

MINNPOST

Donate

Nonprofit, nonpartisan journalism. Supported by readers.

METRO

After outcry, committee pauses plan to alter vehicle traffic on Minnehaha Parkway

By **Jessica Lee** | 11:35 am



MinnPost photo by Jessica Lee

The proposal aimed to reduce traffic volume to give priority to bicyclists and pedestrians, essentially by eliminating the option to drive continuously along Minnehaha Creek.

At a tense meeting that exposed neighborhood opposition to long-term plans for redeveloping **Minnehaha Parkway**, a citizen-led committee decided Tuesday night to suspend its work to allow time for new studies to help determine if vehicles should be allowed to use the scenic boulevard as they do now.

The **Citizen Advisory Committee**, which is under the purview of the **Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board**, made the move Tuesday in response to criticism of early versions of the **Minnehaha Regional Trail Master Plan**, which called for new concrete medians at four key intersections — at Nicollet and Lyndale avenues, as well as both places where the roadway intersects with 50th Street near Portland Avenue — to force drivers to turn right off the parkway and onto nearby residential streets.

The proposal aimed to reduce traffic volume to give priority to bicyclists and pedestrians, essentially by eliminating the option to drive continuously along **Minnehaha Creek**, and spurred opposition from people who said it would cause them inconvenience or detract from allowing everyone — even motorists — to experience the park.

But now the committee wants to scale back those plans. It will now partner with an outside consulting firm to study traffic on the parkway over the summer and then use that information to reconvene in the fall. The committee will ultimately recommend a version of the master plan — which will guide development of the parkway over the next 20 to 30 years — to the Park Board, which will have the final say on the document.

“I believe we should pause the master plan process,” MPRB project manager Adam Arvidson told the crowd Tuesday. “We need some time to figure out how do we actually study this piece of the master plan effectively.”

Responding to feedback

Over the past several weeks, opponents of the idea to limit vehicle traffic have flooded MPRB staff with comments with emails and online comments, as well as attended a series of public meetings. On Tuesday, more than 125 people packed a gymnasium at the Lynnhurst Recreation Center to weigh in on the proposal.

Carrying a sign that read, “Save Minnehaha Parkway” and shouting over each other, some laid bare their frustrations with the planning process and their skepticism of the committee’s and MPRB’s agenda.

It was the eighth meeting of its kind, which is designed to allow members of the committee — a 19-person group of representatives from neighborhood organizations and appointees by the Minneapolis City Council and MPRB — to discuss the master plan in a space where community members can ask questions and provide feedback.

Responding to the criticism, the committee on Tuesday agreed it should dial back its previous ideas to limit traffic along the parkway by removing the plan’s call for concrete medians on Nicollet and Lyndale avenues entirely. Arvidson said they support the amendment since medians don’t inherently guarantee greater safety for pedestrians and bicyclists, and the concrete additions could hinder some people’s access to park space.



MinnPost photo by Jessica Lee

Sitting at a U-shaped table at the front of the gym, several committee members addressed the audience about suspending its work to allow time for new studies.

Concrete medians are not off the table, however, for the two areas where the roadway intersects with 50th Street. At least one member of the committee expressed support for them, saying the traffic calming devices would alleviate vehicle congestion. All in all, the committee agreed to use its hiatus to further explore options for the area, while also advocating for easy improvements — such as clearing shrubs that are blocking signs or repainting crosswalks — as soon as possible.

“We can’t simply not address those intersections based on the engagement we heard,” Arvidson said. “I’m not convinced the status quo is a good long-term solution.”

Among all traffic crossings in Minneapolis, the parkway’s intersection with Portland Avenue ranked third highest for its number of bicycle-motorist crashes between 2000 and 2010, **totaling 127**, according to the most recent city data of its kind. At that time, data collectors tallied 194,922 vehicle trips per year, and more recent studies have calculated an uptick in the area’s daily pedestrian and bicycle trips — all trends that will influence the committee’s work.

But that data is not specific nor recent enough to guide proposals for the master plan, according to Arvidson. That's why parks staff has partnered with **Spack Consulting** — a Minneapolis-based engineering firm — to study the travel patterns of bicyclists, pedestrians and vehicles along the entire parkway over the summer.

Sitting at a U-shaped table at the front of the gym, several committee members addressed the audience to share reasoning for their decision to pause and collect more information. Jonathan Heide, who is an assistant professor of communication arts at **North Central University**, for example, emphasized how the decision is a reflection of the intense level of feedback they've received so far and makes sense so they can effectively weigh all input.

“Once we have knowledge of who is turning where at what intersections — that will certainly help what the results are,” Arvidson said, stressing how he anticipates a robust dialogue when the committee meets again in September or October. “It's still an open conversation.”

Other aspects of the plan

The master plan could include other proposals related to driving, too, such as the removal of the lower east-bound road under the Nicollet Bridge. That proposal would direct traffic up to the existing at-grade crossing of Nicollet — similar to current roadway conditions at Lyndale Avenue. Also, the plan proposes converting some two-ways to one-ways, and vice versa.

Still, no ideas have garnered more feedback than the earlier proposals to divert vehicle traffic from the parkway, according to Arvidson. Generally speaking, he said the public has shown broad support for tools to calm traffic and improve safety in busy areas. But most respondents, so far, are against concrete medians, and those opponents have far outnumbered any people who support the idea.

Via emails, online surveys and impassioned testimonies, some people have stressed they rely on the roadway for their daily commutes, or that it's their only way to enjoy the creek's natural amenities.



Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail Master Plan ([click to enlarge](#))

Courtesy of the City of Minneapolis

Louise Hertsgaard, of South Minneapolis, said in an email to project leaders that she periodically uses the route to get to and from work at the University of Minnesota when traffic is congested on Interstates 94 and 35W. She said she looks forward to taking in the parkway's greenery from the road, and the drives mean even more to her now since she can't experience the views via bicycling or walking because of mobility issues. "Since driving is my only way to experience this lovely route, please prevent its closure to me and others like me," she wrote.

A few residents, however, have argued in favor of concrete medians to reduce automobile traffic on the parkway, saying they would improve safety of nonmotorists, as well as show a commitment to the city's goals to develop urban landscapes that incentivize biking and walking in an effort to mitigate climate change. "The traffic there is very heavy, bumper to bumper, slow, and completely detracts for enjoyment of the park area," commenter Marilyn Cook wrote in an email. "If the vision of the Parkway is to maintain a stunning natural corridor in the city, and not to serve as a heavy, traffic commuter route, then [a call to limit car traffic] is the right one."

Beyond vehicle-related changes, the master plan includes ideas for high-visibility crosswalks and raised intersections; new technology that manages stormwater to reduce pollution and chances of flooding; improved access points to the lakes and parks; proposals to grow more vegetation; and ideas for new public art and playground spaces.

After the committee reconvenes with new data and design ideas in a few months, it plans to vote on a version of the master plan on which the public will have a 45-day window to comment, though dramatic, conceptual changes are unlikely at that point, Arvidson said.

That document will go before the park board for any potential last-minute changes and final adoption.

The planning is part of a larger-scale project – MPRB’s [Southwest Service Area Master Plan](#) – that will establish new long-term plans for development in 40-plus Minneapolis parks south of Interstate 394 and west of 35W. Much of those trails, including Minnehaha Parkway, are part of the 50-mile [Grand Rounds trail](#), which is one of the nation’s largest urban parkways.

GET MINNPOST IN YOUR EMAIL INBOX:

[Sign up](#)

You can also [learn about all our free newsletter options](#).

Related Tags: [Minneapolis parks](#) [Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board](#) [Transportation](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



Jessica Lee

Reporter Jessica Lee focuses her reporting on covering local government issues in Minneapolis and St. Paul. She can be reached at jlee@minnpost.com, and you can follow her on twitter at [@byjlee](#).

NO COMMENTS YET

MOST COMMENTED STORIES

Minneapolis 2040 Plan is just part of the solution (80)

No surprise: No evidence to back up Trump’s assertion that Obama sought Kim meeting (24)

From pushback to engagement: How Minnesota school districts have reacted to being flagged for discipline disparities (18)

Russia must be warned to stay out of our elections — or else (15)

As St. Paul rolls out restorative justice program for first-time offenders, officials encounter a skeptical public (10)

Thanks to our major sponsors

Sponsor of
D.C. Memo
and
MinnPost
Social



Sponsor of
Second
Opinion



Sponsor of
New
Americans



Sponsor of
Community
Sketchbook



Sponsor of
Economy



 Powered by
WordPress.com VIP

MinnPost Staff

CEO: Andrew Wallmeyer

Editor: Andrew Putz

Managing Editor: Susan Albright

Creative Director: Corey Anderson

News Editor: Tom Nehil

User Experience Engineer: Jonathan Stegall

Director of Development: Tanner Curl

Audience Engagement and Development Manager: Caroline Schwenz

Advertising Operations Director: Brian Perry

Director of Finance & Operations: Adrian Doerr

Membership Manager: Laura Lindsay

Co-founders: Joel & Laurie Kramer

MinnPost is a nonprofit, nonpartisan enterprise whose mission is to provide high-quality journalism for people who care about Minnesota.

Thanks to our generous donors

Mark Abeln & Monica Little

David & Debbie Andreas

Edward R. Bazinet Charitable Foundation / Maureen Bazinet Beck & Peter Beck

Wendy Bennett

Blandin Foundation

Carla Blumberg

Otto Bremer Trust

Burdick Family Fund of the Minneapolis Foundation / Allan & Lou Burdick

Bush Foundation

Central Corridor Funders Collaborative

Bill & Sharon Clapp

Sage & John Cowles

Jay & Page Cowles

David & Vicki Cox

Fran & Barb Davis
Toby & Mae Dayton
Jack & Claire Dempsey
Kelly Doran
Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation
Jill & Larry Field
Peter & Mary Gove
Great River Energy
Sam Heins & Stacey Mills
Kathleen Jones
The Joyce Foundation
Tom & Marlene Kayser
Kim & Garry Kieves
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
Joel & Laurie Kramer
Becky Lourey
Lee Lynch & Terry Saario
Martin and Brown Foundation
Jane Mauer
Bill and Amy McKinney
The McKnight Foundation
The Minneapolis Foundation
Northwest Area Foundation
Kandace Olsen & Scott Peterson
Jeremy Edes Pierotti & Kathryn Klibanoff
Susan & David Plimpton
Pohlad Family Foundation
John & Lois Rogers
Jeff Ross
The Saint Paul Foundation
John & Linda Satorius
Rebecca & Mark Shavlik
Tankenoff Families Foundation
John & Lesa Tieszen

Stephen & Jayne Usery

Donations and pledges totaling \$25,000 or more have been made by each of the families and foundations listed. For a list of all donors by category, see our most recent [Year End Report](#).