

**Transportation System Plan (TSP) Forum
Questions and Answers – October 24, 2012**

Why does the 4th Street railroad crossing not include auto access?

Given the difficulty of getting any railroad crossing and essentially next to impossibility of the railroad granting us a crossing, and after much deliberation we decided the important thing was for people from Hersey St. to have the ability to walk to the downtown to patronize businesses. We also thought the chance of getting a crossing would be better if we shoot for the multi-modal.

Clearly there are political challenges getting any railroad crossing. The railroad was telling us to close an existing crossing in order to add a new one and we were not willing to give up any existing crossings. There was also more sentiment in keeping it a pedestrian/bike crossing as we felt having an auto crossing really jeopardized the integrity of the railroad district neighborhood.

Also, with the proposed transit center in the railroad district which is located on the north side of the tracks, we felt that the crossing would undermine the center. We would not want a railroad crossing that would intersect the station at that location.

Ashland isn't maintaining current sidewalks and lighting; wouldn't the money be better spent to maintain what we already have?

Other than in the downtown area, residents are responsible for maintenance of the sidewalks in front of their residences. Filling in the gaps, connectivity and promoting safe routes to schools is the focus of the plan.

Why is it not the final goal of the transportation system plan to end up with a pedestrian area from the plaza to the library?

This will be a good thing to look at in the upcoming study of the downtown plan; however, a proposal that would close the downtown to pedestrians only is not consistent with a multimodal (auto, bike, pedestrian, transit, etc.) master plan.

How will funding be generated for the proposed plans? Ashland is heaping on the rate increases already.

None of the proposals would be funded with a rate increase. They will be funded from the street fund, System Development Charges (SDC's) and revenue obtained through grant opportunities. One of the reasons for the transportation system plan (TSP) update is to identify projects that will be added to the capital improvement project list. Once projects are on this list, the City is able to apply for grant funds as funding becomes available. If a project is not on the list, the City cannot apply for funding. Also, included in the plan are innovative funding options such as Fee in Lieu and multi-modal projects which make grant applications attractive on the state and federal level.

Municipalities should update their master plans every five years. The last time Ashland updated its TSP was in 1998.

What is the timeline on the downtown transportation redesign?

The study has many issues that need to be addressed with numerous stakeholders. The priority for the study is high which means it will take place within five years after the plan is adopted.

What is the cost to undo the North Main project and is that money put aside already?

The estimate to undo the project is \$35,000. Undoing the project would cost substantially less than the amount it cost to put it in place. Current striping is complicated with the bike lanes, cross hatching and turn pockets. Even though the estimate to undo the road diet is \$35,000, the City budgeted \$100,000 to cover unanticipated costs.

How about longer crossing times for pedestrians? Washington DC has 45 seconds, enough time to cross leisurely.

The transportation commission very seldom receives complaints on this topic. Recently the City has heard complaints from citizens who think the crossing times should be shortened, not lengthened. All pedestrian signal timing is within prescribed regulations.

The downtown sidewalks need to have wheelchair ramps for strollers and the disabled. Are these in your plans at downtown crosswalks?

Yes, ADA requires this by law. Any time a sidewalk is reconstructed, it must meet ADA requirements.

Hersey Street needs consistent sidewalks – any plans?

The City has been awarded an air quality grant in the amount of \$500,000 to construct sidewalks on one side of Hersey Street from Lori Lane to Oak Street, scheduled for 2013 through 2015.

Law enforcement needs to enforce bicyclists violations, why isn't there more being done?

Enforcement, education and engineering are all important components of the transportation system. The police department staff is spread thin and there is only one officer assigned full time to traffic although all officers enforce traffic laws when they have time. It's fair to assume the better the infrastructure the less conflict people will have with bicyclists which decreases the number of violations. Officers do ticket bicyclists that fail to follow traffic laws. The local judge offers a bike diversion program that requires offenders to attend bike safety classes.

Why not consider licenses for bikes to allow reporting and enforcement?

Ashland Municipal Code requires that all bikes operated in the City must be registered.

The criteria to judge the success of the road diet seems to guarantee "a success." Will you ask people what they think?

Comments are always welcome. People should remember the road diet is a pilot project and we want to judge this scientifically. Change is tough but often results in people asking themselves “why did I wait so long to do this?” The concept of trying something with the option of changing it back is refreshing.

The following criteria will be used to judge success of the road diet:

1. A reduction in the annual average number and severity of crashes on North Main.
2. Vehicles travel at a speed closer to the posted 25 mph speed limit. Prior to the road diet, the ‘85th percentile speed’ on North Main was 32 mph. That means that 85% of vehicles on North main were traveling at least 32 miles per hour.
3. Vehicles maintain an average travel time of 4 minutes and 20 seconds or less from Helman Street to the railroad trestle during the peak traffic hours of 4:00 to 6:00 p.m.
4. Impact on adjacent streets and neighborhoods, in particular Van Ness, Central, Laurel, Manzanita and Hersey (vehicle increase/decrease will be tracked on identified streets including Van Ness, Central, Laurel, Manzanita, High and Hersey).
5. An increase in bicycle and pedestrian use.
6. An increase in or majority support for keeping the Road Diet after the trial period will indicate a successful project (public input, public meetings, questionnaires, etc).

Traffic counts are also being conducted on Oak Street to determine what impact the road diet has on it.

The road diet is under a microscope by other cities. Many are looking at Ashland as a model when considering similar projects in their own towns.

If the downtown area feels/is congested now, how will two lanes ease the issue (if there is one)? Won't wider sidewalks just accommodate more panhandlers?

Traffic engineers study indicates that two lanes will accommodate the amount of traffic that currently uses three lanes and we have to rely on that kind of analysis. It's similar to the traffic engineers telling us we could implement one lane as part of the road diet. The numbers seem to be there which would allocate more roadways to sidewalks and bike lanes, thus giving more access to bikes and pedestrians. However, the proposed downtown transportation study will determine the final recommended configuration based on input from engineers, stakeholders and potential economic impacts.

In order to bring more business to downtown, could the City consider piloting the closure of Main Street from the plaza to the library one or two Saturday's during the summer. Restaurants could put tables out on the sidewalk/street, farmers market, food and merchant vendors, performers, etc. marketing the event well in advance?

This could be considered but it would take a lot of discussion, thought and involvement with the diverse group of stakeholders and it could fall into the special event category.

Crosswalks in town do not appear to be any safer, despite the city saying it would happen. Will this planning fix the issue, leave it the same, or make it worse? Why are there no signs about pedestrian rights (as in Jacksonville)?

Ashland has a sign pollution ordinance. It allows as few signs as are necessary to reduce driver distraction. (The panel was not familiar with Jacksonville's pedestrian signs and therefore could not comment further.)

As a tourist town, as well as a retirement mecca, expecting more people to ride bikes is unrealistic. Plus, with winter weather, many will drive instead.

We are not expecting everyone to ride bikes or walk but we want to make sure the infrastructure is in place for those who would use other modes (bike, pedestrian, transit) if they are available. For example the TSP recommendation of a rubber tire trolley route that would service the downtown and operate during peak hours of theater and dinner would encourage tourists to leave cars behind, thus reducing the number of vehicles using our transportation system.

The following comments were not addressed during the forum:

Are the needs of the downtown businesses really being considered as the planning progresses?

Yes, the downtown business community will be important stakeholders during the upcoming downtown transportation study.

Systems development charges already burden homeowners and businesses. Do you plan to increase this already punitive fee?

Systems development charges (SDC's) ensure that new development pays their fair share of system improvements that would not be required but for growth related development. New SDC's calculations are not yet completed; however, staff does anticipate possible SDC increases.

I live on Clay Street near the Siskiyou School. I think that part is still a county road.

Yes, it is still a county road.