

**SPUR**

San Francisco | San Jose | Oakland

August 14, 2015

Hon. Sam Liccardo  
Mayor  
City of San Jose  
200 E. Santa Clara St.  
San Jose, CA 95113

Councilmember Pierluigi Oliverio  
District 6  
City of San Jose  
200 E. Santa Clara St.  
San Jose, CA 95113

**Re: Letter in Support of the Lincoln Avenue Road Diet**

Dear Mayor Liccardo and Councilmember Oliverio,

Street design is an important element of creating a walkable, people-oriented place. We applaud the efforts made to date in San Jose to design an urban transportation system that works well for walking, biking, and transit. We support the Lincoln Avenue Road Diet because we believe it furthers San Jose's stated policy goals towards creating a city designed for people. Making the new street configuration permanent demonstrates San Jose's commitment to creating and sustaining the distinctive neighborhood centers —like Willow Glen—that make San Jose walkable and livable.

In recent years, San Jose has adopted numerous sustainable transportation policies. The *Envision 2040* General Plan includes robust mode-shift goals that decrease driving alone, from 80% to 40%, by increasing walking, bicycling and transit use. The General Plan also transitions to a more urban form by implementing Urban Villages, which are envisioned as higher-density, mixed use urban districts that promote transit use and walkable neighborhoods. The San Jose Bike Plan 2020 identifies streets, including Lincoln Avenue, that comprise a core network of connections near downtown, strengthening the fabric of central San Jose. Most recently, San Jose adopted Vision Zero, a commitment to making San Jose's streets safer for all users.

The Department of Transportation collected information from 45 locations on Lincoln Avenue and nearby streets to monitor the impact of the pilot. The results indicated that there were lower traffic speeds overall and fewer cars traveling at 10+mph above speed limit. However, we understand that there are lingering concerns about the diversion of high speed vehicle travel onto other streets. Where increases in speed did occur, they occurred primarily on major roads. The results of the study also found that there were minor travel delays during the morning and

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evening commute times—particularly the evening southbound commutes. We believe that, with appropriate signal modifications, these delays may be substantially reduced.

While we understand the concerns about the road diet trial, we do believe that the overall benefits of implementing a road diet outweigh the adjustments that are required in the short-term. Streetscape improvements like the Lincoln Avenue road diet are a means to achieving San Jose’s stated goals because they re-allocate street space to encourage mode shift and minimize conflicts for walkers, cyclists, transit vehicles and motorists. In addition to providing circulation space, streets (which we define as the roadway and the sidewalks) are important public and civic spaces. In the right locations, allocating more space to these functions can support local businesses and create or strengthen memorable places. So-called “4-3 conversion” road diets of the kind being piloted for Lincoln Avenue are a commonplace, well-researched and proven solution nationwide. What follows is a list of the benefits of road diets and a number of examples.

- **Road diets can support and sustain thriving neighborhood business districts like Lincoln Avenue in Willow Glen.** One of the most well-known examples of how complete streets can support thriving local business districts is on Castro Street in Mountain View. In the 1980s, Castro Street was put on a road diet with the goal of revitalizing downtown Mountain View. The road diet narrowed the street from a four through-lane road to two lanes plus a center turning lane with parallel parking and wider sidewalks. Today, Castro Street is a thriving, walkable district with a healthy mix of retail and restaurants.
- **Businesses can benefit from streetscape improvements.** Several studies have found that streetscape improvements, including bike lanes and vehicle lane reductions, can have positive economic impacts on local business sales tax receipts. A study of eight streets in San Francisco found that, two years after construction, businesses on reconfigured streets had tax revenues 4.4-6.3 percentage points higher than those that had not been improved.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, New York City’s Department of Transportation found that all four reconfigured street corridors that it studied saw an increase in sales tax revenue and outperformed most nearby comparison streets.<sup>2</sup> These studies show that better-designed streets can have positive economic benefits for businesses, albeit over time.
- **Road diets support walkable, livable communities.** Walkability is an excellent shorthand for good urban design. For a city to encourage walking, it must have a dense mixture of uses, open space and streets, all designed for people. Long Beach, California has implemented a number of road diets on its streets under the direction of

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<sup>1</sup> Latterman, David C. and Jesse Anttila-Hughes. 2014. Using retail tax revenue data and other business metrics to determine the effect of streetscape improvements on business and business corridors in San Francisco.

<sup>2</sup> New York City Department of Transportation. 2013. The Economic Benefits of Sustainable Streets.  
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/dot-economic-benefits-of-sustainable-streets.pdf>

the city's Livable Communities agenda, which has broad support from the city's elected officials. This agenda emphasizes the role of placemaking and walkability in attracting employers and workers, and the importance of pedestrian infrastructure in achieving them.

- **Road diets improve safety for pedestrians.** The proportion of pedestrians that can survive a vehicle collision drastically increases when vehicle speeds are reduced. Narrower lanes help to slow traffic, creating safer speeds for pedestrians. For example, a road diet in Vancouver, Washington helped reduce the number of pedestrian collisions from six to zero collisions per year.<sup>3</sup>
- **Road diets improve safety for drivers.** According to the Federal Highway Administration and the National Association of City Transportation Officials, four-lane configurations have been shown to increase rear-end, blind-side left turn, and sideswipe vehicle crashes. Busy main streets can have frequent turns and people entering and exiting parking spaces. Several case studies illustrate the positive effects of road diets on driver safety. A road diet in Santa Monica, California resulted in a 65% reduction in collisions. A 2010 FHWA study found that road diet measures reduced vehicle collisions by about 25% in five Bay Area cities and Sacramento.<sup>4</sup>
- **Road diets can improve traffic.** Road diets can improve traffic flow by reducing conflicts between vehicles. On many four-lane roads, the left lane does double-duty as a through-lane and left-turn lane. This means that through traffic cannot move when a left-car is waiting to turn left safely. A road configuration with turning lanes and pockets channel turning vehicles out of through-lanes, which allows for through traffic to flow.
- **Road diets are a smart use of transportation dollars.** It is inefficient to build systems for the peak auto demand, which may be only a few hours per week. Designing roads for peak vehicle demand can lead to overbuilt streets, which can be expensive to construct and maintain, and degrade the pedestrian environment. Building for the peak can also induce demand; this is why widening roads so often leads to more driving and, consequently, more traffic. Instead, it is more efficient to build roads that offer comfortable and convenient options for walking, cycling and transit use. When more people can safely choose other modes, this takes cars off the road and effectively reduces traffic.

San Jose should be designing streets for all travel modes while creating places that support thriving neighborhoods. That's the type of complete transportation system that will support a more urban, livable central San Jose. **We support making the Lincoln Avenue Road Diet**

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<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Rosales. Road Diet Handbook: Setting Trends for Livable Streets. Parsons Brinckerhoff.  
[http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/docs/nickerson/Road\\_Diet\\_Rosales\\_Overview.pdf](http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/docs/nickerson/Road_Diet_Rosales_Overview.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Federal Highway Administration. 2015. Road Diet Case Studies.  
[http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/road\\_diets/case\\_studies/roaddiet\\_cs.pdf](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/road_diets/case_studies/roaddiet_cs.pdf)

**permanent coupled with signal modifications. We encourage the Department of Transportation to monitor the effects of those modifications on travel times and traffic volume.** If the Road Diet cannot be made permanent at this time, we strongly recommend that the road diet pilot be extended for a period of 2-3 years with signal modifications. We also recommend monitoring the impacts of the road diet on neighboring streets and on businesses.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Lincoln Avenue Road Diet Trial. Please feel free to contact me with any questions at 408-638-0167 or [ltolkoff@spur.org](mailto:ltolkoff@spur.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laura Tolkoff', with a stylized, cursive script.

Laura Tolkoff  
San Jose Policy Director

Cc:  
Jim Ortbal, SJDOT