



CITY OF SAINT PAUL
Mayor Melvin Carter

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Dear Council President Brendmoen and Members of the Council,

I am writing today to outline the history of our work together to resurface and improve Ayd Mill Road (AMR), the options ahead of us, and my recommendation for a choice I would like us to make together.

Building a transportation system that works for all is a core value that informs my approach to our work to repair streets, improve transit, and make it safer and more appealing to walk and bicycle in Saint Paul. Together, in 2019, we made significant new investments in our mill and overlay (or street resurfacing) program and instituted a new practice of incorporating needed pedestrian safety improvements as part of each mill and overlay. Together, we also created the City's ongoing annual funding stream specifically dedicated to improving our bikeways.

It's a dynamic time in the City of Saint Paul. As we heard from Susan Brower, Minnesota's State Demographer in October 2019, the total population of Saint Paul is now at 313,000; nearly matching our 1960 all-time highest population. Our city has grown by nearly 30,000 in the past decade and is projected to grow by another 30,000 within the next 20 years. This population growth means more people traveling on our streets and if each of these new residents were to move around in a single-occupancy vehicle, traffic in Saint Paul would grind to a halt. I know we all agree that we simply must invest in and provide more options for people to move around our community by more efficient modes of transportation.

From the beginning of this work together to improve transportation in Saint Paul, I think we have all agreed that we need to invest more in our streets so that we can stop the vicious cycles of more and more pothole patching. By spending more upfront on creating better asphalt conditions, we have an opportunity to save money in the long run with better regular maintenance.

Our Department of Planning and Economic Development had a 2-year community engagement process around the creation of the City's new Comprehensive Plan, that you approved, and I signed in 2019. The Transportation Chapter of the Plan states that we will prioritize people walking, people cycling, transit riders, and then cars and other vehicles - in that order - in how we approach our transportation system.

In 2015, the City Council adopted the Saint Paul Bicycle Plan. The bike plan calls for an off-street bicycle trail along Ayd Mill Road, a key leg of a future trail that will connect to Minneapolis and the Midtown Greenway. Since the adoption of the Bike Plan, it has been our practice to add bicycle facilities to the streets identified in the bike plan during the mill and overlay process.

In 2019, Public Works staff also completed the draft of our new Saint Paul Pedestrian Plan. It was the work done for the Pedestrian Plan that led to the idea of incorporating pedestrian safety improvements during our mill and overlay projects.

Also, in 2019, our Chief Resilience Officer and staff from multiple city departments engaged our community deeply in our Draft Climate Action and Resilience Plan (CARP), which the City Council adopted unanimously in December 2019. The CARP, in support of our mutual goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 50% by 2030 and 100% by 2050, sets a target of reducing the total vehicle miles traveled in Saint Paul by 2.5% annually for the next 20 years. The CARP identifies many strategies for achieving this goal, including prioritizing walking, cycling, and transit use over the use of other vehicles.

I have been a part of community conversations about Ayd Mill Road for close to two decades and I co-authored the 2009 City Council resolution about AMR that called for a 2-lane roadway with a parallel bicycle and pedestrian trail. In March 2019, after the Woodlawn-Jefferson project was postponed, my recommendation was to use the majority of the budgeted funds to resurface Ayd Mill Road. By that time, AMR had risen to the top of Public Works list of streets needing to be resurfaced based on pavement condition and the volume of vehicle traffic.

By early 2019, conditions of the roadway surface on AMR were deteriorating quickly, to the point where Public Works was spending \$250,000 each year on pothole patching on AMR alone. However, I also knew that adding a bicycle/pedestrian trail along this corridor was no simple matter and would take months of evaluation, design, and engineering work. I decided that the best course of action would be to move ahead with a mill and overlay of AMR in the fall of 2019, while simultaneously asking Public Works to begin the work of determining the best way to incorporate a bicycle/pedestrian trail in the near future.

Last April, on my recommendation, you approved \$3.5 million to mill and overlay AMR. At that time, Director Lantry stated in her remarks to the Council at the public hearing on April 17, 2019, that I had also asked Public Works to continue to analyze how to design in a bicycle/pedestrian facility in the near future.

Meanwhile, as the roadway surface has continued to deteriorate, the rate of spending on maintenance has also continued to increase. This winter one-third of all of the funding for pothole patching in Saint Paul is going to AMR. As you know, filling potholes in the winter with "winter mix" is a very short-term fix. Each time it snows, and our plows go over AMR the winter mix material is removed by the action of the plow on the snow/ice, and the crews have to go right back out and fill all of the same potholes again.

In the summer of 2019, Public Works presented me with options for adding a bicycle/pedestrian facility to Ayd Mill Road. The recommendation was that the most cost-effective approach would be to do the work to reconfigure and resurface the street all at once, rather than resurfacing in 2019 and then reconfiguring the road to add the bike/ped facility in 2020. As you will recall, in August 2019 I proposed exactly that in my 2020 budget -- that we would do all of the work at once, at a preliminary estimate for the project of \$5.2 million. My proposal at the time was for a 2-lane road (1-lane each direction) on what is currently the southbound side of AMR, and to convert the northbound side of AMR to a 26-foot wide bicycle and pedestrian trail. My recommendation was based on preliminary information.

As 2020 is a particularly busy year for street and trail construction projects (and as is common practice) in the Fall of 2019 Public Works hired an engineering/design consultant to assist with determining the best, safest, and most cost-effective way to reconfigure the road and add a bicycle/pedestrian facility. In the course of the consultant's work, a few important pieces of new information became clear.

First, there are significant drainage problems on the roadway, and in order for the resurfacing to last as long as possible, it is necessary for the City to rework and rebuild the stormwater collection system along AMR.

Second, it became clear that existing lighting located on the western side of the roadway would not be adequate to meet standards for the new trail facility on the eastern side of the roadway.

Third, the 2-lane + trail configuration would be quite a bit more expensive than a 3-lane road + trail configuration to implement.

Additionally, the traffic signals along Ayd Mill Road are sub-standard, temporary signals. The City did not invest in modern signals to date in large part because the plans and future of this road have been in flux for so long. The additional costs for new signals were anticipated in the preliminary \$5.2 million estimated budget.

Here are the cost estimates for the different scenarios:

- A. Mill and Overlay Only (2019 approved): \$3.5 million
- B. 2-lane road + 26-foot-wide trail: \$9.8 million (initial estimate was \$5.2 million)

***The following are current estimates, not final budget:**

\$2.1 million constructing new left turn lanes in current median
\$1.3 million trail
\$1.9 million stormwater/sewer
\$670,000 traffic signals
\$460,000 lighting
\$6.5 million total construction

\$1.6 million engineering
\$1.6 million contingency
\$9.8 million total cost

- C. 3 lane road + 12-foot-wide trail: \$7.5 million

\$1.1 million resurfacing asphalt
\$980,000 trail
\$1.1 million stormwater
\$1 million traffic signals
\$720,000 lighting
\$5 million total construction

+\$1.25 million engineering
+\$1.25 million contingency
\$7.5 million total cost

Given the options before us, my strong recommendation is to move forward with option C. It meets our shared policy goals and values in the most cost-effective manner. If you approve the Public Works 5-Year Plan and street reconstruction bond sale, we will begin a community engagement effort. We will hold a community meeting and create a new on-line tool where members of the public can provide feedback. We will bring the results of this public engagement work to you, and then seek a final Council approval for the AMR project by early May. This is a short timeline. But in order to do this work on AMR in 2020, we will need to bid the project no later than early June. The terrible condition of the road presents us few options but to move forward with this compressed process and timeline.

My office has received a great deal of feedback about my proposal to reconfigure the road and add the trail. Nearly 200 people have contacted my office since August 2019, with 62% being in support of the original proposal. The Council conducted a public forum on the 2020 budget in the basement of City Hall in early September 2019, and AMR was reported to be one of the primary topics of conversation. I know you have also received significant communication on this proposal, and I would welcome the opportunity to include that feedback in our results.

In recent meetings, the Council has requested that Public Works take the time to conduct a test of a 2-lane or a 3-lane roadway prior to making a decision about the final project. While I agree this would provide additional information, a test would cost about \$200,000 and would delay the project until 2021. We cannot lay down traffic counters while there is still snow and ice on the streets and we would need to gather data for a period of months to conduct a meaningful test.

Of the options before us, I strongly recommend and request the Council approve the 5-Year Plan and bond sale on February 19, with an estimated cost for the AMR Project of \$7.5 million. I commit to you that we will engage with the community in a process where we share information on all of our options by April 10. That would allow for a final Council vote on the plan for AMR by May 10, and construction can begin in Fall 2020.

I believe amending the 5-Year Plan to only include the original \$3.5 million for mill and overlay is not a smart option. The road would be resurfaced in 2020 with no bicycle/pedestrian facility and no stormwater management improvements to improve our ability to effectively drain the road and extend the life of the resurfacing. The total cost of the resurfacing plus coming back in the future to reconfigure the road and add the trail would be much greater.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue for Saint Paul. I look forward to our continued work together to improve our City's transportation system consistent with our goals and values.

Sincerely,



Melvin Carter
Mayor, City of Saint Paul