

Comments on US-23 Widening Project

March 15, 2015

The Washtenaw Bicycling and Walking Coalition (WBWC) has the following comments regarding the proposed widening of US-23 between M-14 and Silver Lake Road. The “preferred alternative” in the Environmental Assessment (EA) attempts to address the peak-period congestion on this corridor.

Things we support:

- Repairing the road.
- Ramp extensions.
- Bridge improvements, including the accommodations for bicycling and walking.
- Crash investigation sites.
- Extra lane at the southbound US-23/M-14 split.
- Roundabouts at selected interchanges.
- Alternative shoulder management -- A managed shoulder lane that would be opened to general traffic only when there is a crash or other incident that blocks a lane. Barring a lane blockage, the shoulder lane should be limited to multiple-occupant vehicles. Signage should allow an “HOV only” message for that lane. Any use of the shoulder lane requires enforcement. If possible, median areas should be created where violators could safely be stopped without having to cross to the right shoulder.
- HOV tools -- Creating the legal framework, under MDOT leadership, for proper enforcement of high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes.
- “Wally” study -- Continued investigation of the “Wally” rail option, with the goal of understanding soon the probable costs and timeframes.

Things we oppose:

- Proposed shoulder management -- A lane regularly opened to all vehicles during the southbound a.m. peak and the northbound p.m. peak.

Things that concern us about the “preferred alternative”:

- Traffic impact -- The proposed widening seems likely to increase total vehicle volumes arriving in Ann Arbor. And historically, adding road capacity has induced additional traffic.
- Parking impact -- Higher vehicle volumes imply more parking demand, which conflicts with Ann Arbor goals to limit new parking.
- Non-motorized impact -- Higher traffic would discourage bicycling and walking, which conflicts with the local goals embodied in non-motorized transportation plans.
- Carpooling discouragement -- Added capacity reduces the impetus for people to carpool and thereby reduce congestion.
- Land-use impact -- Transportation policy should support the local land-use goals of compact development, preservation of open space, and development in areas served by diverse transportation options. Adding highway capacity conflicts with these goals. Many urban-area communities can accommodate more housing and other development, and many rural areas would like to retain what they can of their rural character.
- Congestion strategy -- Whereas this proposal seeks to address congestion by adding capacity, local plans seek to reduce congestion by increasing ways to travel, as exemplified by the WATS transit plan and the ReImagine Washtenaw plan.
- EA scope -- We found no analysis in the EA of the above impacts outside of the land immediately adjacent to the corridor and no focus on the countywide transportation system.
- Relation to goals -- The impacts of this project would conflict with adopted local goals.

We believe that the “preferred alternative” presented in the EA does not adequately address impacts of the project. We believe that creation of “HOV only” lanes would be the best way to address congestion, minimize negative impacts, and support local goals. WBWC, with its coalition partners, represents the interests of thousands of bicyclists and walkers throughout Washtenaw County.