



January 14, 2013

Dear C.I.B. Committee and Whom it May Concern,

The Saint Paul Bicycle Coalition strongly supports the Dayton's Bluff Greenspace Committee's C.I.B. funding proposal for a Margaret Street Bike Route on the east side of Saint Paul.

As anyone in the city should be aware, the east side neighborhood south of Lake Phalen is harder to get in and out of than many other Saint Paul neighborhoods. This is because it is hemmed in by railroad lines and Interstate 35 on the west, a major rail line on the north, Interstate 94 and the bluff on the south, and a major boulevard (McKnight Road) on the east. Other than Interstate 94, there are only two ways to get from the East Side to downtown. These are East 7th Street and the 3rd Street/E. Kellogg Bridge. Of these, only the 3rd Street Bridge is safely traversable by bicycle, via a shared bike/ped path on the south side of the bridge. There is also the Bruce Vento/Swede Hollow bike trail but it is more of a recreational trail, is very secluded, and lacks lighting or much human traffic in the early weekday mornings or evenings when many people are commuting into or out of downtown.

Not only is it hard to enter or exit the east side by bicycle, it is difficult to ride a bike through the neighborhood from east to west. Many cyclists currently ride through the east side of Saint Paul to work, either in downtown or out at 3M Corporation. Their options for east/west riding are few and dangerous. Most of the quieter, low traffic streets don't go all the way through the corridor. This is true of Fremont, 4th, 5th, 6th, Beech, Bush, Ross and Stillwater. The only two major east-west streets that pass through the entire corridor are Minnehaha Avenue and East 3rd Street. Both have high volumes of fast-moving motor vehicle traffic including two major bus lines (the 74 and 63). Making it worse, 3rd street is just 2 lanes and narrow in many stretches, meaning there is not enough room for motorists to safely pass bicycles. Biking on it is stressful and dangerous, as a rider must deal with large passing vehicles including buses while being on alert for drivers opening doors of parked cars, turning vehicles and other obstacles.

There are only two quiet streets with low traffic volumes that pass through the entire corridor—Reaney Avenue and Margaret Street. Of these, Margaret is wider, straighter and closer to 3rd Street. Margaret would make a great alternative bike route to 3rd or Minnehaha. It merely needs to be signed and painted as a Bike Route and (perhaps at a future date) have crossing aids added at a couple of the major north-south streets that intersect it. Once we see how riders use it, a more official connection to Margaret could be made and signed at the west end, south to the 3rd Street Bridge and into downtown Saint Paul.

As a place that promotes bicycling and walking for everyday transportation, the East Side is way behind many other parts of the city. In some areas it lacks sidewalks and there are very few continuous bike lanes on arterial streets, almost none go east to west. While It is intersected by some nice recreational trails, these often do not make good, direct commuter routes and are not lit and watched in the early morning or evening when people are commuting to and from work. Making Margaret Street into a designated Bike Route would do a lot to improve non-motorized access to and through the East Side.

A Margaret Street Bike Route would connect cyclists to existing bike lanes and pathways on Johnson Parkway, Ruth Street and McKnight Road as well as a recreation center and Swede Hollow Park. A connection could also be made, via Hazel Street to a second recreation center and the soon-to-be completed Furness Parkway bike trail just north of the railroad line.

In May of 2012, the Saint Paul Bicycle Coalition led a ride over to the East Side with members of the district councils and Emily Erickson, the city's former "Sustainable Transportation Planner." It included riding almost the entire length of Margaret, from Swede Hollow Park to Ruth Street. Photos of the ride and commentary can be found on line at—
<http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.457458984266520.108321.133657969979958&type=3>

In closing, we urge the C.I.B. committee and anyone else looking at this application to support it and fund it. It would do a lot to improve and promote bicycling (and walking) on the East Side of Saint Paul and it would do it for very little cost. If you would like additional information, feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

Andrew Singer and Jeff Zaayer, Co-Chairs

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