

Honorable Mayor Sam Liccardo and San José Councilmembers
200 East Santa Clara Street
San José, CA 95113

via email, sent July 30, 2015

cc: SJ Department of Transportation Director Jim Ortbal;
Lincoln Avenue Road Diet Group.

re: the Lincoln Avenue Road Diet

Dear Mayor and Councilmembers,

I am writing to ask that the City take the time to properly evaluate the “Lincoln Avenue Road Diet”, the City’s current experiment with traffic calming in the Willow Glen shopping district.

As a long-time and frequent customer of the various shops on Lincoln – I go to downtown Willow Glen by foot, bike, or car probably a dozen(!) times a week – I feel that the Road Diet has been a success. The shopping district is now far more bike- and pedestrian-friendly, the vehicular traffic generally seems calmer and far safer, parking was only negligibly impacted, and the shops and street life all feel more lively and vibrant.

However, the process has been far from ideal, resulting in a badly divided community and rushed decisions even before a number of the planned street improvement could be implemented. And the community has a number of associated issues (e.g., parking and cut-through traffic) that should have been acknowledged, even if they might not have been addressed as part of the process.

The road diet was introduced with only minimal public input this past spring in advance of a planned street resurfacing. The thought was, “why not just try an alternative street configuration for a while, and if the neighbors and businesses like it, then the street will be striped in that manner after the resurfacing.” And that phrasing has been interpreted as having given the Willow Glen Neighborhood Association (WGNA) and the Willow Glen Business Association (WGBA) vetoes over the road diet. That is hardly fair to them or the community as they represent only their members and only a small fraction of the affected community. These associations then prematurely rendered their judgments, long before the experiment was to end and even before the transportation department could implement a number of the planned improvements.

Lincoln Avenue can be repaved next spring just as easily as this fall. Please delay that work and use the time to complete the diet’s implementation (e.g., adjust the timing of the signal at Willow & Lincoln and fix the left-turn lane by the elementary school). Listen to the concerns of the community, acknowledge them, and see if they can be readily addressed. And please defer the final decision on the road diet until the City has had an opportunity to properly evaluate the impact of the full implementation.

The road diet is a change, and change can be scary. Thirty-some years ago I served on the City’s task force to evaluate Lincoln Avenue – we too proposed a road diet, but were told we’d have to wait for a while! – and I remember that some merchants feared that even just planting street trees would damage business since motorists wouldn’t be able see their window posters. Today, some merchants

again are scared and fearful of change. And there may well be changes: the gas station and the take-out deli might notice a reduction in sales with the road diet's decrease in commuter traffic, although resurrecting the four-lane expressway could adversely impact other businesses like the bike shop and the sidewalk cafes and bistros. (And some changes might be totally unrelated to the road diet, depending instead on the fads in clothing fashions or the opening of competing shops.)

As a long-term nearby resident and frequent customer, I like the changes I have seen in Lincoln Avenue over the years: it has evolved from barren throughway past rundown second-hand shops into a lovely tree-line shopping district. The road diet continues that evolution, improving the streetlife by calming traffic and encouraging walking and biking to our local shops and sidewalk cafes. I hope the diet can be extended further along Lincoln, and can also be implemented on nearby Minnesota Avenue. And a more bike- and pedestrian-friendly village will help San José meet its Envision 2040 goal of reducing "vehicle miles traveled".

But I don't like how the process has been "rushed": the impression that "it's a done deal" has divided the community and has made some oppose a project that they otherwise would have liked.

I hope you will announce that the City will pause and take the time needed to properly evaluate the road diet. Allow time to soothe the wounds and to implement the planned improvements, and then collect and evaluate the data. It is my hope that, at the end of this extended process, a fair analysis of the findings will support making the road diet permanent and will support making Willow Glen a more walkable and bikeable community.

Thank you,

~Larry Ames

nearby resident on Willow Street since 1979 (and a member of the City's "Downtown Willow Glen Advisory Committee" for the Lincoln Avenue Neighborhood Business District: see http://www.wgbackfence.net/Linc_1984/LincolnAveStudy_1984.pdf)