



January 21, 2009

Dear 84th Street Resident,

When I was first elected to represent you on the Bloomington City Council in 2001, I committed myself to finding ways to mitigate the impact that traffic on 84th street has on your lives. Over the past seven years I have spent literally hundreds of hours researching solutions to neighborhood traffic problems and I have successfully advocated for changes in Bloomington's street design policies to improve neighborhood quality of life.

My research eventually led me to the concept of the "Road Diet", the conversion of a four-lane street to a three-lane street to improve traffic safety and make residential neighborhoods more livable. In 2006, the City implemented its first Road Diet on 90th Street. While the proposal was controversial when originally proposed, the reaction to the implementation was unanimously favorable. Comments such as this one from 90th Street resident Marv Hartung were typical:

Council members,

It was about a year ago that we were discussing the re-striping of 90th Street and Poplar Bridge Road between France and Normandale. I would like to take this opportunity to tell you how pleased I am with the new striping. I think we have attained the goals of the project. I believe we have slowed the traffic. Left turns are easier. I live on 90th Street and I can work on my yard without having traffic passing a foot or less from the curb. It also makes it easier for bikers to travel this street. Thanks for letting this experiment happen.

*Marvin Hartung
4309 West 90th Street
Bloomington, MN 55437*

These words from Marv were extremely gratifying to me. Thus, it is with bitter disappointment that I must report to you that I have failed to secure the same opportunity for you.

Those of you attended the open houses for the area-wide traffic calming study at Poplar Bridge School are aware that the City had its traffic calming consultant evaluate the impact of putting 84th street on a three-lane Road Diet between Stanley and France. However, once the consultants determined that 84th street would perform equally well from a traffic flow perspective with either three or four lanes, the 84th street part of the study was separated from the rest of the study so as not to muddy the evaluation of the options under consideration to address the issues being felt in the neighborhoods to the south of 84th Street.

Subsequently, a Met Council project to expand the regional sewer line beneath 84th street presented us with an opportunity to bring the 84th Street Road Diet proposal back to the City Council for consideration on its own merits. If approved, it would be implemented this summer in conjunction with the sewer expansion project. However, at the Council's January 12th Study Meeting I was only able to secure the support of Mayor Winstead and Councilmember Nordstrom to move forward with a neighborhood outreach initiative focused solely on discussing the pros and cons of implementing the Road diet on 84th Street. Councilmembers Grady, Peterson, Axtell and Wilcox were opposed. Unless one of these four changes their mind at the next City Council meeting on Monday, January 26th, 84th street will stay exactly the way it is now for at least another seven years.

The Councilmembers who are opposed to further consideration of the Road Diet cite neighborhood opposition to removal of the stop signs at Morris and Quinn. The removal of these stop signs is, in fact, essential if the Road Diet proposal is to succeed (for reasons that I will explain).

I know from speaking with many of you that there is broad support in the neighborhood for keeping these stop signs. Under current traffic conditions, these stop signs provide the only opportunity for residents to the north

of 84th Street to exit the neighborhood [somewhat] safely during the morning rush hour. Many of you are concerned that you will be unable to see your children safely across 84th Street to Poplar Bridge Elementary in the morning without the stop signs. However, I also know that these concerns can be addressed; I know that **none** of you are satisfied with the status quo on 84th Street; and I know that **none** of you want to see things remain as they are for at least another seven years.

There is an admittedly difficult trade-off to be made here. We know from studies conducted in Bloomington and other Minnesota cities that the benefits of the Road Diet approach would include:

- Average speeds on 84th Street would decline slightly and, more importantly, the incidence of drivers traveling well over the speed limit would decline considerably.
- Traffic accidents would be cut nearly in half
- It would actually be safer for pedestrians to cross 84th Street
- It would be easier for residents of 84th Street itself to exit their driveways during rush hour
- Neighborhood bicyclists would gain safe access to the area's recreational bike trails
- Property values on 84th Street would improve and the neighborhood would stabilize

... while traffic would flow as well as it does now – just a lot more “calmly”.

On the downside, our Consultant's traffic simulations indicate that rush hour waits to enter or cross 84th Street from Morris or Quinn would increase from an average of 10 seconds, at present, to 30 seconds with the three-lane configuration – comparable to waiting at a traffic light. Waits at intersections that are currently without stop signs would actually **improve** because there would be more gaps in the traffic flow.

I know that many of these assertions are counter-intuitive. How, you ask, can there be **more** gaps in the heavy traffic with one **fewer** lane in each direction? The short answer is that, on single lane roads, traffic bunches up into “platoons” behind the drivers who decide to obey the speed limit, creating gaps in the traffic flow ahead of these drivers. The stop lights at either end of this segment of 84th Street accentuate the platooning – the traffic starts off down 84th Street platooned to begin with when the lights turn green. This has been demonstrated to be the case on numerous Road Dieted streets throughout Minnesota, some with much higher traffic levels.

The reason that we can't have both the three-lane Road Diet **and** the stop signs is that stop signs break up the platoons and eliminate the gaps in the traffic that residents need to get out of their driveways and side streets. Traffic meters itself out from stop signs in a steady, continuous drip, drip, drip without any gaps. Thus, our Consultant's traffic simulations show gridlock on 84th Street in a scenario with both three-lanes and stop signs.

My research and the actual experience of Bloomington and other Minnesota Cities has convinced me that the benefits of the three-lane Road Diet approach would far outweigh the negatives of losing the stop signs and, after all of the effort I've made to bring us to this point, I'm not willing to give up the fight, yet. Ultimately, it is the neighborhood, itself, that has to decide whether keeping the stop signs is worth foregoing all of the benefits that would come from putting 84th Street on a Road Diet.

I know that I can't possibly answer all of your questions in a two-page letter. To provide more information, I've prevailed upon neighborhood resident Mark Thorson to post more information about the 84th Street Road Diet proposal on the Traffic section of his Better Bloomington web site at: www.betterbloomington.com/traffic

Mark has posted my answers to the ten most “frequently asked questions” about the 84th Street Road Diets proposal that came up at the Traffic Calming Open Houses, as well as links to the Minnesota studies that have provided the data behind my assertions of improved safety with the three-lane Road Diet approach. What I ask of you is that you review this information and then let me and the rest of the City Council know what you want us to do. If you really do prefer the status quo, I'll let it go.

Sincerely,



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