

Futures for Locust Street – Third Aldermanic District

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1.0 Background

The Locust Street community was involved with a controversial plan to widen Locust Street due to the growing problems with neighborhood quality, personal and traffic safety, and vehicular congestion. The unintended result of this plan would be the destruction of part of the community's housing and businesses. This report discusses other unexplored alternatives that would alleviate the problems without the physical destruction of the community.

2.0 Problem

Traffic congestion has occurred on Locust Street for three major reasons:

- Locust Street was one of three principle routes between the East Side and the rest of Milwaukee
- Traffic flow was considerably hindered at the intersection of Locust Street and Humboldt Boulevard by an at-grade railroad crossing and an abrupt change in the number of lanes (requiring traffic lanes to merge)
- The narrowness of the viaduct on Locust Street caused traffic to slow

Additional problems included:

- Numerous complaints of excessive traffic on residential streets in the project area
- High number of vehicle-related accidents
- Inadequate pavement structure and poor condition of street, sidewalks, and curbs
- Existing and projected traffic volumes exceeded the practical capacity of the existing facility to operate at a satisfactory level of service

In addition to the technical problems, the Locust Street neighborhood was also deteriorating, due in part to the lack of implementation for the widening of Locust Street. While the plan had been created in the 1950s, in 1975 it had yet to be enacted. In the meantime, some home and business owners were unwilling to invest in their properties because of the possibility of demolition/condemnation by the City. As a result, some of the buildings had deteriorated significantly and left a blighting influence on the neighborhood.

3.0 Alternatives

The report summarized two alternatives – the original widening proposal by the City and a second, unexplored option. They are as follows:

Alternative I: The Widening of Locust Street

The City's proposal for the widening of Locust Street included two 36-foot roadways with a 24-foot median and a 120-foot right-of-way. In order to complete this proposal, it would have been necessary to acquire 39 parcels of land, displacing 60 households and 17 businesses establishment (7% of the residential and commercial units in the immediate Locust Street community). However, according to the report, this proposal did not recognize the following key factors:

- The at-grade railroad crossing would intensify the traffic congestion if the street was widened

- Increased traffic flow could create a safety issue with Locust Court, an elderly home – the pedestrian traffic signal at the home would also cause traffic congestion, which would increase with the traffic flow
- The existing viaduct cannot be widened and its “below standards” status because its narrow width would hinder traffic flow
- The condemnation of 39 parcels would have a greater blighting influence on the neighborhood
- The widened portion of Locust Street would not be compatible with the narrower portion already existing east of the river

Alternative II: Locust Street as a One-Way

In this alternative, the excessive traffic and congestion was redefined as an “over-use” problem (as opposed to the proposed “under-capacity” of Locust Street). The non-destructive alternative focused on diverting traffic, accommodating vehicles that must use Locust Street, and preserving the neighborhood. The recommendations of this alternative are as follows:

- Reduce traffic on Locust Street by making it a one-way street (going west from Humboldt to Holton)
- Increase the capacity of the street by placing a permanent ban on parking
- Divert east-bound traffic from Locust to Center and Burleigh Streets, which are operating significantly under capacity
- Implement the general improvement in the pavement structure and curbs on Locust Street
- Maintain proper repair and upkeep of the railroad right-of-way
- Install adequate street lighting
- Provide off-street parking to partially replace the approximately 75 parking spaces eliminated from Locust Street between Holton and Humboldt

4.0 Recommendation

The report recommends that the non-destructive, one-way alternative be considered for implementation on Locust Street. In addition to the safety, cost, and advantages in preserving the integrity of the neighborhood, this alternative was one that could be easily implemented on a short-run basis and required a minimal capital investment.