

## **Comments on Winooski Ave Corridor Scoping Study Alternatives**

It is critical to create a Winooski Avenue that is safe, comfortable and convenient for anyone walking or biking. We will support a design that equally accommodates both types of users, which honors the character of the street and is reflective of its surrounding context, and which takes into account impacts on the broader transportation network.

We envision a continuous bike network with facilities on both sides of the street throughout the corridor, as well as abundant sidewalk space with an adequate buffer for those walking. Narrowing travel lanes to 10 feet, repurposing on-street parking on one side of the street, road dieting from 4 to 2 travel lanes within the downtown core (Main – Pearl) with turning functionality, limiting road widening and sidewalk/greenbelt disturbances, and experimenting with a variety of different options via pilot projects (eg ones that convert the street back to two-way between N. Union and Pearl, and test out a parking protected bike lane) would achieve this vision and are all priorities for us.

### **Our Assumptions / Guiding Principles**

#### **Plan with the Full Network in Mind**

- As the primary north – south route through the city, any changes made will significantly impact the entire street network, and proposed alternatives should be considered in this light (e.g. how can changes help restore the traditional street grid)
- It's been mentioned at several meetings that decisions about how to design intersections (especially whether or not to include roundabouts) have to happen after decisions are made about how to design biking infrastructure for the corridor. We encourage the planning team to, instead, think about what is ultimately desired for the corridor and surrounding network as a whole, and to open up those conversations so decisions are made simultaneously with this context in mind. Don't save conversations about roundabouts for some future date.

#### **Slower Speeds and Intuitive Designs Create Safer Street Networks**

- Winooski Ave has a high rate of crashes because it is designed in a way that is confusing for all users, and with segments that encourage reckless behavior.
- The one-way section between Pearl and N. Union encourages cars to speed and to swerve in and out of the existing bike lane, forces those biking to travel up and down both sides of the street, and frustrates vehicles that have to watch out for bicyclists traveling in both directions only to be redirected onto networks of other one-way streets.
- Imagine how much wider a 35 ft road will feel if you remove parking on one side, and add a bike lane and contraflow bike lane on either side of the travel lane. By making the travel lane appear wider, this design encourages vehicles to speed, which makes the street less safe. Adding a contraflow lane to a one-

way street in this location doesn't address the multiple challenges posed by having people biking in the opposite direction on this corridor.

- Two-way traffic, by contrast, helps to slow speeds by creating a visual barrier to oncoming traffic. Furthermore, given the city's disrupted grid system, opportunities to reconnect the network, reduce redundancy and travel distances, create alternative routes to diffuse traffic and alleviate bottlenecks, and minimize confusion for all road users should be capitalized on. In the context of this corridor, two-way vs. one-way street networks are safer for those walking, biking and driving and should be explored.

### **On-Street Parking is Not Always the Enemy**

- Streets are public spaces and should be designed to accommodate all types of users, but removing on-street parking and replacing it with a bike lane is not always the best solution, and won't necessarily make a street safer. On-street parking can serve other important purposes, particularly within an urban, mixed-use context. A North Winooski Ave without any on-street parking could mean there would be no buffer from cars for those walking, and would do little to slow traffic speeds.
- Imagine how it feels to walk along the side of North Street that is without any on-street parking or real buffer from traffic/greenbelt. As advocates for both bike and pedestrian amenities, there's a balance that needs to be struck to make streets more accommodating for all users. Although we support parking removal on one side of Winooski Ave, we are hesitant to have parking removed from both sides as we feel it may have detrimental impacts on the pedestrian experience and the experience of the streetscape as a whole.
- All this being said, there is an abundance of privately owned off-street parking available along N. Winooski Ave (particularly behind Butch & Babes, Vermont Legal Aid, North End Studios, Old Spokes Home, and across from the African Market). These spaces could be repurposed or shared for public use at different times of day and night, making it easier to make the case that some existing on-street parking could be repurposed for bike lanes.

### **Embrace Experimentation**

- In general, testing out a design for feedback before installing it permanently makes good financial and political sense.
- This corridor is complicated. There are no easy answers. It's difficult to know what the right approach is unless we test out different options. We can't stress enough the value of trying things out, and allowing enough time to learn from the results. Trying out two or three designs for one location can help everyone learn what works and what doesn't before making final determinations. It may seem unnecessary, or cumbersome, but in the long run it will be worth the investment of time and other resources.
- Church Street began as a day-long street fair....

## **Our Preferred Design**

**Riverside/N Winooski:** Have intersection function more as shared space with slower speeds and easier bike/pedestrian/vehicle interactions, ideally with mini roundabout incorporated. Opens up possibility of taking Willard lane as a cyclist, if that bike lane can eventually be extended north, and provides opportunity for more welcoming gateway to ONE.

**Riverside to North Street (40 ft):** 2a with adjustments to stay within existing ROW of 40 ft. Remove parking on east side. Maintain 1 foot buffer between bike lane and parking/bike lane and travel lane. We are open to piloting the parking protected bike lane between Riverside and Pearl, but have some concerns about how it will function in practice (sight lines, driveway navigation, issues with irregular parking and confusion over where to park, year-round maintenance, etc) and prefer this configuration: 8-5-1-10-10-1-5. Return to two-way vehicle traffic between North and N. Union. We are supportive of a design for shared space at N. Winooski/N Union/Decatur. Could include mini roundabout or speed table design to slow speeds. Taco Gordo needs to make changes to improve sight lines for those coming out of N. Union onto N. Winooski (bushes/sign in the way). The new bank property/Asian Market needs to eliminate one driveway and reinstate greenbelt as this set of curb cuts creates for an unsafe bike and pedestrian experience.

**North to Pearl (35 ft):** This is possibly the most challenging section, and perhaps one of the more expensive if some road widening is required over the longer term. Given these challenges, it is important that the city take time to assess different options before committing prematurely to a permanent change. We'd like to see the return to two-way vehicle traffic with bike facilities in each direction explored as one option (1c with adjustments to stay almost within existing ROW, though SB bike lane with NB sharrows may be required to try out a pilot in this stretch given limited roadway width).

We are also open to trying out a parking protected lane. If a parking protected lane does not seem functional after piloting for reasons noted above, in the shorter term, we would recommend the following for this segment: 7-6-11-11 (with NB super-backed sharrows). Parking removal on both sides may be needed in the short segment by Radio Bean/other businesses to maintain existing sidewalks/greenbelt and accommodate a bike lane and NB travel lane. If a parking protected lane were installed permanently, 1.5 ft could be removed from each side of roadway or 2 ft off one side and 1 ft off the other, for 6-7-10-10-5.

**Pearl to Main (40-43 ft):** This is the section to tackle first, as it is the most dangerous section of the corridor. The changes could be instituted as a quick-build until funding for the curbed median becomes available. 2c with adjustments (2 travel lanes, each 10.5 ft with a series of 7 foot wide medians with spacing between that allow for turns at key locations, and 5 foot bike lanes in each direction with 1 ft buffer: 5-1-10.5-7-10.5-1-5. Bike lane buffer disappears at intersections to allow for two 10 foot travel lanes and one 10 foot turning lane. See examples below of how a pedestrian refuge/median with mid-block turning capacity might function.

**Main to King (40 ft):** Maintain parking on west side of street, and remove parking on east side to allow for bike lanes in each direction: 8-5-1-10-10-1-5.

**King to Maple (30 ft):** Prefer to maintain as 2-way vehicle traffic. Add southbound bike lane and northbound bike lane through parking removal: 5-10-10-5. Would be nice to add street trees/plantings in existing greenbelt on east side of street.

**Maple to Saint Paul:** Maintain existing conditions.

Examples of Pedestrian Medians (potential models for Main – Pearl St)



<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/publicroads/12marapr/04.cfm> (left)

## **Key Issues to Highlight**

### **Road diet**

Biking and walking along a road with two lanes in each direction feels very different than biking and walking along a road with 3 or 4 lanes. Do we really want any 4 or 3 lane roads (intended for more suburban or rural contexts) in the heart of Burlington's downtown? If we want to encourage land-uses along the core of Winooski Ave that are pedestrian and bike-friendly, do we want a 3-lane road between Main and Pearl?

Road dieting the most dangerous section of Winooski Ave from 4 to 2 lanes (as opposed to 4 to 3) allows for more space to buffer or protect bike lanes on both sides of the street without encroaching into sidewalk/greenbelt, creates a shorter pedestrian crossing, helps address storm water concerns by adding rain gardens/green infrastructure, and **may reduce the need for Alternative 3 (2 way protected bike facility), which is not an appropriate design for this context. In addition to challenges posed by multiple driveways, those biking in the two-way facility would need to make turns across multiple vehicle travel lanes, which is unnecessarily unsafe.**

We'd like to see the proposed alternative of 2 travel lanes with a 7 foot median (vs. 2 travel lanes and a full center turn lane between Main and Pearl) be more

prominently displayed as a preferred option in the alternative scenarios. It would also be helpful to show the median in outreach materials with spaces that would allow for mid-block crossings as well as turns onto cross streets.

### **Two Way Protected Bike Lanes**

NACTO recommends constructing this type of facility along corridors with few driveways or cross streets, along streets with high vehicle speeds (upwards of 25), on streets with multiple vehicular travel lanes (a higher stress environment for biking), and on streets where most destinations are on one side (thus reducing the need to cross the street). Winooski Ave does not meet any of these criteria, and so the design does not make sense in this context. Even with phased signalization, when someone biking either north or south wants to turn out of the protected cycle track, they will have a challenging time doing so safely. On blocks with many driveways (which was the experience during the Union St pop-up), it will be a challenge to even place any bollards, as most will hinder turning movements for vehicles, thereby leaving the protected lane unprotected. People often reference the success of Montreal as a bike-friendly city, and look to their designs as solutions to our challenges. Burlington is not Montreal. Montreal has long stretches of city block after city block without any (or very few) driveways/curb cuts, which are more ideal for this type of design. Just because it is a city nearby that many are familiar with, does not mean the design of its streets always ought to be replicated in Burlington.

### **Road Widening**

Avoid road widening to the greatest extent possible to preserve the existing sidewalk/streetscape, and resort to a different design if road widening will negatively impact tree canopy along the corridor. In one key location, widening could make a significant difference, namely, in the two blocks between North and Pearl Streets. There is little curb to remove here, and there is enough of a greenbelt that street trees may not be impacted by minimal road widening in this location.

### **Bike Parking**

As identified through this study and a recent BBA survey, there is a shortage of bike parking downtown and along the corridor. To encourage people to bike to businesses, make sure bike parking is installed in appropriate locations to accommodate the increased demand. The new parklet program might provide an opportunity to add additional storage outside of the ONE and downtown businesses in such a way that is incorporated into the design of the parklet itself.

### **Misc Improvements**

There are numerous other ways to make the streetscape more appealing to those walking and biking.

- Opening up the private park/playground at the corner of Pearl and Winooski for public use (removing the fence) would increase access to much needed green space in this part of the city.
- A mural on the brick wall across the street (southwest side of Winooski/Pearl intersection) would bring color and dynamism to this intersection.

- The corner of College and Winooski at the library could also benefit from some type of public art.
- Rite Aid could use, and has room for, a greenbelt/street trees along the west side of Winooski Ave.
- Discouraging surface parking and encouraging more mixed-use development along the core of the corridor through a land tax could be a beneficial way to change perceptions about streets as public space.