

## **NEHBA response to Nicollet Ave Road Construction – basic design phase**

The Nicollet-East Harriet Business Association (NEHBA) has been actively participating in the planning stage of the Nicollet Avenue Road Construction project for the last year. This memo represents what NEHBA has heard from the businesses that are represented in this corridor.

Nicollet Avenue was last reconstructed over 50 years. NEHBA wants this project to prepare Nicollet Avenue for the next 50 years of change. Nicollet Avenue is a unique, multi-modal, transportation corridor that is a vital lifeline of the City. Throughout the basic design phase, the businesses we represent have been voicing their concerns for the roadway width and bump outs. Many of the businesses originally sought a 48' road width which would be consistent with that of Nicollet south of 40<sup>th</sup> Street, but believe a compromise of a minimum 46 ft. wide roadway with no bump outs will allow Nicollet will be able to handle cars, buses, trucks, bikes, pedestrians - and hopefully one day, streetcars – in a climate that brings with it snow management challenges. This belief is consistent with City policy pertaining to economic development opportunities on Nicollet Avenue and other relevant city policy such as the Pedestrian Master Plan

The current City proposal is a road generally 44 ft. wide, with a 4.5 ft, green boulevard without bump outs. Most business and commercial property owners are seeking a road generally 46 ft. wide, with a 3.5 ft. green boulevard without bump outs. Boulevard amenities (and their required setbacks) such as trees, light posts, utility boxes, trash receptacles, benches and bus shelters can be equally accommodated in either size boulevard.

The preferred 46 ft. wide road width was arrived at by recognizing that in the winter roads get narrower from snow because roads are not plowed curb-to-curb. Despite the best efforts to plow curb-to-curb, the reality is that roads get narrower when snow is plowed and accumulates at the curb and in boulevards. Business owners are concerned that street parking would be eliminated on one side during the winter on a road narrower than 46 ft. During the winter of 2010-2011, one side of parking was eliminated on a portion of 38<sup>th</sup> Street that is 44 ft. wide because of snow accumulation.

Nicollet carries so many larger vehicles like buses and delivery trucks that business owners are also concerned for the safety of people entering and exiting their vehicles on the street. The difference in the preferred boulevard widths will be virtually unnoticeable to most people, but the extra one foot of road on each side will change the potential customers' perception of safe parking, especially during snow accumulation.

### **Economic Development**

The City has been pursuing economic development opportunities on Nicollet Ave for many years – and the Kmart property at Lake/Nicollet is at the center of discussion. The desire to re-open Nicollet Ave at Lake Street, and the area's connection to other transportation options, has made Kmart a prime redevelopment site. Mayor RT Rybak has stated in a number of State of City addresses that Nicollet can play a major redevelopment role if Nicollet is reopened.<sup>1</sup> The City

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<sup>1</sup> 2008, 2011 State of the City

[http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/mayor/news/20110308newsmayor\\_stateofcityrelease.asp](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/mayor/news/20110308newsmayor_stateofcityrelease.asp)

created policy through planning studies that with appropriate public investment, Nicollet Avenue will generate new economic development opportunities<sup>2</sup>. Even the traffic analysis for this project uses future traffic counts with a re-opened Nicollet Avenue. With the likelihood of Nicollet being open again, this portion of Nicollet should be designed now to accommodate future traffic needs, which includes streetcars, bikes, cars and pedestrians.

### **Current Conditions and Vehicular/Non-vehicular Uses**

Nicollet Avenue has many modes of transportation, cars, buses, delivery trucks, bikes and pedestrians. It is a Metro Transit High Frequency Route and in certain areas, carries up to 10,000 cars per day. Much of the road is 50 ft. or wider today. Most of the sidewalks are 5 to 6 ft. wide and the boulevard between the road and sidewalk is, at best, 3 ft. in most locations. In addition, many of the residential and some commercial properties have obstructions in the right of way between the property lines and the sidewalks. As identified in Access Minneapolis<sup>3</sup>, determining the roadway design needs to take into consideration the priorities of all these modes of transportation as well as those of business and residential uses on Nicollet.

### **Recommendation Rationale**

NEHBA has been facilitating a discussion with Nicollet Avenue businesses and building owners since summer 2010. Over that time, businesses owners have consistently communicated strong opinions to NEHBA about two issues pertaining to the basic street design: roadway width and bump outs. These business and building owners along Nicollet Avenue in unison view on-street parking, adequate road width for all modes of transportation and delivery throughout the year, and pedestrian safety as the major influence for street design that affect the long-term health and prosperity of these businesses. Loss of parking, even a perceived one, can have result in a loss of customers. The safety of customers and employees also contribute to the income generated by businesses in the Nicollet Avenue project area.

#### **1. Roadway width**

Businesses have told NEHBA that they would like to maintain the current roadway width. To allow for parking and driving lanes that can accommodate all forms of traffic, as well as increase the pedestrian amenities in a larger green boulevard, there is a compromise between the existing conditions and a much narrower road. NEHBA is in favor of a 46 ft. wide road for the majority of the project area. This would allow for 10 ft. parking lanes and 13 ft. driving lanes in both directions. Sidewalks could generally remain at six (6) feet in width with a 3.5 foot green boulevard that would allow for healthy tree growth and an enhanced pedestrian experience. The businesses on the avenue are also open to a four foot wide boulevard and a five and one-half foot wide sidewalk.

Businesses are aware that improvements in the public right of way can be beneficial to their bottom line. Investment by the City encourages private investment and a well

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<sup>2</sup> Many planning documents support streetcars as an economic development tool, two of which are the Nicollet Avenue: The Revitalization of Minneapolis' Main Street" and the Minneapolis Streetcar Funding Study Final

<sup>3</sup> Access Minneapolis. 3.5 Determine Modal Needs and Priorities

maintained environment gives the consumer confidence to walk, bike, drive or bus to visit businesses. Businesses believe that 46 ft. is needed to attain the variety of transportation needs on Nicollet and accommodate the narrowing road with that inevitably comes with snow management on heavily trafficked road with intensive on street parking needs.

NEHBA represents many businesses that rely on on-street parking for a variety of reasons: customer parking, and loading and deliveries and people. With the variety of transportation modes on Nicollet, there is a desire to see cars, trucks, buses and bikes being able to use the roadway, at the same time. NEHBA believes that a “complete street” would accommodate not just the pedestrian needs of the corridor, but also the ability for a biker to travel with cars and buses.

NEHBA understands that a larger boulevard would allow for better snow storage out of the street. But due to the cumulative impacts of multiple snow events, the amount of snow that accumulates in the street is inevitable. A 46 ft. wide road would allow for the continuation of large sidewalks and a minimum *increase* from what exists today of 2-3 ft. to the right of way boulevard.

## 2. Bump outs

Businesses have also been consistent in their opposition to bump outs along Nicollet Avenue. Loss of parking, especially during winter, vehicular congestion, and conflicts between bikes and vehicles are some reasons businesses have concerns with adding bump outs to Nicollet Avenue. Some of the business owners cite witnessed motor vehicle and bike conflict on King’s Highway and Lyndale Avenue where bump-outs are present.

The safety reasons to including bump outs are well understood by businesses, especially the safety for pedestrians crossing this busy road. NEHBA encourages the City to examine all the possibilities to increase pedestrian safety that is included in policy documents, including improved crossing signals, pavement striping and material changes to identify pedestrian crosswalks.

Businesses feel that the bump outs will further reduce on-street parking during winter due to the inability of snow plows being able to plow close to the curb. While curb-to-curb plowing may be a desirable aspiration, NEHBA believes that bump outs present a difficulty to plow drivers. While avoiding the bump out, the plow driver unavoidably must also miss plowing the roadway directly after the bump out. The cumulative impact over a winter will be a loss of many parking spaces. Businesses have witnessed this effect on other streets with bump outs, such as King’s Highway and Lyndale Avenue. Businesses have also commented on the concrete damage done to the front side of bump outs and wonder if the bump-outs will be maintained and how the maintenance costs will affect them.

Businesses have also identified concerns with vehicle congestion at bump outs. With the variety of transportation modes on Nicollet, there is a desire to see cars, trucks, buses and

bikes being able to use the roadway, at the same time. The addition of bump outs to a narrow street will have unfortunate impacts on bikers and other vehicles. With the narrower roadway at a bump out, there could be unintended congestion and a greater concern for safety. NEHBA believes that a “complete street” would accommodate not just the pedestrian needs of the corridor, but also the ability for a biker to travel with cars and buses.

In conclusion, NEHBA commends the City for the outreach efforts undertaken with the Nicollet Ave Road Construction project. It is a complex avenue that is home to and serves many types of stakeholders with a spectrum of needs. The future potential of this section of Nicollet is exciting. The Steering Group meetings, changes to project management, community meetings, and small node meetings with businesses, residents and property owners have all improved communication about the project. NEHBA believes this level of engagement will help businesses survive the impacts created by loss of visibility during construction. Engaging businesses and commercial property owners helps ensure a street design that creates an atmosphere for them to prosper into the future. NEHBA appreciates that businesses and the businesses association have been treated as stakeholders and given an opportunity to develop the design of Nicollet Avenue. We truly hope that the City will take into consideration these serious concerns for the basic roadway design of Nicollet Avenue.