

From: Glenn Meter
Sent: Tuesday, July 24, 2018 8:56 AM
To: Rivera, Andrew <Andrew.Rivera@austintexas.gov>
Subject: Shoal Creek Trail Plan on Planning Commission agenda

Mr. Rivera,

I hope you're staying cool in this heat.

As I understand that there will be no public input at tonight's Planning Commission meeting regarding the Shoal Creek Trail Plan, I wanted to submit the following feedback regarding the plan.

I live in Allandale, on Shoal Creek Boulevard (SCB). I bicycle for exercise, walk dogs, and drive along SCB. I love the vision about a connected trail between downtown and Waller Creek. But I have concerns about the current plan. They are:

- **Safety:** The goal of the Trail Plan is to keep bicyclists out of the path of cars on SCB, and keep them from having to pass parked cars. This is an understood safety issue. However, the current plan does not take into account:
 - Placing more riders at risk by moving them into traffic lanes. The current SCB bike lanes in Allandale are wide enough for two bicycles in each direction. The proposed trail moves them onto one side of the street, with only enough room for one bicyclist in each direction. SCB is a popular bicycle route, with groups of riders often riding two abreast. Many such riders do not ride at traffic speeds. By funneling the riders into a smaller space, some may move over into the traffic lanes instead of riding in the bike lanes. The current discussion is to have hard dividers between bicycles and traffic, making it hard for these bicyclists to avoid traffic if needed for their safety.
 - Putting more pedestrians at risk. SCB has some very long blocks and blind curves. With parking moved to only one side of the street, you are asking for more people (visitors, delivery people, etc.) to jay-walk to reach their destination due to the long blocks. Add in the blind curves and the amount of traffic along SCB and you are putting more pedestrians at risk.
- **Priorities:** The Shoal Creek Trail Plan lists its top tier priorities as between the lake and 38th St. When I signed the Bike Austin petition supporting an improved trail, I was sold on connecting the existing pathways from downtown all the way to Waller Creek. But while I safely ride from my house downtown and back once a month, I was very surprised to see that the #1 priority for the first phase of the Trail Plan is to re-stripe SCB between 38th St and Foster Lane.
 - While safety could be improved along SCB, the safety of getting from Foster Lane up with Waller Creek is far, far less. I do not understand why the least safe areas (Section C in the plan) will only be complete at the end of the plan.

- Community Input: The Shoal Creek Conservancy (SCC) has had public forums about the plan and has attended the Allandale neighborhood association meetings. However, unlike the healthy give-and-take I have witnessed to between city staff and the neighbors around bicycle improvement projects on Pedernales Street and Great Northern Blvd:
 - Many of the concerns raised by citizens were not reflected in the Shoal Creek Trail Plan proposal. The proposal did not even capture the concerns, only positive feedback for the plan.
 - The Shoal Creek Trail Plan proposal does not include alternative plans with the community that they had ruled out. Recent discussions with SCC have captured that this would be a good starting point to continue the discussions between SCC and the community.
 - The Shoal Creek Trail Plan proposal includes widening the existing sidewalks along SCB. Many in Allandale along SCB are not yet aware that the plan may eat into their current easements, involving moving plantings, irrigation systems, etc. As well as having the public closer to the houses that have short setbacks from SCB. Again, this is an area where the Allandale neighborhood association can assist SCC and the city in spreading the word. But the existing conversation has just scratched the surface.
- Fiducial responsibility: Against the background of homeowners stating that “our property taxes are already too high, don’t make them higher”, my understanding is that the city staff has been directed to “do more with what already exists.” As well as making financial trade-offs. For example, when the city looked at improving bicycle safety along Great Northern Blvd (GNB) recently, adding more sidewalks along GNB was just off the table. When reviewing the city’s priorities for enhancing sidewalks Austin-wide the GNB sidewalks just did not rate — rightly so.
 - Which is why it was concerning to see in the plan investigating tunneling under Allandale Road to make a safer crossing there. While that crossing is a safety concern, moving the crossing over to Marilyn Drive could (a) better connect the Trail to the Northwest Rec Center (b) provide a safer crossing over Allandale Road and (c) would be much cheaper. Again, this alternate route may have been investigated and discarded by the Trail designers, but the proposal does not include the discussion of any paths not along SCB.
- Completeness:
 - An “all ages, all abilities” trail should address the steep hill around 41st St, especially if reducing bike traffic to 1/2 the current space. Private discussions with SCC members show that they have thought about the issue, but it is not included in their published proposal.
 - The plan does not mention the existing large bicycle traffic along SCB in Allandale, nor how it may be affected by reducing the space for two-riders in each direction to one-rider in each direction (see enclosed photo).
 - The plan states that dedicated lanes are required to allow safe “all ages” bicycling along SCB. This is already supported (and used) along most of the route using the existing sidewalks.
 - The plan should address planned growth, including the Austin Oaks development. And while very recent, McKalla Place as well.

I look forward to working with SCC and the city to help develop a viable and safe path from downtown to Waller Creek. However, I believe that there are concerns in the current proposal around safety, land use, and financial responsibility that must still be worked through.

Respectfully yours,
Glenn Meter
7714 Shoal Creek Blvd

Bicycle traffic along SCB, taken July 7th 2018. A pack of bicyclists, not traveling at traffic speeds, enjoying an evening ride. Note the number of riders riding side-by-side.

