CITY OF ASHLAND

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, PLEASE
DATE: June 6, 2011
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Road Diet Meeting, Tuesday June 14 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

The public is invited to attend the meeting on Tuesday, June 14th from 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm at the Ashland Middle School Commons, 100 Walker Avenue.

"At the first North Main Road Diet meeting held several weeks ago, citizens asked about the potential traffic impact on surrounding neighborhoods if North Main were reduced to three lanes," said Mike Faught, Public Works Directors. "Our consultants listened to those comments, completed additional review of those neighborhood street intersections and now have new information to share."

The agenda will include a progress update and timeline, a presentation by Kittelson & Associates, Inc. on traffic impacts in surrounding neighborhoods and a presentation by Dan Burden, an internationally recognized authority on bicycle and pedestrian facilities and programs, walkability, livability, sustainability and smart growth. Following the presentations, citizens will have an opportunity to ask questions.

The City of Ashland's Transportation Commission, Planning Commission and Public Works Department are currently updating the City's Transportation System Plan (TSP). The update includes a proposed pilot program which narrows North Main Street from Helman Street north to Jackson Road from four lanes to three, commonly known as a "road diet". Research has shown

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reducing the number of traffic lanes can reduce accidents by 25% to 33%. If approved by the City Council, the pilot program will be implemented in September.

It is expected the proposed project will improve the overall safety for vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian traffic by providing a left turn refuge lane, bike lanes and reducing highway crossing distance for pedestrians and vehicles making left hand turns. The proposed North Main Road Diet Striping plan, frequently asked questions and additional information gathered since the March 31st public meeting can be viewed online at http://www.ashlandtsp.com/statics/draft_documents.

For more information, contact Mike Faught, Public Works Director at faughtm@ashland.or.us or 541 552-2411.

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Frequently Asked Questions

Why would the City want to reduce the number of lanes on N. Main Street?

Improved Safety

Nationally published research has indicated converting a four-lane roadway such as North Main Street to a three-lane cross-section reduces the number of crashes along the roadway by 25% to 33%[1].

North Main Street has one of the highest crash rates in the City. The crashes that occur are primarily related to vehicles making left-turns from North Main Street to the side streets and from the side streets on to North Main Street. The existing 4-lane configuration (2 lanes in each direction) requires vehicles turning left off of North Main Street to stop in a through-lane to wait for a gap in traffic to turn left. This increases the risk for rear-end crashes as well as turning crashes when drivers rush to fit into a gap in traffic that is too short. Vehicles turning off of North Main Street onto a side street also have to look for a gap in two lanes of on-coming traffic, which can result in misjudgments. Vehicles turning left from the side streets on to North Main Street must watch four lanes of traffic to determine when it is safe to turn left. Misjudgments result in angle and turning crashes.

The three lane configuration will provide left-turn lanes for vehicles turning left off of North Main Street to reduce the likelihood of rear-end crashes. Vehicles turning off of Main Street will also only need to look for gaps in one lane of on-coming traffic reducing the risk of misjudging gaps. The three lane configuration will also make it easier for vehicles turning left on to North Main Street from the side street to determine if there is an adequate gap since drivers will be concerned with fewer lanes of traffic compared to today.

Reduced Travel Speeds

North Main Street currently has a posted speed limit of 35 mph south of the Southern Pacific Railroad overcrossing and 25 mph south of Grant Street. However, it is believed that the four lane cross section results in travel speeds in excess of the posted speed limit. (This will be verified as part of the on-going traffic analysis for the road diet.) Narrowing the cross-section to three lanes and adding features such bike lanes creates a "tunnel effect" that naturally reduces travel speeds. Case studies from previous road diets in the United States indicate in some cases vehicle speeds were reduced by 18% and vehicles over the speed limit reduced by 32%[2].

Why a "temporary" road diet?

Staff is proposing a concept that has the potential to improve safety and better serve pedestrians and bicyclists. A *temporary* road diet provides the opportunity to determine how well the

[1]American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO).*Highway Safety Manual.* 2010.

[2] Road Diet Handbook: Setting Trends for Livable Streets, Second Edition. 2007.

concept works and if there is public support prior to making significant investments in more permanently changing the roadway.

What about emergency vehicles?
Ashland Police, Fire and emergency services (ambulances) are involved in the discussions of reducing North Main Street to three lanes. They have seen and commented on the proposed change and they are comfortable with testing the three lane scenario. Providing emergency service and response along North Main Street as a three-lane street would be similar to the situations they encounter when providing service on East Main Street (currently two-lanes with bicycle lanes) as well as other two- and three-lane streets in Ashland.

What about emergency evacuation needs?
In the event of the need to evacuate Ashland, North Main Street could be converted to as many as three lanes traveling outbound (north) or it could be converted to two lanes outbound while providing one lane for southbound travel. The same type of arrangement could be made for the existing four-lanes. The City and/or emergency personnel would coordinate and manage such a situation if one arose.

What will fewer lanes do to traffic congestion?
Traffic congestion will increase slightly in some areas, primarily at the north and southbound approaches to the signalized intersections, but the amount of time it takes to travel the length of the corridor under consideration for the road diet will remain relatively the same.

What about 25 years from now when traffic volumes increase?
A 25 year traffic analysis was conducted at the Maple Street and Wimer-Hersey Street intersections to determine the impact of the road diet on existing and future (to year 2034) traffic conditions. Preliminary results indicate that congestion along North Main Street are not increase significantly over the 25 year period.

How will the road diet affect heavy truck traffic on Hersey Street?
Heavy trucks will continue to use North Main Street as well as Hersey Street during the proposed pilot program. The intersection of North Main Street and Wimer-Hersey Street will be reconfigured to accommodate heavy truck turning movements through the intersection. Left-turn movements from North Main Street onto Hersey Street will be permitted. Left-turn movements from North Main Street onto Wimer Street will be prohibited. Similarly, left-turn movements from Wimer Street and Hersey Street onto North Main Street will be prohibited. The purpose of these left-turn restrictions during the temporary road diet is to reduce conflicts and therefore crashes at the Hersey-Wimer Street/North Main Street intersection, which due to the history of crashes at that location, is now a safety focus for the City of Ashland.

How will the road diet improve safety for bicyclists?
North Main Street currently does not have designated bicycle facilities north of Helman Street. The provision of north-south striped bicycle lanes on the roadway shoulder will provide separation between vehicles and bicyclists reducing the potential for conflicts and improving bicycle safety. Nationally published research indicates installing bicycle lanes on an urban

arterial such as North Main Street tends to reduce, not only vehicle-bicycle crashes, but also total crashes on the roadway[3]. If in the future the bicycle lanes were buffered, the increased separation would increase the riding comfort for bicyclists and motorists as well.

Why test this during the busy summer time?
Testing the proposed road diet during the summer months allows us to see if the three-lane configuration will work for Ashland year round. If the community likes how it works during the summer, we can feel confident that it will work year round as summer is when we experience the highest traffic volumes on North Main Street.

In addition, because this is a pilot program, we need to be able to remove it before the weather becomes wet in the fall. The project consists primarily of restriping which can only be done in dry weather. We need to evaluate the new configuration for at least several months and ensure we can return it to four lanes before the rainy season begins.

Why doesn't ODOT just add bike lanes by widening the highway?
For most of this corridor there is no right-of-way available to widen the roadway for bicycle lanes or to add a center left-turn lane and keep the existing four lanes. Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) standards require that they add bicycle lanes whenever they modernize a roadway. ODOT would not be widening this segment of Main Street to provide additional vehicle capacity in the foreseeable future because the additional capacity is not warranted (by traffic counts) and additional right-of-way is not available. Even if purchasing right-of-way were to be considered, several properties along the corridor are nationally registered historic sites and many are identified by the City as historically significant.

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[3]American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO).Highway Safety Manual. 2010.