

Lincoln Avenue Road Diet Committee, Dept. of Transportation Director Hans Larsen, and Councilmember Pierluigi Olivero
Via email, sent 4/29/15

Dear Committee Members, Director, and Councilmember,

I am writing to express my qualified support for the Lincoln Road Diet experiment, and to offer some observations and suggestions on possible improvements.

Yes, there is traffic on Lincoln Avenue, sometimes even traffic congestion. There was also traffic and congestion before the experiment.

And, yes, Lincoln Avenue was very severely impacted the first day of the experiment: I think everyone in the area came out to see what was going on, thereby adding to the congestion. And pedestrians realized that it was now finally possible to cross Lincoln Avenue even at rush hour, and so they proceeded to do so, compounding the backup!

Traffic is still impacted from time-to-time, due in part to the various street repairs and infrastructure enhancements that are being implemented prior to the pavement refresh, and in part due to various street festivals and other events.

Now that the novelty has worn off and the traffic patterns have settled down, here are my observations and suggestions:

There are two categories of people on Lincoln: those who view Willow Glen as a “destination”, and those who view it as an “obstacle” to their travels. As I’m firmly in the former camp, I like the Road Diet. I like that I’m able to safely bicycle to the local shops – something I do a half-dozen to a dozen times or more a week. I like that the village seems to have more “street life” – people out walking and enjoying the area. I do drive the length of Lincoln a couple times a week, and I find that traffic is calmer and more predictable – none of the lane-jumping to swerve around a car stopped to make a left turn here, or around a car trying to parallel-park there: there’s a nice smooth predictable flow in the lane. But those trying to just get thru from one part of town to somewhere else may not appreciate the street life and definitely don’t appreciate the backups, so let’s address them:

- The timing of the traffic signals at Willow/Lincoln need to be adjusted. I sent you a detailed email on this topic in late February, so I’ll just copy it below for your reference.
- You should eliminate 2 or 3 parking spaces on the east side of Lincoln just south of Willow (in front of Willow Glen Square): there is a lot of pedestrian traffic crossing Willow at the light, and currently the northbound traffic trying to turn right blocks the single lane of traffic while waiting for the pedestrians to cross. If the couple parking spaces are eliminated, then those waiting to turn can pull over towards the curb, freeing the thru-lane.
- At Lincoln/Minnesota, southbound: the very nice new bike lane ends abruptly, and cyclist are suddenly dumped into the single lane of traffic, without warning or preparation. You really need to extend the bike lane on Lincoln south of Minnesota, at least for a block or so to smooth the transition. Could the southbound traffic lane be shifted to the east so as to give room for a bike lane?
- Northbound Lincoln, south of Minnesota: the lane marking is confusing. You have a two-way left-turn lane, and also a “lane must turn left”. If one wants to turn into the school, does one

use the two-way lane or the must turn left lane? Recommendation: add to the marking for the “must turn left” lane to indicate that that means at Minnesota. Or better still, squeeze the thru-lane down to one and have the two-way left become a single left on Minnesota (in a configuration comparable to what’s done for southbound traffic approaching Coe), and then use the extra space for the southbound bike lane.

- I appreciate how you quickly fixed the westbound Coe into Lincoln, by adding an angled line of paint to indicate that the right lane is now only for thru and right-turn traffic. This matches the new directional sign on Coe, which replaced the old sign that had indicated that a left turn was permitted from both lanes. However, it would have helped to have alerted travelers to the change in the sign – they do look quite similar, and the subtle change is easily overlooked by the regular drivers. In many jurisdictions, when a sign is subtly changed, it is highlighted for a few weeks with a couple red flags attached to the top.
- I appreciate how quickly you addressed the “northbound left turn into Bank of America” – well done.
- I appreciate that, while southbound traffic can no longer turn left at the signal into Wells Fargo, that is not an issue since drivers can easily turn earlier (just past John’s XInt Foods) and gain access to the same parking lot. A suggestion: change the direction of the driveway at the signal into Wells Fargo: change from an “inbound” to an “outbound”. This would allow Wells Fargo customers to turn left or right onto Lincoln at the light, rather than being limited to right-turn only as they are now. Cost: you’ll need a couple lights at the signal facing Wells Fargo. (They can probably be attached to the existing poles, but they will need new pick-up loops.) It will impact five parking spaces at Wells Fargo: they’ll still be accessible, but will either need to be reconfigured or else used as back-in diagonal parking, like that at the new Whole Foods on Stockton.
- While the concept of a central two-way left-turn lane is not new to San Jose, still folks seem to be confused by it here. Would it help to have a couple paired white turn arrows (↕↕) in the lane, as is sometimes done elsewhere?
- I like being able to cross Lincoln at the various crosswalks, but I wonder if it might perhaps help to remove the southernmost one (by Le Boulanger). I have noticed southbound traffic jammed up because of the heavy pedestrian traffic across Minnesota by the school limits the southbound traffic from turning right. When the drivers finally have a chance to turn and the traffic lane is freed so others can drive south across Minnesota, then sometimes a pedestrian decides to cross, stopping traffic on the thru traffic during their one chance to get thru the signal, and so only 2-3 cars (those after the crosswalk and before the intersection) are able to cross Minnesota. So, either configure the crosswalk by Le Boulanger to be synchronized with the Minnesota light, or else eliminate it – it’s not all that far to the signalized crosswalk at Minnesota.

One last piece of the puzzle – technically not part of the Road Diet, but hey, I’m on a roll: the parking lot for Aqui / BevMo / Garden Theater. Presently, the only egress is north to Willow, where there is a right-turn only sign. Many people want to go left (west) on Willow, and so they ignore the turn sign. I see two possible solutions:

- Modify Willow to better accommodate left-turns from the driveway. If parking is eliminated on the north side of Willow by Bill’s Cafe, then it’d be possible to have a short two-way left-turn lane on Willow for that first block, which would give a holding-bay for left-turners from Aqui et al and ease their transition onto Willow. But this would require taking maybe 8-10 parking spaces.

- Another, perhaps easier option: Rearrange the fences in the parking lots so as to allow traffic to exit eastward to Lincoln from the northernmost driveway (by Athletic Performance), where the drivers could then turn left into the northbound left-turn lane.

Before the Lincoln Avenue pavement is resealed, I hope that the underlying pavement will be repaired. Of particular interest to bicyclists: “ripples” and “ridges” in the pavement. There’s a nasty one on northbound Lincoln at the edge by the gutter, just after crossing the Los Gatos Creek bridge. (There’s an even worse one in the middle of the bike lane on east-bound Willow at about 1118 Willow -- it’s so bad it even shows up in Google StreetView!)

For the record: I did witness one accident on Lincoln: a motorcyclist made a left turn too quickly from Meredith, spun out, and landed on the pavement. He ended up in the center turn lane, where he picked himself up, dusted himself off, and then went on his way. If this had happened pre-Diet, he would have been in a lane of traffic and in greater danger of being run into.

I have heard second-hand that some shops on Lincoln may have experienced a decline in business since the start of the Diet. On the other hand, I have heard directly from the salesclerk at the Le Boulanger that their business has increased, which explains why they’ve been sold out of my favorite pastry a couple times lately!

I live on a nearby cross-street (Willow), a couple blocks from Lincoln. Traffic sometimes backs up from Lincoln to my house due to the interaction between pedestrians crossing Lincoln and cars turning right to go south on Lincoln. Traffic backed up to my home before the Road Diet, and it backs up as often and as far with the Road Diet -- no change.

Overall, I think the experiment has been a success, and I hope that the Road Diet will be made permanent – it is making Willow Glen an even more walkable and bikeable village, and it is encouraging residents to “shop local” and to reduce our “Vehicle Miles Traveled” while enjoying our neighborhood. I also hope that the Road Diet will be extended so as to provide improved biking and calmer traffic both south of Minnesota and also north of Coe.

Please feel free to contact me if I can provide any additional information regarding these comments and suggestions.

~Larry Ames
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[extract of my email sent 2/28/15 regarding the timing of the traffic signal on Lincoln at Willow]

there is a refinement [to the Lincoln/Willow signal] that I think could help: adjust the timing of the traffic signal at Willow.

Since before the restripe, it has been 4 phase:

- * E/W left-turns (short time)
- * E/W thru
- * N left & thru

- * S left & thru.

The N and S traffic worked because the left lane was used for both turn and thru, and so there was the equivalent of maybe 1 and a half lanes of traffic going thru.

But now, with the restripe and the signal unchanged, less traffic can go thru N and S: just the 1 lane.

Ideal solution: reconfigure the traffic lights for N & S turns, giving

- * E/W left-turns (short time)

- * E/W thru

- * N/S left-turns (short time)

- * N & S thru

-- this would give a larger fraction of the signal period to the thru traffic. However, it costs a fair amount of money to add the extra stop lights for the turn lanes, and it definitely wouldn't be worth the cost for a short experiment.

Possible (temporary?) solution:

remove the left-turn lights from N & S traffic: have the turns "unprotected" rather than having their own cycle. It'd then be like most other intersections: you'd just have to wait for a gap in the traffic to make the turn.

It'd be quick and cheap to make this change (just a cautionary sign and some black tape over the green arrow!), and the timing would then be:

- * E/W left-turns (short time)

- * E/W thru

- * N & S thru and (unprotected) left-turn

Thru traffic would then have an even larger portion of the light cycle, but it would be harder to make left turns.

Not ideal, but perhaps better than now.

(and, while not the reason I suggest this, there'd probably be less traffic on my street..)