



May 4, 2020

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Dear Mayor Berkowitz:

At Bike Anchorage, we have been excited to see the noticeable increase in the number of people walking, bicycling, and otherwise enjoying outdoor spaces in Anchorage. The combination of warmer temperatures, previous hunker down order, and continued physical distancing recommendation has made for an outpouring of community members enjoying their neighborhood streets and trails for daily outdoor activity. Getting outdoors continues to be an essential way for Alaskans to stay healthy and calm during the Covid-19 pandemic.

We have, however, become concerned with a few aspects of these increased demands on our multi-use facilities. Trails and sidewalks are often crowded enough that physical distancing becomes challenging or impossible. Our current infrastructure provides only minimum width for two people walking side by side (if at all). Neighborhood streets have also become much more popular to walk through. With this popularity and required physical distancing, people are frequently needing to walk and bike further into those streets while passing one another.

While there is overall less vehicle traffic, [people driving have more of a tendency to speed](#), which is contrary to the added precaution necessary due to the sudden increase of vulnerable roadway users. As a result, many of our members have reported difficulty in finding space where they can recreate outdoors in a way that feels safe. The experience of physical distancing has made us more aware of the existing road space allocated to vehicles, that at many times of day is unused. Could this space be redistributed to pedestrians and cyclists who are competing for 4-5' of sidewalk or shoulder?

We see an opportunity to increase options for getting outside safely by opening some of the road space for people to walk and bike that is currently underused by vehicles. Partial opening of road sections or lanes to people walking and biking, and limiting the vehicle traffic, could alleviate crowding on



trails and sidewalks and improve safety on routes that are already being increasingly used by pedestrians, cyclists, and families. We suggest two options for actions that could be taken:

- 1) **Opening selected residential streets as pedestrian spaces and restricting through traffic for vehicles.** [This doesn't need to be complicated.](#) It might involve placing temporary “local traffic only” barricades or “watch for pedestrians” signs at relevant intersections. Such closures would have minimal impacts on motorized traffic by reducing only the through-traffic, but would also allow safer and more comfortable non-motorized use of those routes. If placed strategically across the Muni, such partial closures would provide residents with accessible and safe public spaces without having to travel far from home. See [attached map](#) for specific suggestions of a low-stress network that allows bikes and peds to move to/from/through neighborhoods. These don't necessarily need to be expensive corridors, but need to limit speeds and volumes for better walking and biking.
  
- 2) **Reserving one lane of multi-lane throughways for non-motorized traffic.** Traffic cones, bollards, and temporary signs could be used to indicate the appropriate use of the lane. Converting one lane to non-motorized use would provide additional opportunities for people to choose the bicycle to cover longer distances without using the multi-use trails or the narrow sidewalks. This would also benefit essential workers who need or prefer non-motorized options for transportation. This initiative could also be used to test or preview corridors that have been identified for future bike-friendly infrastructure. Again, see [attached map](#) for specific suggestions.

We envision either or both of the above options providing more outdoor space for residents to use safely for walking, jogging, or bicycling, thus ensuring that physical distancing requirements can be met. If widespread partial closures are impractical to implement all at once, we hope you will consider implementing one or two on a trial basis, publicizing the initiative, and evaluating whether the new space is used as intended when motorized traffic is reduced. [Dozens of cities in the US and worldwide](#) such as Oakland, CA, Calgary, Canada, and St Paul, MN have implemented these types of programs in recent weeks, and have documented the success and popularity of space for physically distanced outdoor activity. Such initiatives have been most successful when connected routes are prioritized and only passive traffic enforcement is used.



Providing more space would alleviate crowding on existing trails and sidewalks and allow appropriate physical distancing, thus alleviating the stress arising from the difficulty of getting outdoors safely. Optimizing more outdoor space for individuals and families to walk, jog, or bike would also help the city feel more pleasant and welcoming during a difficult time, sending a message that the wellbeing of Anchorage's residents is a key priority – even beyond the primary goal of minimizing the spread of Covid-19. [Such action would be a valuable addition to the measures the Muni has already taken](#), such as transforming the PeopleMover service, proactively implementing orders to reduce non-essential travel and social contact, designating bike shops as an essential business, and keeping residents informed to ensure the safety of our population during this trying time.

Thank you for your consideration, and for your past support in making our city more bikeable, walkable, and livable. Please don't hesitate to follow up on these comments by emailing [info@bikeanchorage.org](mailto:info@bikeanchorage.org) or calling (907) 891-8906.

Thank you,

Devora Barrera Gonzalez  
Director, Bike Anchorage

with support from  
Bike Anchorage Advocacy Committee and Board of Directors