

December 10, 2013

Minneapolis City Council

From:

Nick Mason, Chair, Minneapolis Bicycle Advisory Committee (BAC)

Ethan Fawley, BAC rep and Executive Director, Minneapolis Bicycle Coalition

Joshua Houdek, BAC rep and Land Use and Transportation Program Manager, Sierra Club

RE: Minnehaha Avenue layout approval

Dear City Council Members,

We have been engaging with Hennepin County staff around the bicycle, community design, and community engagement aspects of the Minnehaha Avenue reconstruction project for more than 18 months. While we are disappointed that the design before the City Council for Minnehaha does not include a transformative protected bikeway, we recognize the importance of building a positive and constructive partnership between the City and County on creating a network of protected bikeways that improve our community. With the longer-term city-wide goals in mind and the County's plan to build as good an on-street bike lane as possible, we want to let you know that we support the Council providing municipal consent for the Minnehaha project so we can move forward with other important efforts.

We support protected bikeways in general and on Minnehaha Avenue in particular because they offer the best opportunity for increasing the number of people using bicycles to get around. The City has recognized this through its Climate Action Plan goal for installing thirty miles of protected bikeways by 2020. We recognize that protected bike lanes are a newer concept for Minneapolis and that the public engagement for street design is evolving. We hope that Minnehaha can provide valuable lessons that can help us do future projects better. Some opportunities for improvements include:

- **Public process.** We can find better ways to have *meaningful* public input on street projects. Hennepin County did a great job engaging the local community through the Minnehaha-Hiawatha Community Works project, an effort that included Minnehaha Avenue. But it's not clear that this community feedback was meaningfully included in the engineering design of Minnehaha and a clear connection was not made between the road project and broader community goals. The process led to a lack of community buy-in and delays for the project—which could have been avoided with more collaborative and meaningful public engagement from the beginning. We hope to see future community input processes more like the approach used for Washington Avenue reconstruction project.

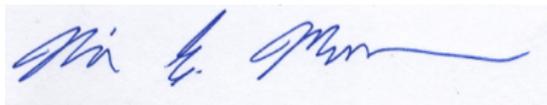
- **Protected bike lane design.** The protected *bike lane* design (“cycle track”) created by County staff was not in line with the best national standards for protected bike lanes. This led to greater impacts on boulevard trees and parking and less safe intersections. Many, if not most, of the public comments critical of the protected bike lane design focused on these unnecessary impacts. And despite significant public input in seeing a revised protected bike lane design to reduce impacts and improve safety, it was never done. We are glad to see that Hennepin County is using the NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide as the base for its buffered bike lane design. We suggest that this guide (or a future replacement) be used as the starting point for all future protected bike lane designs.
- **Goals to increase bicycling.** Everyone in the process agreed that a protected bike lane would provide the most comfortable environment for most people and that it would increase biking. Yet that was never a consideration in the final decision despite clear County and City goals to increase biking. We hope that future streets projects will include increasing biking as one of the metrics of success.

While we support the City providing municipal consent for the Minnehaha Avenue design, we understand why a Council Member may choose not to because of extra interest in the Minnehaha Avenue project in particular. Finally, we share Council Member Colvin Roy’s concerns that the layouts are not designed to allow for the potential of changing to a parking protected bike lane in the future and commend all efforts to ensure that this flexibility is included in the project.

We look forward to moving forward collaboratively with City and County staff.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Nick Mason, Chair, Minneapolis Bicycle Advisory Committee



Ethan Fawley, BAC rep and Executive Director, Minneapolis Bicycle Coalition



Joshua Houdek, BAC rep and Land Use and Transportation Program Manager, Sierra Club

Cc:

Minneapolis BAC

Commissioner Peter McLaughlin

City Council Member-elect Andrew Johnson

City Council Member-elect Alondra Cano

Debra Brisk

Steve Kotke

Jim Grube

Kristy Morter

Nick Peterson

Chris Engelmann