

## **Meeting on the Shoal Creek Transportation Project, May 11, 2005**

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The Gullett meeting was held on May 11, 2005 by the City of Austin to address recent changes on Shoal Creek Blvd (SCB). The purpose of the meeting was to update residents of the two neighborhoods along Shoal Creek Blvd., Rosedale and Allandale, as well as cyclists and other users of the corridor, of the status of a design project that was begun over five years ago, and to solicit public comments.

The city was represented by Sondra Creighton (Director, Public Works), Debra Dibble (Project Mgt., Public Works), Keri Juarez (Project Mgt., Public Works), Alan Hughes (Transportation, Public Works), Colly Kreidler (Bike/Ped program coordinator), Julie Strong (Public Works), and Joe Ramos (Project Mgt., Public Works). Paul Nagy represented Allandale. Charles Gandy of Livable Community Consulting was hired under the pilot program budget as a design consultant. There was standing room only at the meeting.

Traffic engineer Alan Hughes reported that, after analyzing traffic at several spots along SCB, the data showed that there was a very small slowing of car speeds. This was judged to be negligible by the city. To the extent that the design was intended to calm traffic by reducing speeds, it has failed.

Of particular interest was the role of the City Council. There is an ordinance on the books that stipulates that, when streets are re-paved, if a bike lane is to be (possibly re-) striped on that street, parking shall be prohibited in the bike lane to provide for obstacle-free, channeled bike traffic.

Subsequently, due to neighborhood opposition to removal of any parking on SCB, the city council passed a resolution introduced by Mayor Pro Tem Jackie Goodman that a consensus-based, neighborhood-involved pilot design project would be funded at a cost of \$500K. The end result is the design we see implemented on SCB.

An important distinction of the current design is that, while SCB remains an important corridor in the city's bike route plan -- it is still an official bike route -- the striped lanes are NOT bike lanes. They are, more or less, officially shared bike/parking lanes.

The current plan is to continue to monitor the street for six months before making any decisions about major changes. It is a pilot project, and so the city made it clear that it is not set in stone. But, this is, of course, subject to budgetary constraints.

There was a lengthy question and answer session. The majority of the neighbors who spoke were vociferously averse to the design as it exists now, particularly to the curb extensions. The exchange was quite unruly at times. Some residents complained that cyclists ride on or very close to the white stripe separating the driving lane from the

parking lane, which they felt was more dangerous now that the car lanes are narrower. While this may be true, this is expected behavior for cyclists trying to avoid obstacles in the parking lane where they are expected to ride.

There was an apparent misunderstanding about why the curb extensions exist. According to the original design, they exist for two purposes: to calm traffic by narrowing the perceived width of the corridor; and to dissuade drivers from driving in the parking lane.

Cyclists who spoke also did not like the curb extensions. The main reason given was visibility; the curb extensions could be difficult to see.

While there were a few folks who spoke favorably about the new design, the overwhelming sentiment of the neighbors was a demand for the city to remove the curb extensions.

There was some mention of an on-going working group in which neighborhood volunteers could participate, with the goal of working with the city toward a resolution on -- and, presumably, an improvement to -- SCB. Anyone interested in participating should contact Paul Nagy.

There was also mention by Ms. Creighton that the city will attempt to set up a website or other internet resource that the neighborhood could use to keep informed on progress. Anyone interested in making use of these resources should learn more by contacting Ms. Creighton at the City of Austin Public Works Dept.

Parked cars are more barriers to cyclists. Whereas there are fully four feet of space that a cyclist can use to negotiate the curb extension, there is typically zero space, to pass cars parked and cyclists are forced fully into the adjacent travel lane.

The lesson here is, if you're going to channel traffic, you can't put obstacles in the channels.

If we decide that channeling car and bike traffic is valuable and worthwhile, then we need to remove parking from properly implemented bike lanes. If channeling is deemed unnecessary then on-street parking can be left alone, but the parking lane stripes should be removed, leaving cars and bikes to share wide lanes.