Future Downtown Transportation and Parking
Frequently Asked Questions
April 2023

Created by City of Missoula Department of Public Works and Mobility, the Missoula Parking Commission, and the Missoula Redevelopment Agency.

- **What transportation and mobility projects are planned for the downtown area?**
  1. Higgins Avenue from Brooks to Broadway
  2. Front and Main St. Two-way Conversion between Orange and Madison
  3. Riverfront Trail Connections between Ryman and Kiwanis Park
  4. Downtown Signal Optimization – 22 signals between Orange and Van Buren

- **Why did the City of Missoula put these projects together? And what is that project being called?**
  The City of Missoula applied for a Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant in February 2023. Packaging these projects together created a cohesive and compelling project for the RAISE grant application. The combined package is called the *Downtown Safety–Access–Mobility Project (DowntownSAM)*.

- **When would these projects happen? How long will construction take?**
  If the grant is awarded this fall, it will take 2-3 years to complete final construction drawings and agreements before construction can start. The City intends to construct the project in phases over 2-3 seasons to minimize construction impacts on businesses and downtown traffic.

- **Why is the City of Missoula considering these projects? What is the history?**
  Downtown Missoula saw significant investment in new buildings, hotels, restaurants, breweries, and housing over the past ten years, but we have not invested in modernizing our street and transportation system. The DowntownSAM project will create safer streets for walking, biking, driving, and public transportation; improve access and circulation for Downtown businesses, workers, residents, and visitors; establish an inviting streetscape that showcases Downtown Missoula as a destination; and support economic health and investment in Downtown. The original concept emerged in the 2009 Downtown Master Plan and was further evaluated in the updated 2019 Master Plan.

- **How was the public included? Is this a done deal?**
  Over 3,000 community members participated in the 2019 Downtown Master Plan. More recently, public outreach for the Higgins Avenue Corridor Study included over 750 survey responses and 50 direct conversations with over 70 business owners and employees. Public outreach for the Front and Main Two-Way conversion project engaged 141 residents and 14 stakeholder groups in 2021. In addition, there are Engage Missoula pages for the Higgins Avenue from Brooks to Broadway project, and the

Front/Main Two-Way Conversion project. These pages include existing planning documents for the projects.

There is still an opportunity to provide input. City staff continue to meet with business owners and other stakeholders to hear concerns and answer questions. A public meeting will be held May 9, at 5:30 pm at the Wilma Theater. Public input will be considered in the final design.

- **What's involved in the DowntownSAM projects?**

  Higgins Avenue from Brooks to Broadway:

  This project reconfigures Higgins Ave from 4 lanes to 3, allowing for dedicated left turn lanes, protected bike lanes, standardized lane widths, curb extensions, improved transit stops, wide sidewalks, street trees, improved lighting and ADA upgrades. All improvements will take place within existing right-of-way, and largely within existing curb lines.

  The conversion of Higgins will result in up to 50% reduction in crashes. An analysis of research on similar projects across the country indicates a strong potential for economic benefits, in part due to improvements to "quality of place" and in part due to the increased spending potential from new bicycle and pedestrian customers.

  Front and Main St. Two-way Conversion:

  This project restores Front and Main Streets to two-way traffic, and includes intersection improvements, signal upgrades, a new signal at Front/Madison, a protected bicycle loop running west on Front Street and east on Main Street, and bus stop improvements. On-street parking will be maintained in most locations, although parking will be removed in some locations to accommodate intersection curb extensions.

  The economic impact of this conversion is estimated to have an increase in sales of about 10% to 13% for local retail, restaurants, and other food establishments based on increased daily vehicle traffic and an improved environment for pedestrians and cyclists (pg 43, Front and Main Two-Way Feasibility Study).

  Riverfront Trail Connections

  This project includes widening Ron's River Trail to create safe and accessible connections between the trail and Front Street at four locations: Ryman Street Gateway, Pattee Street, Kiwanis Park, and the east side of Beartracks Bridge. Ryman Street between Front Street and the trail will be reconstructed, creating access for pedestrians and protected bicycle lanes between the Central Business District and the Riverfront Trail system. A new ADA-accessible ramp from Beartracks Bridge to the Riverfront Trail will provide a long-needed direct route between the bridge and riverfront commuter trail system.

  Downtown Signal Optimization

The City of Missoula and Montana Department of Transportation will upgrade signal detection, controllers, and other hardware with this project and conduct analysis and optimization of the entire downtown signal system following constructions.

The Benefit-Cost Analysis Memorandum demonstrates that DowntownSAM will result in nearly $5 in benefits and savings for every $1 invested. The value includes over $20M in savings from crashes, $25M in increased real estate value, and $25M in health benefits. While there is an anticipated opportunity cost of about $2M in potential traffic delay, there will also be $2.5M in savings from reduced auto usage and emissions reduction.

- **What is the specific number of downtown street parking stalls that will be eliminated as the result of these projects?**
    - It is important to recognize that the concept plans are a work in progress. Our design team continues to make adjustments as we hear feedback and develop more detailed drawings. For example, after discussion with the Montana Department of Transportation about Highway 12 traffic, the team changed the design between Brooks and 6th to include additional lanes.
    - The number of parking spaces is influenced by safety regulations (corner/driveway setbacks, fire hydrants), loading zones, bus stops, ADA parking, left turn lanes, and bikeways. Early estimates for Higgins Ave indicated up to 20 on-street parking spaces could be lost, however, this number will likely go down as we work through final designs. Similarly, early estimates for Front/Main were much higher, but after receiving feedback from businesses and a field review of existing conditions, the team is working to change the design to reduce parking impacts.
    - An additional 20 spaces under the Beartracks Bridge will be converted to ball courts and climbing structures in Caras Park, however this is not a direct component of the DowntownSAM project.
        - **In the past 10 years, the City has added:**
            - 519 public parking spaces in downtown structures, including 124 hourly spaces
            - This includes 371 spaces (66 Hourly, 305 Leased) at the Park Place garage
            - 148 spaces (58 Hourly, 90 Leased) at the ROAM
            - Free 2-hour parking at the new Missoula Public Library

      This follows the strategy recommended in the Downtown Master Plan to replace some on-street parking with structured parking, particularly for long-term (e.g. employee) parking. Additional parking structures are planned at the Riverfront Triangle, Payne Block (old library), and Missoulian Building, among others.

- **How will eliminating lanes on Front/Main and Higgins impact traffic?**

Traffic analysis of the combined Higgins and Front/Main projects indicates very limited impacts to vehicle travel in downtown. On Higgins, it is expected that people driving may see a total increase of about 50 seconds ***only during peak travel time, i.e., rush hour.*** However, traffic is expected to move more smoothly and safer during all other hours due to the addition of improved traffic signal coordination, left turns, and ability to travel in two directions along Front and Main Street.

Front and Main streets will similarly experience slight delay during peak hours; however, evidence and analysis shows that two-way restoration can increase overall capacity while slowing traffic to safer speeds. A new traffic signal at Madison and Front will improve access to the downtown, further reducing travel times. Improved safety will reduce delay caused by crashes.

- **Where will bike lanes be added?**
  Protected bike lanes will be added to Higgins between Brooks and Broadway, and in a single direction to both Front (westbound) and Main (eastbound). These improvements will create a connected network in our downtown core that does not existing today, linking the existing commuter trails, bike lanes on Higgins, and facilities west and east of Downtown.

- **How many bicyclists and pedestrians travel in the downtown area?**
  Bicycle volumes on Higgins are estimated to be about 600/day (average annual daily trips, Higgins Corridor Study Technical Memorandum #1). Average annual daily trips are estimated using an average of counts across all seasons, including summer peaks and winter lows. An estimated 18% of traffic at the Higgins/Front location is bicycle and 21% pedestrian per the 2016 Bicycle Facilities Master Plan. Pedestrian volumes on Higgins are approximately 1,940 per day on an average weekday, and more than 3,000 on a typical weekend.

- **Why is the City prioritizing bikes over cars?**
  The City of Missoula does not prioritize bikes over cars. Cars are necessary and welcome in Downtown. The approach is a multi-modal strategy to ensure all trips are safe, accessible and connected regardless of mode, which gives options for travel. These projects will help Downtown become a destination, not a through street.

- **What is the benefit of having separated bicycle lanes? Will that improve vehicle traffic flow?**
  Research and evidence over the last decade show that the number of people choosing to bike is directly related to the comfort, safety and accessibility of facilities. In addition, issues related to bicycle users traveling on the sidewalk or going against the flow of traffic increases without dedicated space. Adding protected bike lanes on Higgins and Front/Main will provide increased predictability for drivers and people biking, increase

safety for all modes, and reduce conflicts between those driving, parking, walking and biking.

- **What can I tell my friends/customers/family when they say there is no parking downtown? Are there any resources I can share?**
  In Downtown Missoula, we have approximately 960 on-street metered spaces, 170 pay lot spaces, and 230 short-term spaces in our garages for short-term public parking. In the core of Downtown, the demand for these on-street and off-street parking resources is high, but parking is available.

  There are options for parking that require a short walk, including the Central Park, Park Place, and ROAM parking structures. Monday through Friday, from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm, these locations offer hourly parking at $1.00 per hour, with the first hour free of charge. After 6:00 pm and on the weekends, the lease spaces are open for hourly use at no charge. In our on-street and off-street lease locations, the permit restriction ends at 6:00 pm allowing for public use of these spaces.

  With the two-way restoration of Front and Main streets and addition of a dedicated left turn lane on Higgins, access to these off-street parking resources will be improved, and navigating to and from these garages on foot will be safer.

  Much like driving to Costco or other popular destinations, parking can be limited at specific locations, however downtown is an incredibly accessible and easy to navigate center. Once parked, all destinations are a short walk away, and embracing "park once, shop often" will improve customer experiences.
- **What will happen if the RAISE grant is not awarded?**
  The City will continue to seek funding to construct these projects. Without Federal funding, the projects will take significantly longer to complete and will require significant investment of local transportation funding.

- **Where can I find more information?**
  - Downtown Safety–Access–Mobility Project Engage Missoula page
  - Higgins Avenue Corridor Plan: Brooks to Broadway Engage Missoula page
  - Front/Main Two-Way Conversion Engage Missoula page

References:

Higgins Corridor Study Preferred Concept Traffic Analysis:
https://www.engagemissoula.com/11878/widgets/35150/documents/41293

Downtown SAM Benefit-Cost Analysis:
https://www.engagemissoula.com/11878/widgets/35150/documents/41300

Front-Main Two-Conversion Feasibility Study:
https://www.ci.missoula.mt.us/DocumentCenter/View/29737/2015-5-15-FRONT_MAIN_FINAL

Bicycle Facilities Master Plan:
http://www.ci.missoula.mt.us/DocumentCenter/View/39172/2016-Bicycle-Facilities-Master-Plan?bidId=

Higgins Corridor Study Technical Memorandum #1:
https://www.engagemissoula.com/11878/widgets/35150/documents/41278

Higgins Corridor Study Economic Memorandum:
https://www.engagemissoula.com/11878/widgets/35150/documents/40170

Additional resources and studies about one-way street conversions and restorations:

https://www.planetizen.com/node/69354

http://spacing.ca/vancouver/2010/09/16/does-vancouver-still-need-one-way-streets/

https://www.governing.com/archive/the-return-of-the.html: "A year later, the success of the project is even more apparent. Twice as many cars drive down Main Street every day, without traffic jams or serious congestion."

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-03-09/two-way-street-conversions-are-a-mixed-economic-blessing: more of a mixed outcome study summary – key point is that two-way conversions can have positive or negative impacts, and that context is important. Conversions tend to benefit typical downtown businesses most, and lead to higher growth in income and housing. The article states that two-way conversions should not be sold as economic panaceas on their own, but that if appropriate context and other policies are in place they can be net positive impacts.

https://www.accessmagazine.org/fall-2012/two-way-street-networks-efficient-previously-thought/

To summarize: while two-way streets may move traffic a bit slower than one-ways, they can typically serve higher trip rates at peak times.

"two-way networks are often more efficient than one-way networks. Even though two-way networks may provide lower vehicle-moving capacities, they can, in some cases, serve trips at a higher rate. This trip-serving capacity is a better metric for predicting network performance during peak periods. When trips are short, two-way networks that allow conflicting turning maneuvers have higher trip-serving capacities than one-way networks because the additional circuity in one-way networks offsets the more efficient intersection control. Two-way networks are more competitive as the length of the signal cycle increases. Additionally, two-way networks that ban left turns can always serve trips at a higher rate. While both strategies

eliminate conflicting turning maneuvers, two-way networks with banned left turns impose less circuity than one-way networks.”