Shoreline Drive Road Diet – FAQ

Why now?

Safety for both pedestrians and drivers – Shoreline Drive between Southern and Terrace carries from 12,000 to 20,000 vehicles a day at speeds 45 mph and higher. In the last five years of available data (2016-2020), 22% of crashes within the city involving a pedestrian where the result was either a fatality or a serious injury occurred in this area. 8 of 30 total traffic fatalities within the city occurred on these 4.5 miles of state highway US-31 BR (Seaway Drive/Shoreline Drive/Moses Jones Parkway) in the last 10 years (2011-2020). The pilot project is expected to calm traffic; reducing operating speed reduces crash severity and can help save lives.

Pedestrian/bicyclist benefits – This stretch of roadway can be particularly daunting for pedestrians and bicyclists to cross. A pedestrian crossing Shoreline Drive at 3rd Street is required to cross ~135 FT of pavement which is more than double the length to cross a large roadway like Laketon Avenue. By reducing the road width, the length of the crossing is reduced, creating a more manageable crossing point for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Addressing decisions of the past – Redeveloping this corridor seeks to reconnect all neighborhoods that were historically, physically separated through the construction of infrastructure that prioritized the fast and convenient movement of cars. In many areas along its full route, construction of the highway also displaced residents.

Livability benefits – Shoreline Drive creates a physical barrier between the downtown and the Muskegon Lake waterfront; separating the two assets with pavement and high-speed traffic. Reducing the road width improves walkability, and providing pedestrian amenities along this corridor strengthens the connection between our downtown and waterfront. The pilot project also creates opportunities to enhance existing regional attractions (Heritage Landing, downtown festivals, etc.) or create new parks and open space in our developing urban community.

Economic development and local business – This project is intended to create a better environment where pedestrians and motorists are more likely to visit and support the growth and development of downtown businesses.

Environmental Sustainability – The incorporation of new pedestrian-friendly greenways along Shoreline Drive will positively impact the environment through mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions while street trees and landscaping counter the urban heat island effect and aid in reducing stormwater runoff.

Fiscal Responsibility – The City is overburdened with road maintenance costs, and, where possible, reducing the amount of pavement to maintain allows for funding to be put toward maintenance of our many other city streets that require attention.

Will this create backups and congestion?

Preliminary modeling for the area suggests that a reduction of Shoreline Drive from two thru lanes in each direction to one thru lane in each direction would not create any substantial backups or delay on the route. The anticipated increase in delay based on preliminary modeling is in the range of one additional minute through the corridor.

This pilot project would be implemented for a set duration of time so that changes to traffic patterns can be observed in real-time, better informing decisions moving forward. Modeling is a very useful tool and suggests that there will be limited impact, but what is observed in reality is the true measure of the project's potential.

Will traffic be diverted to other streets?

Given that there is not a great deal of backup anticipated as a result of this change, it is not expected that traffic will need to divert. Shoreline Drive is expected to remain the most efficient route. Since this concept is billed as a pilot, the goal will be to monitor and measure the impacts on adjacent streets. The results of the pilot project will better prepare us for the areas that will be impacted if permanent implementation is pursued.

Why not try alternatives like a pedestrian bridge or a tunnel?

Both options have been explored previously. Bridges and tunnels create a single point of connection along the corridor, so to match the effect of an overall road diet on the corridor there would need to be multiple pedestrian bridges and/or tunnels along the route. The proximity of the railroad tracks further complicates the use of tunnels/bridges as either option would also have to cross the tracks.

From an engineering standpoint, tunnels would be further complicated by the proximity of the lake and dealing with groundwater. In order to keep the tunnels above the groundwater table, they would essentially need to be built at or near the existing roadway grade, requiring all of the roadway and railroad to be raised above them either by construction of an embankment or by making Shoreline Drive into an elevated bridge through the area. This would be hugely expensive and would create even more of a divide between the downtown and the waterfront.

Pedestrian bridges could be used, but are likely to be more costly and less effective than reducing the width of the roadway. It would be necessary for the pedestrian bridge to cross both Shoreline Drive and the railroad tracks; railroad crossings require a greater clearance (typically 23-24 FT) than roadways (typically 16 FT) leading to the belief that a pedestrian bridge in this location would be more costly and difficult to construct than in other locations. Pedestrian bridges are also difficult to construct to achieve ADA compliance, and the additional 7-8 FT of height needed for railroad clearance only further exacerbates this. The more inaccessible and difficult a pedestrian bridge is to use, the less likely people are to see it is a viable route.

What happens to the space that is freed up by a road diet?

In the pilot (temporary) project, the project will include exploring ways to activate that space, but will likely be somewhat restricted based on what MDOT will allow for permitted uses. We hope to have some options identified and preliminarily approval by MDOT during the July open house.

If the project moves forward into developing more permanent, long-term changes, there will be a lengthy public engagement and planning process centered on what the roadway should look like and how the reallocated space can be used. The underlying land is owned by MDOT and their input will be important with regard to potential future uses of this space, which could include – but not be limited to – a linear parkway greenspace for pedestrians, non-motorized vehicles, picnic areas, public art, or playground space.

Are there examples of roadways that have been converted to park/pedestrian spaces?

Two examples are highlighted below, but there are a number of highways that have been or in the process of being redesigned to incorporate park/pedestrian spaces. A report titled *Freeways Without Futures* chronicles highway removal efforts – both potential and those already underway.

- The Park East Freeway in Milwaukee, WI was built starting in the 1960s. Concerns that it would effectively cut off Milwaukee's downtown from its neighborhoods caused the project to be abandoned after being partially completed. Beginning in 1999, the parts that were complete were repurposed to allow for 370 acres of parkland and new commercial space.

- La Jolla Boulevard, San Diego, CA implemented a road diet that reduced a five-lane roadway to a two-lane roadway and converted several intersections to roundabouts. The traffic volumes handled by the La Jolla Blvd. remained nearly identical before and after the project's completion, but traffic speeds were reduced from 40-45 mph to less than 20 mph and traffic crashes were reduced by 90%.

- Robert Moses Parkway was built in the 1960s in Niagara Falls, NY to serve waterfront industries that have since closed. In the 2010s, the four-lane boulevard was reduced to one lane in each direction, converting the leftover land to 140 acres of park space along the Niagara River.

The City will have additional information to share and additional notifications in the future as the project progresses, check back periodically to the following website for updates:

https://www.muskegon-mi.gov/departments/planning/shoreline-drive-pilot-project/