really hope that this spurs more smart streets and more complete streets throughout the city of Appleton in its entirety. So, we're very excited about the opportunity and the growth that we're making in our streets designs.

**Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 11:01**

So lastly, I am going to show the showcase video and turn it back over for any other discussion and consideration. Bear with me. Hopefully, can do this quickly.

**[Begin video. Upbeat music plays in background. Video can be viewed [here](#).]**

**Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 11:31**

Smart streets are roads that are designed with alternative modes of transportation in mind, accommodating pedestrians, bicycles, vehicles, vehicles, and, of course, keeping into consideration safety. The public reaction when this was announced was mixed. There were people who were excited to see safety improvements, to see more in the ways of multi modal transportation, but there were people who were very against it.

**Oliver Zornow (Building For Kids) 11:57**

So, my immediate reaction was a little bit of bewilderment confused as to what it meant. I think a lot of the community felt that way. But then I spent some time sitting on the corner watching the traffic flow in the old four lane configuration, and I realized just how insane that traffic flow really was.

**Monika Austin (Beatnik Betty's) 12:12**

I definitely like to keep an open mind about things when new things are coming in, but I knew that it would probably most likely take care of the issues that they were having with the traffic and with the noise level that we were experiencing downtown.

**James Ragus (Downtown Appleton Resident) 12:26**

First impression, and I would to wait and see, and sure enough, after the street cones have been pulled up and everything is said and done, I would have to say that smart street has been a success and a positive to Appleton traffic without a doubt.

**Jason Druxman (Avenue Jewelers) 12:43**

My first thoughts about the lane change were, obviously, I was apprehensive and that, you know, change is bad, right? But I didn't see anything different with it. I actually saw that it was made a little easier to turn here and there. When I heard that it was a lot safer and saw the data for that, I was very, very happy to hear that people were safer downtown.

**Kyle Jakobsen (Patrol Officer – APD) 13:01**

The chief concerns that most people had here was quality of life. It was loud exhaust. It was unnecessary acceleration, revving of engines. I feel like it's significantly reduced those complaints. The biggest impact it's had is in reducing rear end collisions within the left lane approaching intersections.

**Emma Snyder (Downtown Appleton Resident) 13:20**

I feel a lot safer since the lane reconfiguration. Honestly, I've noticed that people are a lot more aware of their surroundings with the bike lanes, as well as myself. I notice when I'm making a right-hand turn or left-hand turn, I'm consistently looking for pedestrians and bikers along the avenue, just to make sure that we stay safe.

**Bill Wetzel (Acoca Café & Roastery) 13:40**

You know, when it comes to pedestrian safety and walkability, I feel that that's paramount for a small community who's trying to develop a downtown, an active downtown, and bring more people downtown. So, I think it's incumbent upon our city to take the steps to help people who are maybe not as ambulatory, people with families, young children, people with disabilities, anyone will benefit from a more pedestrian friendly environment in downtown. It just makes it safer and more comfortable for everyone to be in our space, and that's exactly what we want—people to come down and enjoy everything that we have to offer here in downtown Appleton.

**Sara Conklin (Downtown Appleton Visitor) 14:19**

Before they implemented it, I was a skeptic, and I will openly admit that, but since they have implemented it, I'm handicapped, and it's wonderful to be able to pull in and not worry about opening your door and having that access to get into the sidewalk safely and not have to worry about the cars. And it really—it doesn't back up, except a little bit here and there at peak times. I've had no issues with that at all.

**Monika Austin (Beatnik Betty's) 14:48**

I have been very happy with how it's happened. It's definitely made downtown more walkable.

**Jason Druxman (Avenue Jewelers) 14:55**

I don't think the lane configuration has changed my business. If anything, I think it's a more positive thing. I think that people are happy to come back downtown because it's a little bit more streamlined. Yes, you'll hear these complaints that you can't find parking, but that's been something that we've heard as long as I've been downtown here. So, it's not the reality. The reality is it's a really easy place to get in and out of, and parking is pretty easy too.

**Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 15:17**

We have taken great pride in the fact that we have been able to reduce the amount of crashes traveling through the corridor while also maintaining the travel time through the corridor.

**Oliver Zornow (Building For Kids) 15:28**

In general, I would say the visitors here at the Building For Kids have said that downtown Appleton is a more family friendly and pedestrian friendly space.

[End Video]

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 15:44**

So, I saw Ms. Stephany come in. Did you want to speak this afternoon? So just state your name—

**Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 15:55**

Yeah.

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 15:56**

—for the record,

**Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 15:56**

I'm Jennifer Stephany. I'm the executive director with Appleton Downtown Incorporated, and I'm here to share a little bit about some of the responses that we've heard. You've heard some of them here. You've heard a little bit from Laura regarding the survey that we did, and we've heard a mix of comments, as we have throughout this entire process. Some of the positive ones that you heard here in the video, as well, is, of course, relative to safety: it's easier to get in and out of my vehicle once I'm parked; traffic flow seems to be fine, some minor backups here and there; less drag racing, which is good; more pedestrian friendly.

**Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 16:35**

I think what's most telling for us is when we did that second survey out to our members, we had a low response. We had about 19 people respond. Now those of you have done surveys know that when you have a low response, that means people are—there's a level of comfort. And from those responses, we had 40% indicate a positive response. 75% of those indicating that their foot traffic has remained the same or increased since the reconfiguration. And then the 63% indicating improved safety. I do have a copy of it here with me. I can leave that with you, Laura, if you have any specific questions regarding that.

**Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 17:23**

There were a number of other questions that we asked regarding deliveries, and have you changed your marketing? And some of those responses were interesting to hear as well. Most of them have not had any issues with any deliveries at all. Nobody changed their marketing, which I thought was really interesting, because that would be what I would have done. We certainly talk about it.

**Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 17:47**

Some of the concerns—we heard concerns regarding it being more difficult to turn on to College Avenue, that it has not totally fixed the traffic noise (which we knew), that there are areas where there's a bit of a backup, which we knew would be an issue as well, and that—this one I don't get "sometimes difficult for pedestrians to cross" but we really don't see much of that. So, I don't know if there's a specific spot. Maybe you have more on that.

**Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 18:22**

I think it's more in the time with the signal timing, and maybe you have to wait a bit longer to actually cross College Avenue. That's my assumption.

**Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 18:31**

That would make good sense because of the longer green light. Yeah.

**Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 18:35**

Walkability remains a high concern for us. It's really important, characteristic of our district, and safety, of course. We want everybody to feel welcome and safe in our community. The multi modal access we know is increasingly more important in communities of our size, and we want to make sure that we're a part of that and that we're ready for that. And I think the bike lanes have shown that to us. I get it; we live in Wisconsin; people aren't riding their bikes all the time, but being down there every day, watching out my window, I do see some folks on bikes. So, we've had a mostly positive experience and response from the lane reconfiguration. And I think Bill Wetzel said it really best that we really want everybody to be comfortable in downtown, and we do feel that the lane reconfiguration brings that to downtown. So, thank you.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 19:29**

Thank you. All right. Anything? I see Alder Hartzheim. Fifteen? Thirteen, I'm sorry.

**Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 19:40**

Thank you, Chair. I think just from a user perspective, it seems like it's working, and I'm satisfied with that. I did question the same thing that was mentioned by Ms. Stephany as far as noise reduction. I don't know that there were any measurements prior to or have been any measurements subsequent to. But my concern is that it really hasn't done a lot in that regard, but that's just, you know, my own witnessing of that sort of thing.

**Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 20:10**

And then the other question that I had, or concern that I had, was there was initially some feedback about how the bike lanes are on the opposite side of the parked area. Has there been any feedback from bicyclists saying, "Oh, this is, this is super dangerous now, because people are opening their car doors while they're parked," etc.?

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 20:35**

We have not received any such feedback. You know, there—you're right, there was some discussion early on about doing something called floating parking, which essentially puts the car—puts the bike lane between the parked cars and the curb, and the—it was not feasible with the with the geometry that we had out there without, you know, we were on a budget, and we were not moving concrete around. We were just restriping the road. And so, there was that—the bump outs, quite frankly, precluded us from being able to do that effectively.

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 21:09**

The other thing is, is there's a lot of parking that you end up losing in that scenario, because as you get close to the intersection, you have to stop the parked cars so that the people that are making right turns can see those bicyclists. So, for that reason, would be we thought of that as more of a long-term future goal, but not something we could accomplish with this project.

**Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 21:31**

And then anything to note from staff in regards to noise reduction or noise measurement?

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 21:38**

We were not asked to measure the sound levels. And I can tell you, just having sat in on a lot of meetings related to noise levels, that it is a pretty challenging undertaking to get good data for that. So, whatever we have is our own experiences and just anecdotal information.

**Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 21:57**

Thank you.

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 21:59**

All right, I'm going to go to Alder Croatt, and then I'm going to come up here.

**Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 22:06**

Thank you, Chair. A couple things. Well, as most of you in on the committee and council know that I was the one person that voted against this change on the on the pilot project, and if I recall, it was about \$75 or \$80,000 to implement, which would have been, I think the comment was, about that to undo it. So, I don't think anybody really thought that we were ever going to undo this, myself included.

**Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 22:34**

I voted against it that night because I had some concerns about the cost but more concerns about how we were going to measure success. And some of the biggest things that I was hearing as concerns were the noise, as Alder Hartzheim mentioned, and the amount of quote, unquote racing going on downtown. And I'm not seeing really anything that addresses—I know you already commented on the noise, and I think the officer commented on some of the drag racing on the College Avenue, but that was my concerns then. I think we still have work to do there, because I've heard it a lot—the noise level downtown.

**Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 23:15**

And then the other thing that I would add is not all the feedback that I got on the changes was positive in the beginning or during the pilot. And again, I'm gonna I'm gonna support the change because I don't want to undo it, and I don't want to spend the money to undo it, and I think that the crash data is very relevant here. The speed and the volume is actually surprising to me, because the volume is essentially the same. I mean, you're talking about 1.4% is like 200 vehicles, and the speeds are less than a mile per hour, in some cases, a half a mile per hour. So really no changes there, in my opinion. And like you said, other projects going on downtown might have reduced some traffic. The Lawrence project is one that had College Avenue partially closed or fully closed for a while, but again, I'll support it when it comes to council because I think—you know, I think the crash data alone is a very good, positive thing to come from this. Thanks.

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 24:17**

Okay, I saw Alder Siebers. Maybe we'll just go left to right.



**Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 24:22**

Well, the number one complaint I've received since part of this is in (a lot of it is in) my district, is noise, huge problem downtown. And so, I'd like to think that if we hadn't done the configuration, it probably would have been worse because we would have had more drag racing going on. But we need to address the problem in regards to noise. I don't know what the answer is, but we need to do something.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 24:55**

Alderson Firkus.

**Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 24:56**

Thank you, Chair. I feel like. We're seeing some pretty good results out of this. I think we're seeing some of the changes that we intended to. I think one of the biggest wins has to be how this has become a more pedestrian friendly space for people to move around. I remember some of the parking issues that came up when I was still brand new on Council, and people would speak about how they didn't feel comfortable trying to push a stroller across four lanes of traffic, and that's not a concern anymore. You've now got to—the two lanes plus the turn lane if there's vehicles in it. I think that alone is just one of those things that really highlights how we've made this area more people friendly, instead of just a big highway, basically for people to drive through downtown.

**Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 25:42**

I can speak a little bit anecdotally, as far as a bike list—or as far as biking downtown. I've never really had any problems on the lanes. My biggest pain point, to be honest, is that between College Avenue Bridge and when the lane start, because there are really no good options to maneuver that area. I know that's out of scope. But as far as actual pain points or concerns for biking the downtown area, that's probably the biggest one at this point. Otherwise, College Avenue, the side streets, some of the changes like that have been done to the cross streets have made the traffic a little safer there, that I feel are beneficial for people moving around, and I think we're getting largely what we hoped to get out of this.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 26:27**

Alderson Meltzer.

**Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 26:28**

Thank you. I've gotten a lot of really great feedback, a lot of kind of random people who aren't necessarily my constituents at all, who just know I'm on city council are like, "By the way, I'm really enjoying the reconfiguration downtown." I've had bicyclist friends tell me that they feel much safer biking, that they used to find alternate routes to—if their destination was on College Avenue, they would find an alternate route and then walk the rest of the remainder of the way, and they feel like they don't need to do that anymore. Something about the way that those parked cars are makes everything just seem kind of more visually open. So, I think that the bicyclists I've spoken to, feel that the synergy between how the cars are parked makes the drivers more attentive and aware, and the drivers are more likely to see—the bicyclists feel that they are more seen by the drivers as they're navigating.

**Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 27:36**

As far as noise, I know this continues to persistently be a concern, and it's especially affecting the adjacent areas. But there were some other scenarios that aren't really happening anymore, where there would be kind of massive drag race, kind of, activity that spilled over onto other arterials. And so, the scale of that—while the problem still persists, the scale does seem to have changed in a way that has been noticeable to people giving me feedback.



**Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 28:09**

So, I also just really that that reduction in the crashes is really significant to me. I think that it's kind of hard to go after that kind of a result without doing significant, you know, concrete and significant changes. So, the fact that we could get that with such a non-intrusive project, I think that was a real win for the city.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 28:37**

Alder Doran, do you have something?

**Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 28:38**

Just one quick question for staff regarding the crash data. I know you mentioned some of the wait times we were less than what we maybe had anticipated. Did we—do we have a measurement for what we expected for crash data to go down with this change?

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 28:55**

There are a lot of documents out there, experiences that other cities have had, and they range anywhere from a 5% improvement to, like, a 25% improvement. We did see some bigger numbers early on, and by that I mean higher percentage of decrease. But I think as a data set, you know—as the data set gets bigger and bigger, it stabilizes, and I think it's going to stabilize right around 15% for us, and so that—I would say that's right in the middle of what we had hoped.

**Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 29:24**

Okay, perfect. Thank you.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 29:27**

Just—I don't think I have anything different to say than what my colleagues have said. Obviously, we here on Council spend a fair amount of time downtown, and for me personally, it's gotten easier to move around. In the nice weather when I ride my bike downtown, I don't go all the way as far west as I can go. I can go up from my house and actually ride down College now and not be afraid that someone's going to hit me with a door on their way by.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 30:01**

I did want to remind everybody that just last week at Council, we passed some changes that Alder Smith had worked with staff on to cod—to change some of our noise ordinances to make them a little bit more enforceable, and I am going to be really hopeful that some of that will help us a little bit with the noise as well. So, I'm hoping that both of these things in tandem moving forward—I mean, we can't suddenly make people behave overnight, but maybe with the knowing that there's some more enforcement out there, and the combination of not having those two open lanes to drive down, hopefully it'll get better. So, I'm very enthusiastic about it. All right.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 30:52**

Anything else? All right. Are we ready to vote? All in favor please signify by saying aye. Aye. That passes five zero.