



Atlanta Avenue Railroad Crossing Improvements Emailed Comments Summary

David Crenshaw

12/07/2020

1. There needs to be dedicated turn lanes on College to northbound traffic in both directions. The current plan shows islands with only 1 lane in each direction. This will cause huge backups, especially when a train comes, and the traffic wanting to go straight westward or eastward cannot move.
2. Likewise a dedicated left turn lane on Howard going south onto Atlanta/Adair as is the current set up.
3. Improvements to Adair are needed. This street has the worst speed bumps in Decatur..they are just worn out and the street is full of potholes!

Otherwise, I like the plan!

Response:

1&2 - The concept plan shown in the workshop includes dedicated right and left turn lanes on both Howard and College Avenue for the exact purpose you stated of preventing back up of traffic during train crossings. See the "Atlanta Avenue Workshop Overview Presentation" PowerPoint for a diagram of our current roadway geometry concept.

3 - The scope of this project does not extend throughout Adair Street, but necessary improvements will be made on the approach to the Howard/Adair intersection.

Jim Smith

12/09/2020

Thank you for some excellent sessions. My thoughts regarding the changes to W. Howard Ave as regards the planters are as follows:

1 - Option D with the taller planters with taller vegetation will remove important safety sightlines for cyclists who need to merge back into vehicular traffic in order to turn off of W. Howard onto Commerce or any other street. Additionally, cyclists will be somewhat obscured from drivers, again creating a safety issue when cyclists need to merge back into traffic.

2 - The parking blocks/stops that are in between most of the existing rectangular planters prevent cyclists from merging back into traffic without coming to a complete stop in the bikeway (area between planters and curb). At least when nearer to Commerce Dr, those blocks should be removed to make it safer for



cyclists to merge into traffic. The only alternative for cyclists is to just stay in the traffic lane as the PATH is usually too crowded to ride at any degree of speed.

3 - The session that included a planting layout for the "reclaimed" space at Adair, showed a plan that seemed to remove that bikeway for the length of the "reclaimed" space. That is what my comment in that session was in reference to. Since that bikeway starts back at Paden Circle, removing it from this area only would be really odd and a safety hazard to cyclists. If the area containing the bikeway was to be completely removed (i.e. from Paden Cir to Commerce Ave) and replaced with plantings and grass, cyclists who wish to ride at any degree of speed will be forced to ride in traffic, with the associated risks. I have greatly appreciated the existence of the bikeway as that is located along my usual return leg after riding to downtown and I am often quite tired. Having that area of refuge from traffic is quite beneficial.

Response:

1 - The intersection will be designed with enough clear distance for cyclists and motorists to have ample visibility when cyclists attempt to merge. The Howard mid-block options refer to the treatment of the corridor sections outside of the intersections.

2 – We have heard this comment from a few others, and this is an issue that can be solved by the City of Decatur as a separate and more immediate project where some of the blocks are removed to allow merging. When this project begins, part of the improvements would include removing all of the parking blocks.

3 – The existing PATH and sidewalks will not be removed during this project. We propose to extend and/or improve these existing facilities and thus improve the quality of cycling along the corridor.

Therese May

12/09/2020

Dear Hugh Saxon,

I hope you are well. I attended the Atlanta Ave. project streetscape presentation tonight. Thanks for arranging the presentation. It was very helpful. I wanted to send you an idea I have about the streetscape on Howard Ave.

I heard in the session that new planters may be considered. I really want to recommend you steer away from more planters. You may know I defended the use of planters with letters to the Decaturish editor and in person discussions. In the end, our little town was quite divided. It became a rather toxic subject. For Decatur's sake, I hope you will consider abandoning the idea of installing any more or new planters.



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You may not know that I live on Melrose Ave and I walk the entire stretch of Howard Ave every single day. I believe we need to keep Howard limited to the lanes we currently have – one each way. The lane reduction has been successful in calming the traffic.

I would like to see a new tree line! A tree line that is exactly where the planters are now. See my drawing attached. Trees would thrive in this section because they would be inside the current curb line, and free to grow up, above the power lines. In addition, this would make Howard simply gorgeous. It would calm traffic even more. I would hope you would have long sections of soil for them to grow in, vs the little squares that are typically used in cities to contain trees. It would be amazing if you planted multiple kinds of over story trees, like large leaf Oaks and tulip poplars, not just pin oaks.

I hope my rough drawing helps illustrate my idea.

Again, thanks for taking ideas.



Can we replace the planters with permanent tree plantings? These trees would be able to flourish without power lines above. This would make Howard beautiful.

Response:

The landscaping treatment of the corridor will depend on the preference of the community and feasibility. One of the concepts we showcased during the Traffic Calming session of the virtual workshop (Option D – Planter Islands) includes planter islands being installed in the midblock areas of Howard Avenue. These would be permanent features and their size and type will be dependent on their ability to grow and flourish in the median provided. We will consider your suggestions for the trees as we move into the design phase.



The proposed geometry, while it does increase the number of lanes, only adds turn lanes and are for the purpose of preventing congestion during daily train crossings. We will continue to evaluate the geometry for performance and safety as we move into the design phase.

Aaron Wiener

12/11/2020

I am emailing you to provide support for a protected bike lane/path on both the east and west side of Atlanta Ave / Adair. I also want to provide support to permanent planters on the north side of Howard Ave. This provides protection to people living on the north side of Howard and direct access to Marta. Also, when thinking about permanent planters please consider storm water and green infrastructure.

***Response:** Thank you for your comments. Drainage considerations will be made for any proposed improvements.*

Beth Hammons

12/13/2020

Hello Mr. Saxon,

I am emailing you to express my support for a protected bike lane/path on the east and west side of Atlanta Ave / Adair. I also want to provide support to install permanent planters on the north side of Howard Ave. I own a home and live on the north side of Howard and can attest to feeling unsafe as a pedestrian walking to access Marta. Also, when thinking about permanent planters please consider storm water and green infrastructure and how this impacts the homeowners on Howard Ave.

***Response:** Thank you for your comments. Drainage considerations will be made for any proposed improvements.*

Barry Hall

12/13/2020

Hello Mr. Saxon:

Thank you for all your work on making our little city a better, and more fun, place to live.

I was unable to attend Wednesday's virtual open house on the Atlanta Ave. re-do.

I would, though, like to register "votes" for the various possibilities presented to the City.

Railroad crossing:

Alternative #3 gets my vote and #2 also would be good.

Streetscapes:



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Again, alternative #3 looks good, though #1 comes close. (My reasoning for not favoring terra cotta planters is their lack of heft -- they would be much easier to tip over or otherwise disturb.)

I also really like the parklet. I wonder, too, whether or not the City could one day put an official park just west of all this re-do on that large lawn. The neighbors there are already using it as a soccer ground.

Traffic calming:

On the Howard St. improvements I favor the buffered bikeway Option A.

This “both sides” bikeway would make westbound right turns safer and much less stressful, which would possibly increase use of the street by non-motoring families. It also aligns more with standards for highest-quality cycling infrastructure.

Once more, thanks for your hard work for, and patience with, the City.

Response: Thank you for your comments.

Jack Kittle

12/23/2020

Pedestrian Advisory Committee

Hugh,

The Pedestrian Advisory Committee (PAC) approved the following comments with regard to the Atlanta Avenue RR Crossing Project. The Active Living Board has had the opportunity to review these comments via email. To date, I've only received one positive response on this statement from ALB members, so these comments are just from the PAC.

Hope you are having a good holiday season.

Jack

The Pedestrian Advisory Committee of the Active Living Board strongly endorses Ped/Bike Alternatives 2 and 3 for the Atlanta Avenue Rail Crossing Improvement Project. These options will dramatically improve pedestrian safety at one of the historically most challenging intersections in the city. As a consequence, this improvement has the potential to increase pedestrian usage between the northwest and southwest parts of the city and hopefully reduce automobile trips.

We also strongly encourage the inclusion of signalization with the following features:

- 1) leading pedestrian intervals
- 2) advanced automatic recall technology with sensors for all non-vehicle crossings

- 3) audible pedestrian crosswalk signals to assist visually impaired pedestrians



Response: It is our intention to include Leading Pedestrian Intervals (LPIs) at crosswalks. Sensors and audible signals will be taken into consideration as we proceed into the design phase.



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Tim Bricker

01/09/2020

Hugh,

I want to thank you for having these work sessions, but the format was very inefficient. For the breakout sessions that I attended, a majority of the questions were referred to other sessions. While it's inevitable that this will happen, 1) the moderator should be more knowledgeable about which questions should be asked in each session, and 2) the speakers spent way too much time responding to these. So, in the end, only 1 or 2 relevant questions were answered for each session. It would also be helpful to have longer sessions.

***Response:** Thank you for your comments. We will strive to provide a more efficient format for future workshops should we have another virtual one. Please visit the project website to view the responses to all questions asked during the three workshops.*

Rebecca Serna

01/12/2021

Atlanta Bicycle Coalition

Dear Hugh,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Atlanta Avenue crossing project on behalf of the Atlanta Bicycle Coalition. After years of dangerous interactions and crashes at this intersection, we're very pleased that the City of Decatur is taking action to make it safer for everyone. Our comments and questions are below.

Preferred alternative:

- We prefer ped/bike alt #3: dual separated shared path, with modifications (see examples) that would keep it closer to the street for line of visibility from people driving.
- We recommend adding mountable curbs and reducing the turning radii at four corners of Atlanta / Howard / College.

Turn lanes:

- While we understand the intention and the challenges posed by the active rail line, we are concerned that the additional turn lanes increase the crossing width too much, especially with so

many children, families, and older adults crossing at this location.

- What are the warrants for the new turn lanes?
- If you keep them in the design, please consider adding a dedicated right turn phase to



reduce/eliminate conflict with people on foot, bike, and in wheelchairs or otherwise mobility impaired



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Pedestrian crossing safety:

- Will there be leading pedestrian intervals for people walking and cycling? We have found these to be key to improving safety at crossings.

Trail width:

- Please consider widening the trail at intersections in order to allow space for people to queue or proceed through the intersection safely. While 10' is the minimum width, it appears there is room to exceed the minimum.

Olympic Place:

- If Alt 3 is selected, ensure the signal phasing at Olympic Place accounts for the multiuse trail crossing, with special consideration for southbound cyclists crossing both College and Olympic.

Centerline hardening:

- Consider centerline hardening for left-turning movements to force turning vehicles to turn left at a tighter angle, thereby improving safety.

I'm happy to discuss any of these questions or concerns with your team further if that's helpful.

Response:

Preferred alternative:

- *turning radii was and will continue to be considered for traffic calming. We will consider mountable curbs as well.*

Turn lanes:

- *Thank you for your comments. We will continue to evaluate the proposed geometry for optimal performance and safety.*
- *The turn lane was added in response to concerns about queues during railroad gate closures. However, a turn lane analysis (NCHRP Report 279) suggests they will be warranted.*
- *The right turn phase will be especially considered for pedestrians and bicyclists with the potential to include on-demand no-right-on-red signals.*

Pedestrian crossing safety:

- *Leading Pedestrian Intervals will be used at all crossings.*

Trail width:

- *The width of the trail is partially dependent on CSX approval of the width of the crossing, it is also dependent on the consideration of cyclists' speeds as they traverse a wide travel path.*

Olympic Place:

- *Signals will be appropriately phased in consideration of all modes of travel.*



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Tonio Andrade

01/12/2021

Decatur Bicycle Coalition Executive Board

Dear Mayor Garrett, Mayor Pro Tem Powers, Commissioners Mayer, Walsh, and Dusenberry, and Deputy City Manager Hugh Saxon,

The city has submitted for public commentary plans to redo the intersection at Atlanta Avenue and W. Howard Ave. This intersection certainly needs an overhaul. Its dangerous turn lanes and convoluted crossings have led to a number of accidents involving bicyclists and other vulnerable road users. We believe, however, that the new draft plans, if implemented, would prove dangerous to vulnerable users, including school children, pedestrians, people on bikes, and people in wheelchairs.

No one would disagree that this intersection needs attention. The current crossing is extremely problematic, especially for people on foot, on bikes, and in wheelchairs. The city has already done a great deal to address this issue, by improving the pedestrian crossings near Adair Street and installing a road diet on W. Howard Avenue that has successfully calmed traffic speeds, improved motorists' behavior, and, most importantly, shortened crossing distances. The pedestrian island at Adair Street, in particular, was an excellent addition. These improvements have paid dividends since Covid-19 put such a premium on the ability to safely exercise while also social distancing. The road diet with the planter-protected buffers has created such a sense of safety that many families now view the area as a park, and they now feel far safer than before when crossing to go to and from Renfroe Middle School, Decatur High School, Oakhurst Elementary, and FAVE Upper Elementary school.

We are excited by this opportunity to build upon this success by making it even safer to access for Decatur citizens young and old. The new plans, however, call for a dramatic widening of the roadways on both sides of the railway tracks to make room for turning lanes. Both W. Howard and College Avenues would be widened to four lanes at the intersection, with dedicated turn lanes. Wide intersections of this type, especially when designed with dedicated turn lanes, tend to be very dangerous for pedestrians and people on bikes and in wheelchairs, especially small ones, like children.

We have shown the proposed plans to a number of experts, and they agree that if the city wishes to ensure the safety of vulnerable users – and particularly children – the plans need significant revision. We strongly urge the following improvements to the draft plans.

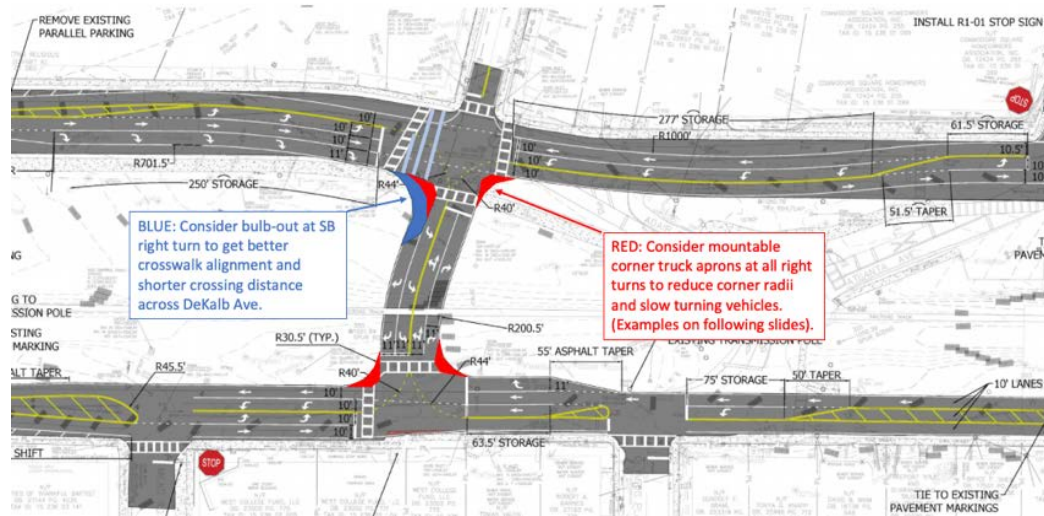


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DECREASE CROSSING DISTANCES FOR VULNERABLE USERS.

The most significant problem with the plans is the increased crossing distances for vulnerable users. The easiest way to remove this problem is to remove turn lanes. We urge you to reconsider whether all of these new turn lanes are necessary, especially given that there are excellent for motor vehicle crossings very close by, at both McDonough and East Lake (a subterranean crossing). This is the solution we overwhelmingly prefer.

If that is not possible, then there are other ways to reduce crossing distances. One good way is to add bulb outs, perhaps with truck mountable crossing aprons, as follows:



For an example of truck corner aprons, see Appendix 1.

Bulb-outs of this type can go a long way toward protecting vulnerable users by ensuring that crossing distances are shorter and turn radii are tighter (which forces motorists to use safer speeds and pay more attention).

1.2 2. ENSURE DEDICATED RIGHT- AND LEFT-TURN PHASING FOR TRAFFIC SIGNALS.

You may already be considering dedicated left-turn phasing, but right turn phasing is also vital. So far as we can tell from the draft plans, the right turn lanes don't currently have their own signal phasing. Instead,

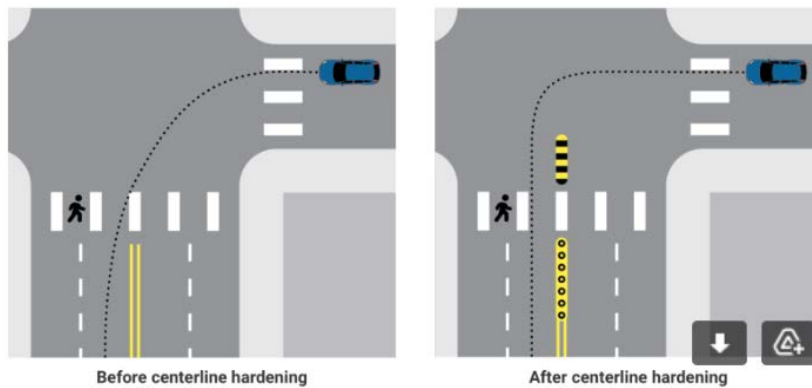
they proceed on the through green signal. This creates a dangerous conflict between walkers/cyclists/wheelchair users on the one hand and motor vehicle users on the other.



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1.3 ADD CENTERLINE HARDENING FOR LEFT-TURNING MOVEMENTS

Centerline hardening for left-turning vehicles forces turning vehicles to turn left at a tighter angle and improves safety. Here is an example.



For more on centerline hardening, see <https://www.iihs.org/news/detail/simple-infrastructure-changes-make-left-turns-safer-for-pedestrians>.

1.4 4. DEDICATED SIGNAL HEADS FOR PEDESTRIANS/CYCLISTS/WHEELCHAIR USERS

Install dedicated signal heads for pedestrians/cyclists/wheelchair users to help control movements. The signal heads should be conveniently located where users queue.

1.5 5. ALTERNATE 3 FOR THE CROSSING TRAILS IS PREFERABLE, WITH PROTECTED LANES

There should absolutely be trails on both sides of the crossing (alt 3). There is no need to increase the conflicts for people walking and cycling by forcing them to cross on a specific side of the street, and any bike/multi-use crossings must be physically protected, not just painted. For years now, the city has acknowledged that multi-use and bike paths should be protected from motor vehicle traffic. So bike/wheelchair facilities should be added to facilitate crossing of the intersections in all directions, and they should have physical protection from motor vehicles.

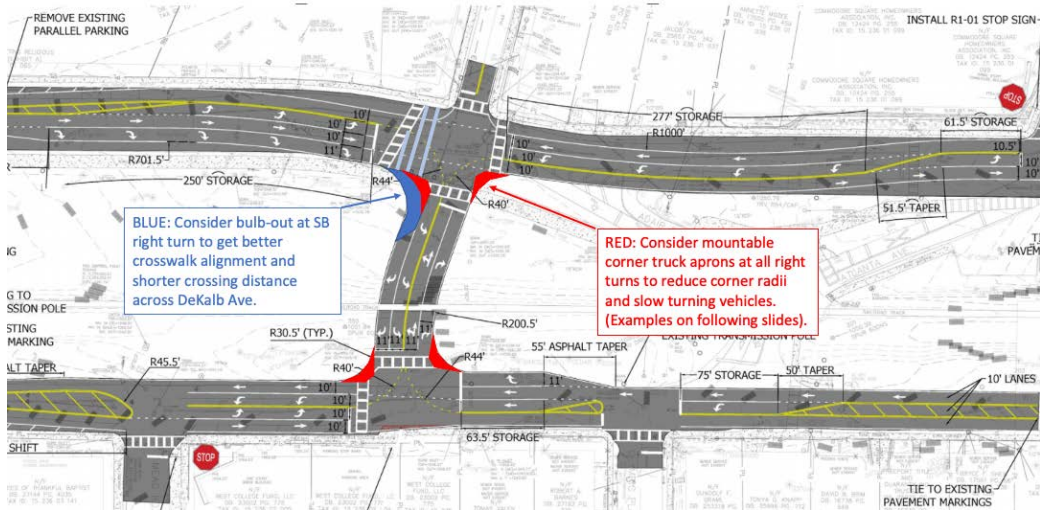
In sum, this intersection is a good opportunity for the City of Decatur to continue prioritizing the safety of vulnerable users, and we trust that you will ensure that the plans are revisited and significantly revised. As one traffic engineer told us, "It's important to prioritize a crossing for people walking and cycling. This seems like a good opportunity to do so. The current design does not do it."

Thank you for your attention.

Truck Corner Apron Examples



PERSPECTIVES IN PRACTICE
Corner Design For All Users
 A review of geometric design practices to improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists at intersection corners



Response:

DECREASE CROSSING DISTANCES FOR VULNERABLE USERS.

We will continue to evaluate the proposed geometry for optimal performance and safety. We will also include truck aprons at turning radii and consider the bulb-out proposed.

ENSURE DEDICATED RIGHT- AND LEFT-TURN PHASING FOR TRAFFIC SIGNALS.

The right turn phase will be especially considered for pedestrians and bicyclists with the potential to include on-demand no-right-on-red signals.

ADD CENTERLINE HARDENING FOR LEFT-TURNING MOVEMENTS



Thank you for your comments. This feature will be considered as we proceed into the design phase.



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DEDICATED SIGNAL HEADS FOR PEDESTRIANS/CYCLISTS/WHEELCHAIR USERS

The types of signals that should be installed will be evaluated in-depth and will be placed to protect the most vulnerable users.

ALTERNATE 3 FOR THE CROSSING TRAILS IS PREFERABLE, WITH PROTECTED LANES

Thank you for your comments.

Kiril Staikov

01/13/2021

Dear Mayor Garrett, Mayor Pro Tem Powers, Commissioners Mayer, Walsh, and Dusenberry, and Deputy City Manager Hugh Saxon,

I have lived on Adair St. for almost a decade and would like to chime in while there is still opportunity for public comment on the planned work for the Atlanta Ave / Adair St. crossing as shown in a powerpoint I've seen (from the latest meeting I believe).

My primary interest in this intersection is from the point of view of a pedestrian. I have two young children who need to cross here to go to school, and we often need to walk along Howard or cross it for leisure. Wasn't the original impetus for the planters and the re-doing this crossing precisely to make everything safer for pedestrians and cyclists? This is a critical walk-to-school route for all the children going to Renfro and FAVE. Thankfully, the current Adair-Howard intersection is a breeze compared to the older 4-lane pre-planter days. It's still worrisome when kids are running/biking ahead and coming up to the intersection, cars still frequently fail to stop even as children are getting ready to cross. But it is so much more manageable, safe, and predictable. So, imagine my alarm when I glanced at the powerpoint and saw that all of a sudden there are 4 lanes again! Furthermore, pedestrians and cyclists will have additional chaos to compute because there is an *additional direction* that cars might be coming from or going towards! ...And then after I cross the tracks, I have to do the same *again* at College.

I would rather peacefully jaywalk a bit west of this intersection, where there are less lanes and directions to worry about, jaywalk over the tracks, then jaywalk College in a safer two-lane section again! I urge you to remove as many of these lanes as you can, preferably all of them. Two ideas, not mutually exclusive:

- Vehicles have a wonderful place to cross the tracks about 30-60 seconds west by car at the East Lake Station / East Lake underpass. When I drive southwards, this is exactly what I often do because I prefer it to the current Atlanta Ave. intersection. This underpass is in an area where there aren't as many pedestrians, making it ideal for where we should want the cars to be going.

There is another fine place for cars to cross the tracks at McDonough. But this crossing here is critical for pedestrians. I would encourage making it a pedestrian/cyclist-only crossing (with



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possible passage for emergency vehicles), or at the very least remove all these lanes and encourage drivers to use it. A minute or two extra westward is not worth all this hassle and danger to pedestrians, bicyclists, and nearby residents.

- Has it been considered making Howard and College opposing one-ways? This seems an ideal way to minimize lanes/directions to worry about.

I realize these ideas are far from what is being considered. But the powerpoint's plan seems hostile to some of its stated objectives, like "prioritizing safety for children, pedestrians, and bicyclists". Maintaining or increasing car connectivity at this intersection may also be desired, but it's also counter to the other goals.

Instead of the expensive powerpoint plan, I would even probably prefer small tinkering with the status quo (i.e. sharpen the angles and lower the lane counts at Atlanta/Howard intersection at the corner of the gas station). At least that wouldn't worsen my pedestrian experience compared to what I have now, which the current plan does.

Response:

Thank you for your comments. We will continue to evaluate the proposed geometry for optimal performance and safety.

Ken Rose

01/31/2021

Decatur Bicycle Coalition Executive Board

Dear Councilwoman Kelly,

Thanks so much for walking through the site with us on Thursday. The letter that Ms. Serna sent Mr. Saxon was remarkably thorough and covers most of the concerns we discussed. Following are some additional items.

1. It is great that you are connecting a multi-use trail spur connection to Mead from the Stone Mtn Path as is outlined in Option 3. The plans did not have detail how this connection would occur. This really should be part of the scope of work and three things should be considered:
 - Connecting from the Path spur terminating at College and the Superior/Mead bisecting path.
 - Widening the bisecting path to 8-10 feet and paving it if possible. (The current 4-foot width with 8x8s retaining the granite crush is dangerous when granite crush subsides. The difference in surface height can cause crashes with hybrid bikes with narrow wheels).
 - Installing a crossing at Mead where the bisecting path meets this road (perhaps consider a raised crossing).



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Use signal timing to eliminate cuing traffic at the railroad crossing. As we have seen at N McDonough and Chandler Drive, cars regularly stop on the tracks. This would allow you to eliminate two lanes of this crossing and reduce this crossing distance for cyclists and pedestrians.

3. It is also clear from reviewing the drawings that the engineers did not use best practices for urban environments in their designs as many of us requested in the open houses. The National Association of City Transportation Officials (www.nacto.org) have produced multiple guidebooks for designing in urban environments with high numbers of bicycles and pedestrians. Given Decatur's high bike/ped mode share and that this intersection probably has one of state's highest counts of school children walking and biking, it really is important to consult this guidance. We suggest that your consultants use this guidance for this intersection's design. Following are four resources I found in a quick web search that are examples of how this intersection could be improved. Many consultants (e.g. Toole Associates) routinely use the NACTO principles as their reference.

- [Designing for All Ages & Abilities | National Association of City Transportation Officials \(nacto.org\)](#)
- [Don't Give Up at the Intersection | National Association of City Transportation Officials \(nacto.org\)](#)
- [Corner Radii | National Association of City Transportation Officials \(nacto.org\)](#)
- [Intersections of Major and Minor Streets | National Association of City Transportation Officials \(nacto.org\)](#)

Again, thanks so much for your willingness to walk the site with us. Decatur's design work on the cycletrack on N. McDonough is one of the best designs in the entire country. I'm sure that this intersection will be too!

Response:

1. *The scope of this project is being evaluated to determine appropriate limits.*
2. *Signal timing would not be sufficient to prevent cuing of traffic during train crossings based on our initial analysis. We will continue to evaluate the proposed geometry for optimal performance and safety.*
3. *Thank you for your comments. All engineering work performed used engineering judgement while also following relevant city and state guidelines and safety practices. We shall review the materials provided and consider them as we move into the design phase.*