

Road Diet Long 27 July 2016

[music playing]

Female Speaker:

My name is Jessica. I'm a proud mom of two kids, and we drive lots of places. We spend a lot of time in the car; we go to classes; we run errands; we go out for family activities; and we spend a lot of time on the road.

Female Speaker:

Well, I live in the city, so I rely on just walking everywhere I need to go. I have to walk to and from work; I walk to meet friends, go to the grocery store, to the gym; wherever I need to go, I walk.

Male Speaker:

My daily bike commute starts out about five in the morning, and I leave my house and I go about five miles down paths and streets until I connect with a bus center. I've had a couple of close calls where I really had to hit the brakes hard.

Female Speaker:

While I'm crossing a four-lane in the city, sometimes I get a little nervous because I'm not really sure if the cars can see me. Sometimes I don't always have enough time to cross the street, and I'm always a little worried that I might get hit.

Female Speaker:

In this area, the roads are always busy; there's always a lot of traffic out there, and drivers here – the make poor choices. They're weaving in and out of traffic, slamming on brakes to quickly stop because they missed their turn, or they're distracted because they're doing other things in the car.

Male Speaker:

There's a lot of reasons why a community might want to build a road diet, but it's actually considerably safer to build a street with a road diet configuration rather than a conventional four-lane, undivided section. It's a great opportunity to combine the need for bike infrastructure with the goal to help improve traffic safety.

Male Speaker:

The reason that roads diets are considered, at least from our agency standpoint – a big – a big benefit is the safety benefit. So safety is improved in road diets through a couple of ways. Also, having four lanes instead of three or two lanes, allows people to weave through traffic, and so you end up with sideswipes. And by having a road diet you eliminate conflicts. By going to a three-lane cross-section you now provide a turn lane so that people can move over to make left turns, and you don't have those rear-end crashes. The other benefit that you get typically is speed reduction. On the Robinson Street Road Diet and the Gaines Street Road Diet here in Tallahassee, when you go down to having only two travel lanes, the prudent driver who will drive the speed limit now controls the platoon speed, basically meaning that the platoons of cars

can't travel any faster than the prudent driver.

Male Speaker:

Now, there are other kinds of road diets as well. For instance, we implemented one this year where we started with a five-lane street – two lanes in each direction, plus a median. We took away one lane in one direction, just enough to be able to create bike lanes in both directions. So now the street is not symmetric; it's got one lane in one direction and it's got two lanes in one direction, but it has both bike lanes, and so it still functions great to be able to have that bike accommodation.

Female Speaker:

Road diets have been implemented on State of Florida-maintained roadways and also local roadways around Florida, and we have done some before-and-after studies, and in general we found that the total number of crashes has decreased after the implementation of a road diet, and some of those are related to the more serious types of crashes – so, including head-ons, sideswipes, and left turn and angle-type crashes.

Female Speaker:

Nation-wide studies have shown that we have had a reduction in overall crashes anywhere from the area of 19 to 47% once a road diet has been installed on our traditional four-lane divided highways. We also have some localities that, due to their experiences, have shown up to 69% of reduction in crashes.

Male Speaker:

On the areas where we do road diets, we're finding that all types of crashes are reduced. When we converted the street from three lanes in both directions to two lanes in both directions under a road diet, what we were able to find is that we not only increase the walking and biking activity but we reduce the number of crashes on the streets, of all types.

Female Speaker:

In Tennessee, with road diets, a lot of the ways we've been incorporating road diets into projects is through resurfacing projects; the harrowing part about that is, with resurfacing projects we typically have a four, five-month turnaround process that we hear about the project to when we actually turn in design plans. And so one of the things I always tell communities is that, if you know of a project that you're thinking about doing a road diet on, a lot of times you kind of have to be ready to go.

Male Speaker:

One example that we've had completed, recently, of a road diet, has been Church Street, the Church Street viaduct. Before, it was a four-lane road. There was cars going in both directions. It was reduced down to three travel lanes, provided with a center lane, and then also an outside bike lane, on both sides. We've seen that, from the bicyclist community and those that bike up and down the route, that they have had really positive things to say about it.

Male Speaker:

If we determine that the street will work well from an engineering perspective, then we want to

get together with the community and talk about the various configurations that might be available. We'll work with the elected officials that represent that community to talk about whether it might make more sense to change the configuration. I think one of the things that's important is, the street belongs to the community, and we want to involve the community in every decision we make.

Male Speaker:

City of Phoenix did a very amazing job of community engagement through surveys, through stakeholder focus groups. They went out to community meetings; they met with neighborhood organizations, neighborhood leaders, and really solicited a lot of input on how to improve the streets in the downtown specifically.

Female Speaker:

One of the things that makes a road diet really successful is, putting elements along the side of the road that make it beautiful, make it attractive to pedestrians so it's not just a narrow road; it's actually a public space.

Male Speaker:

You can really see a dramatic increase in the diversity of people using the sidewalks from strollers, joggers, people walking their dogs in a way that, 10 years ago, you wouldn't have seen in this community. And now we've got pedestrians that are actually a part of life for the street 24/7. And we see that when the pedestrians are out on the street, it attracts even more people to enjoy the sidewalks and really help support the businesses that made the investment in developing this community.

Male Speaker:

I think road diets are going to have a positive impact on the transportation system as a whole, by which I mean we're going to see much-improved accommodations for pedestrians, cyclists, much safer road ways.

Male Speaker:

Bicycling on the redeveloped roadways around Phoenix that has been on a road diet is a huge improvement. Number one, it gives me a barrier; it gives me my own lane that is reserved strictly for cyclists.

Female Speaker:

Crossing the street with a road diet is a lot easier now. If I don't make it across the intersection in time, there's a place in the middle for me to stand. That way, I feel like the cars can see me better and I don't have to worry about getting hit by a car. I feel much safer.

Female Speaker:

I think road diets have really made an improvement. The traffic flows better. Having that dedicated turn lane has really helped reduce some of the stress and has made it easier for people to get where they're going. And I didn't think it would work, but having less lanes has really helped; people can't weave in and out of traffic, and I really feel safer on the road.

[end of transcript]