

Dear Commissioners,

I'm writing because I'm afraid we are going to see an increase in preventable injuries in the city this fall, due to the combination of documented COVID-induced reckless car driving and the reemergence of a large number of students walking and biking. If you share my concern, please consider taking action immediately.

Summary

Due to the overwhelming evidence that 4- to 5-lane bidirectional roads (and 2- to 3-lane one-way roads) pose a significantly greater threat to both drivers and crossing pedestrians vs. roads with fewer lanes, I ask that you recommend that city council direct staff to close all car travel lanes (on all city roads) that exceed one lane in each direction immediately, unless it can be definitively shown that doing so will increase danger or cause an "unacceptable" level of car driver delay.

Documented safety of conversions

I appreciate the recent approval of a temporary reconfiguration on South Main Street and temporary neighborhood street calming. But overall, I am disappointed by our overall lack of action on road reconfigurations (aka lane conversions or road diets) around the city. We know that roads with extraneous lanes make people drive faster, they increase the likelihood of rear-end and angle crashes, and they impose a “double threat” on pedestrians crossing them. We are certain that crashes have been prevented where we have instituted conversions, and we are painfully aware of the tragedies that have occurred in Ann Arbor on 4- and 5-lane roads precisely because of the combination of high speed and the inability of drivers to see pedestrians crossing mid-block in front of a taller adjacent vehicle (even in daylight, in crosswalks, and when RRFBs are flashing). Studies have demonstrated permanent reductions in vehicle speeds—and a 19 to 47 percent reduction in overall vehicle-pedestrian, vehicle-bicyclist, and vehicle-vehicle crashes—when lanes are reduced (FHA 2010).

Unlocking roundabouts

The knock-on benefits of right-sizing roads are also significant. Appropriately narrowing roads makes subsequent intersection conversions to roundabouts much more feasible—which in turn bring another layer of significant safety and throughput efficiency gains. The intersections of multi-lane roads often require a prohibitive amount of space to create a multi-lane roundabout. (Those of you who participated in the Lowertown Mobility presentation saw concepts for such a roundabout, however I imagine it would never be taken seriously due to the land required.) Dieting 4- to 5-lane roads as soon as possible would help accelerate the subsequent possibilities for roundabouts.

Safety and efficiency of roundabouts

Roundabouts are much safer than signalized intersections. Studies by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and Federal Highway Administration have shown that roundabouts typically achieve a 75 percent reduction in injury collisions, a 90 percent reduction in fatality collisions, and a 40 percent reduction in pedestrian collisions.

Roundabouts also improve auto traffic flow significantly, which would likely compensate (several times over) for the *potential* of increased delays due to aggressive road diets (if we were ever to pursue road diets that could incur auto delays; more on this below). Studies by the IIHS of intersections in three states found that roundabouts contributed to an 89 percent reduction in auto delays. I believe that locally the roundabout at Nixon and Green was modeled to achieve an 80% reduction in peak delay.

Lane conversion myths

There is a common misconception that road diets worsen car congestion because they "take away" car travel lanes. However, there is evidence that lane reductions rarely cause increased car delays when the roads carry less than 15-20,000 vehicles/day, and some reductions have been successful on volumes far in excess of that without "unduly compromising" motorist throughput (however you wish to define that).

Directives from plans and the public

Moreover, these commonly-accepted traffic volume thresholds for road diet feasibility fail to consider the significant public safety gains of lane reductions—and the public's high tolerance for auto delays in exchange for safety gains. The 2009 Transportation Plan stated it clearly: "Adopt a policy that states that in evaluating roadway conversions, a certain reduction in Vehicular Level of Service should be deemed acceptable to accommodate safe bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The policy should state that a multi-model approach to roadway engineering is to be employed where the safe movement of all modes is given priority over the capacity of a single mode." The 2021 Vision Zero plan states that you should "Annually review roadway re-configuration needs, based on safety analysis, and opportunities along MDOT roadways in coordination with MDOT."

A statistically-valid survey conducted in 2018 (The National Citizen Survey) found that two-thirds of Ann Arborites are willing to incur delayed drive times between *30 and 60%* in order to "significantly" or "very significantly" reduce pedestrian, cyclist, and motorist crashes, injuries, and deaths (see the attached chart from the Citizen Survey). This finding clearly demonstrates that in addition to a moral obligation to prevent injury, there is a significant citizen mandate to do so.

Conversions are cheap

We have ample evidence both nationally and locally that road diets work. We know for a fact that road diets such as those on Platt and Jackson have already prevented crashes, and perhaps even injuries and deaths. We have documentation that drivers are willing to endure delays in service of safety. Diets are implementable quickly and cheaply with "paint and posts." And the carbon neutrality plan calls us to reduce auto traffic volumes significantly in the coming years, so I believe this provides further encouragement to push the limits of traffic calming for the sake of safety.

Despite all of this, there are 4- to 5-lane roads in the city like Huron Parkway where school children have been injured in crosswalks—and by all accounts a diet would cause *zero auto delay*—with no plans for a diet. There was also a road diet planned for Earhart Road that was

rejected by the last city council, and yet it has not moved forward. Nixon Road was promised to be reconstructed with a series of roundabouts years ago.

Why is that, and what needs to change?

It's your choice to act

I understand that implementing the new transportation plan will take time, focus, and resources, and I appreciate that you and staff are being methodical about that. But the fact is that lives are irreparably harmed every year that we delay. I believe we need to multitask and implement some easy, cheap, and effective tools now. I implore you to recommend to council that we implement a policy to restripe all 4- to 5-lane roads with volumes under ~25,000 as quickly as possible, beginning with ones near schools, unless an initial study demonstrates that there would be in excess of an X% delay to motorists (pick a number between 30-60% that seems not worth saving a life). This could include Huron Parkway between Plymouth and Washtenaw; all undieted sections of W. Stadium on the west side of town, in front of Pioneer, and between Packard and Washtenaw; Beakes, Broadway, and Plymouth between N. Main and Barton Drive; the entirety of Fuller St. and Fuller Rd.; and of course the unfinished business of Earhart and Green Roads. There should also be a formal written complaint filed with MDOT regarding the safety of the entirety of Washtenaw between the Stadium split and downtown, and a request for a timeline for when Reimagine Washtenaw can be implemented.

I think there are relatively few sections of road that could be justified as 4- to 5-lane roads, such as Washtenaw east of Stadium (which should be boulevarded according to plans) and perhaps Plymouth east of Nixon and Stadium over the bridge. (I understand some studies showed that Huron St between State and Main is also important as 5-lanes during rush hours.)

Please act quickly. There are many good reasons why government moves slowly, but the safety of vulnerable road users and drivers can't wait.

Thank you for your thoughtful and urgent consideration.

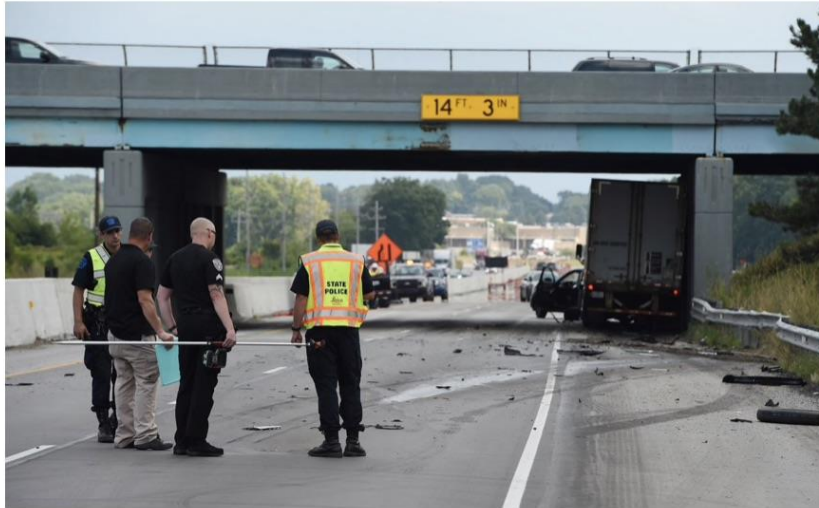
Sincerely,
Kirk Westphal
734-660-9955

Table 47: Question 14

The City of Ann Arbor is considering introducing new road designs that have been shown in other cities to reduce pedestrian, cyclist, and motorist crashes, injuries and deaths. For example, roundabouts have reduced injuries for all users while decreasing motorist drive times (by creating more steady traffic flow). Other road redesign options reduce injuries but have different effects on motorist drive times. Which of the following statements is closest to the advice you would like to give the City as they make these decisions?		
	Percent	Number
Substantially increase drive times (a drive that was 10 minutes would be 16) to very significantly reduce pedestrian, cyclist, and motorist crashes, injuries, and deaths	26%	N=171
Moderately increase drive times (a drive that was 10 minutes would be 13) to significantly reduce pedestrian, cyclist, and motorist crashes, injuries, and deaths	40%	N=265
Slightly increase drive times (a drive that was 10 minutes would be 11) to somewhat reduce pedestrian, cyclist, and motorist crashes, injuries, and deaths	18%	N=122
Do nothing and expect the same drive times and levels of pedestrian, cyclist, and motorist crashes, injuries, and deaths	5%	N=36
Reduce drive time, even if it increases pedestrian, cyclist, and motorist crashes, injuries, and deaths	3%	N=20
Don't know	8%	N=52
Total	100%	N=666

Michigan fatal crashes increased 12% in 2020 despite less travel

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MLive File Photo. Michigan State Police work at the scene of a fatal crash on I-94 eastbound under the bridge at Airport Road on Friday afternoon, Aug. 14, 2020. J. Scott Park | MLive.com



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By [Lindsay Moore](#) | lmoores@mlive.com

Following a surprising national trend, Michigan's traffic fatalities increased during 2020 despite drivers traveling less.

This week, preliminary estimates of crash fatalities showing the largest number of fatalities since 2007 were released by the [U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#).

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