



209 Page Street West | Saint Paul, MN 55107
(651) 293-1708
www.WSCO.org

11 May 2020

Dear MNDOT,

The West Side Community Organization (WSCO) and its groups focused on land use and transportation have interacted with MNDOT several times in the past 4-5 years about major work to redo and reimagine Robert Street on the West Side of St. Paul. The last substantial interaction was in August of 2018 in our Riverfront Development and Land Use committee. At that point, MNDOT was imagining a total mill and overlay happening in 2022 with WSCO being involved in helping to give feedback on what community wants and needs are for Robert Street on the West Side. Independent from our direct interactions with MNDOT, WSCO has been involved in work for a number of years focused on pedestrian safety along Robert Street. There have been a number of tragic accidents involving pedestrians along Robert Street near Cesar Chavez, and there is a general perception in the neighborhood that Robert Street is not safe for pedestrians or bicyclists.

There have been updates from MNDOT since August 2018, and now we hear that major work on Robert Street is pushed back to 2025 or 2026 so that MNDOT can better create a vision for Robert. MNDOT does have funds for a much smaller project this summer that involves fixing potholes and new sealcoating on most of Robert. In a video meeting on April 28th, WSCO got more details on the project. This is when WSCO got details about the potential to re-stripe Robert Street between Cesar Chavez and about one block south of Plato to reduce traffic lanes. This change could potentially make this section of Robert safer for pedestrians. While a webpage about the project and potential changes was not quite ready at that point, we learned that MNDOT needed community feedback by May 13th. If there was significant community opinion in opposition to the lane changes, Robert could be re-stripped exactly as it is currently.

The webpage about this project, which includes a video, visuals, and an official way to give feedback became available approximately on May 5th. This left about one week for public input. Under normal conditions, it is hard to get meaningful public input on such a short timeline. In the current moment in time, it is even harder to get public input. Many of the residents adjacent to Robert Street do not speak English as a first language, and many also do not typically give feedback via online forms. Currently, it does not work to knock on doors or otherwise interact with nearby residents to get feedback. In summary, there is very little opportunity for meaningful or comprehensive public feedback.

While WSCO is not able to get extensive public feedback, our first sense is that what MNDOT is proposing is better for pedestrian safety than the status quo. However, WSCO is disappointed that we don't have more time to gather in community and really consider this project. We are also disappointed that we have to wait an extra 3-4 years beyond 2022 for a better Robert Street for the West Side. With this as the background, WSCO would like to propose a slight revision to MNDOT's proposal for this summer.

The Saint Paul Bicycle Coalition rightly calls out that the Saint Paul Bicycle Plan calls for bike lanes on Robert. With the Robert Piram Regional Trail currently being constructed on Plato, WSCO would like to advocate for painted bicycle lanes on Robert between Cesar Chavez and Plato that connect to the Robert Piram Regional Trail. This modification is a small revision to the current MNDOT proposal. WSCO believes that this revision is important because it relates to the most densely populated part of the West Side, including Dunedin Public Housing, Neighborhood House, Riverview Elementary School, Torre de San Miguel, 88 Cesar Chavez, and Bluff Park Homes. A bike lane on this part of Robert Street would allow thousands of West Side residents to connect to:

- 1) Harriet Island and the Mississippi River
- 2) Robert Piram Regional Trail toward South St. Paul and toward Lilydale
- 3) Highway 52 bike trail with access to Lowertown, East Side, and Lake Phalen

WSCO's proposed revision does not include a bike lane all the way to downtown, and we recognize the need for an extensive public process to thoroughly reimagine Robert Street on the West Side. Many other potential changes to Robert Street that could benefit the West Side will have to wait until 2025 or 2026. We hope that bike lanes along with less traffic lanes between Cesar Chavez and Plato will make this area safer for people on bikes and on foot. If there are fundamental engineering issues that prevent this from happening, WSCO would appreciate a thorough explanation. Thank you for your attention to our feedback, and we look forward to partnering with you to ensure West Side community voice and input in the years to come.

Sincerely,



Monica Bravo
Executive Director



Derek Johnson
Land Use Committee Chair

cc: Councilmember Rebecca Noecker