

July 19, 2021

Brette Hjelle
Interim Director
Public Works
City of Minneapolis

On behalf of the residents, businesses and property owners who have signed the attached petition form we respectfully request that the City of Minneapolis Public Works Department reconsider its approach to the proposed Hennepin Avenue reconstruction project, take additional time to evaluate other options in light of the community response, including those most directly impacted on Hennepin Avenue, and consider the inclusion of an additional Option (Option 3) for public and City Council consideration. This proposed project impacts properties that account for nearly 1% of the total Taxable Market Value for commercial properties in Hennepin County (residential is separate).

“Option 3” proposes to create strategic adjustments to Hennepin Avenue similar to the existing form with general maintenance of vehicle access and parking and loading / unloading areas that are so vital to businesses and residents on and adjacent to Hennepin Avenue. The following potential Hennepin Avenue improvements could be included in Option 3 if it is shown that they can enhance this proposed project:

- Appropriate bus stops for the proposed Metro E Line with advanced payment kiosks to facilitate the boarding process.
- Metro E Line bus driven traffic signals to expedite bus flow.
- More attractive signage for the existing “rush hour only” bus lanes, with no increase to the current configuration.
- A focus on maintainable landscaping that will increase the “greenness” of Hennepin Avenue and make it more climate/pedestrian conscious and attractive, with a particular emphasis on green boulevards between the roadway and sidewalks. The proposed landscaping should be sand / salt / ice melt tolerant and be such that it can be reasonably and affordably maintained as designed by the respective agencies and Special Service Districts.
- Attractive pedestrian-scale lighting that will contribute to a sense of place for the Avenue.
- Intersection enhancements to improve pedestrian safety, confidence, and comfort.

Businesses have been suffering greatly along Hennepin Avenue with increases in the number of empty storefronts. This roadway project should be designed to help restore the vitality of Hennepin Avenue rather than to detract from it. The proposed Options 1 and 2 focus on moving people and traffic **through** the corridor, as opposed to **providing access** to and a reason for people to gather at businesses and buildings along the corridor. Put another way, both Options 1 and 2 recast Hennepin as a corridor to be “passed through” rather than as a community to residents and a commercial node where people come to work, shop, dine, and enjoy the Avenue.

In a meeting with the Lowry Hill Special Service District, city staff stated that they did not have data on what the impact would be on traffic and parking in the neighborhoods for Options 1 and 2. They had also not received or prepared any estimates of what the time savings for Metro E Line buses would be with the proposed 24 hour dedicated bus lanes throughout the project. Our limited analyses suggest that an appropriate analysis of bus operations along the Avenue will likely show that “Option 3” above

will move Metro E Line buses efficiently along the Avenue while avoiding the major impacts to businesses and residents by the radical changes proposed in Options 1 and 2 .

As we begin to emerge from the twin crises of the Uptown public safety emergency and the pandemic, we encourage the city to approach this project with less drastic measures, so that policymakers and users can take time to learn what the “new normal” might be. For example, a federal policy focused on electric cars, a lower future transit ridership given public health concerns, disrupted commuting patterns given less daytime downtown office population, and more delivery vehicles in residential and commercial areas are all potential factors, among others, that this project does not and can not realistically incorporate at this time.

Our greatest concern is a Hennepin Avenue redesign that is obsolete the moment it opens, and will cost much more to undo or reconstruct (like has been suggested by the City with the negative aspects of Phase 1 of the Hennepin Avenue redesign), compared to pursuing a less extensive option at this time that allows some room to adapt later, if needed.

The residents and businesses (many of whom are locally owned small businesses) along the corridor will suffer damage by the length and timing of this project, and the health and livability of the overall community should be a major consideration in the this project. The City and Hennepin County can't afford to have the end product be a failure, especially after what will be nearly five years of economic distress in the area.

Thank you for your consideration. We would appreciate your thoughts regarding our request for the preparation of Option 3.

Sincerely,



Jessica Burge
The Café Meow
thecafemeow@gmail.com



Jill Osiecki
Executive Director, Uptown Association
Jill@uptownminneapolis.com



Thomas Fletcher
President, Fletcher Management, Inc.
tfletcher@aexcom.com

Cc: Mayor Jacob Frey
Council Member Lisa Bender
Council Member Lisa Goodman
Jeni Hager, Director Transportation, Planning & Programming
Don Elwood, Director, Transportation Engineering & Design
Becca Hughes, Senior Transportation Planner