From: Andy Flamm
To: *CI-StPaul_Contact-Council
Subject: Why I Voted No on Summit Bike Plan
Date: Thursday, May 18, 2023 3:43:23 PM

Dear Councilmembers,

I was one of three members of the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Commission to vote against recommending the Summit Avenue Regional Trail Plan to the City Council at our May 11 meeting (the vote was 4-3 in favor).

Why did I vote No? Here are several reasons.

I love biking, especially on separated bike trails such as the one being proposed for Summit. But this trail will not resemble those along the river or within our parks. The trail on Summit would cross major and minor streets every few hundred yards along its five mile length. Between those crossings there will be numerous driveways and other crossings. Cyclists will need to be on constant alert for cars, other bikes, scooters and pedestrians as they bike along, at least to the extent they are now. Parents who think the trail will be a safe place for their kids to ride should understand this.

Faster cyclists will still ride in the traffic lane on Summit, according to both pro- and anti-trail plan advocates and even the trail planners. But once the regional trail is built, there will be no bike lane or buffer from parked cars on the street, meaning cars and bikes will have to share the single traffic lane in each direction. I don't see how this is good for anyone, and what will happen when delivery trucks block the traffic lane, which seems likely (even if illegal)? Will traffic come to a standstill? And how will emergency vehicles get through with no room to pass cars and bikes?

Then there is the cost. The figure of $12 million has been mentioned for the bike trail, but it's hard to say for sure since the plan is to build the trail as Summit is rebuilt at a much higher cost. Whatever additional funding is required to add the bike trail, one has to wonder if this is the best use of that money. We already have a commuter bike path on Summit which is well used and could be improved at a much lower cost, and more quickly, by repaving and painting more visible lane markings. Maybe there are other routes and areas of Saint Paul that need improved recreational bike trails more than Summit Avenue.

There are other costs, too. While the extent of tree loss under this plan has been challenged, there's no question that at least one hundred beautiful, carbon-absorbing trees will be lost if the bike trail is built, and possibly many times that number. There will also be lost parking spaces east of Lexington, a major cost to homeowners, renters, businesses and non-profits on or near Summit. The damage this trail may cause to Summit's historic atmosphere is difficult to quantify, but homeowners and many others place a high value on the avenue's special qualities.

I am not saying we should never build bike trails because there are costs involved, but I do think we need to carefully consider what we are agreeing to pay for when we propose new amenities such as this. Many of those arguing for the proposal appear to be looking at the perceived benefits alone.

Finally, I voted against the plan because I don't believe the public was given an adequate opportunity to weigh its benefits and costs or to view alternatives they might prefer. It seems the city skipped past that step and went right to the design effort, and now proponents are saying we have to proceed or we may lose out on funding opportunities. I think projects that have a major impact on our neighborhoods should receive buy-in from the public before proceeding, and this one clearly did not get that mandate, as evidenced by the mostly negative public comments received online and in person by our commission.

Do Saint Paul residents and other stakeholders support building a separated regional bike trail along Summit Avenue? The best way to find out would be to delay action on the current plan until after the City Council elections in November when more than half the council members will be new. We can debate the pros and cons of the plan, as well as consider alternatives, during election season, and those we elect can make the call (and accept responsibility for the consequences).

If Saint Paulites want this bike trail, then I'm all for scrutinizing the design and moving forward, but that is yet to be determined. Let's get this important step right before moving on to the design approval stage. Thank you for your consideration.

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