

29th Ave Test Closure

April 2016



Above: View of 29th Ave test closure from the intersection of 27th St E (looking south)

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Background

In May of 2015, Public Works began a test closure of 29th Ave S at the Midtown Greenway. Initial discussion surrounding the closure originated from the Seward community during a Safe Routes to School planning effort for Seward Montessori. The closure was intended to inform this planning study and also to explore potential treatments along a future 29th Ave S bicycle boulevard. Some background information regarding the closure is as follows:

- The 29th Ave S Bicycle Boulevard was included in the City's Bicycle Master Plan in 2011
- In the fall of 2012 Seward Neighborhood Group's Community Development Committee (CDC) passed a motion supporting bicycle boulevard improvements on 29th Ave S. Seward residents and Seward School staff also worked at this time to gather community input related to a bicycle boulevard on 29th Ave S. This group submitted an application to MNDOT (Minnesota Department of Transportation) for these improvements but were not awarded funds.
- In fall of 2013, Seward Montessori staff, parents and residents applied for and received a Safe Routes planning assistance grant through MNDOT.
- The resulting Safe Routes to School planning effort for Seward Montessori was led by ALTA Planning and Community Design Group. Engagement sessions included Seward faculty, parents, and residents were conducted from October 2014 – October 2015. The final plan was released in November 2015 and can be found here: <http://wcms/wwwmpls/publicworks/saferoutes/WCMSP-170260>
- Coinciding with the onset of this Safe Routes Planning effort, Seward Neighborhood CDC, Longfellow Neighborhood Environment & Transportation Committee, the Midtown Greenway Coalition, and Ward 2 Council Member Cam Gordon sent letters expressing support for a test closure at 29th Ave S and the Midtown Greenway. Each cited a desire to reduce conflicts along the greenway as well as increase safety for bicyclists and pedestrians along 29th Ave S.
- In January 2015, representatives from these organizations met with Public Works staff to discuss specific concerns related to 29th Ave S and the Midtown Greenway. The test closure at 29th Ave S and the Midtown Greenway was discussed amongst those present at this meeting. There was a perception from the community members present that a large amount of non-local and heavy truck traffic utilized 29th Ave S. This was said to pose a safety risk for students of Seward Montessori School, users of Matthews Park, and bicyclists and pedestrians using 29th Ave S or the Midtown Greenway. Another item discussed was that 29th Ave S is one of five surface crossings along this portion of the Midtown Greenway, which was said to negatively impact continuity for bicyclists and negatively impact safety for all users. The result of this meeting was that Public Works staff agreed to explore the feasibility of a 30-60 day test closure of 29th Ave S at the greenway.
- In late winter – early spring 2015, Public Works staff vetted a 30-60 day test closure of 29th Ave S at the Midtown Greenway with Minneapolis Fire, Police, and School Transportation staff, and with business owners located near proposed closure. Public Works staff was explicit about the brief time period intended for the test during all communication at that time. No major concerns were expressed from these parties that would have prevented the test within this set time period.

Goals

The general purpose of the test closure was to support the development of a Safe Routes to School plan at Seward Montessori and to provide data regarding a future bicycle boulevard along 29th Ave S. The specific goals of the test closure regarding these planning efforts were:

- Determine whether a full closure at 29th Ave S and the Midtown Greenway would result in traffic volume and speed reductions adjacent to Seward Montessori School
- Determine whether traffic would naturally reroute to suitable alternative north/south routes (31st Ave S, 27th Ave S, and 26th Ave S)
- Document the effects of eliminating 1 of 5 surface crossings on the greenway within the neighborhood
- Document public perception of the closure and use this feedback to further study concerns that may arise
- Document whether the operations of local businesses are critically impacted (businesses were notified prior to the test)

Methods/Evaluation Criteria

Three primary evaluation tools were used in collecting data regarding the closure. Automobile tube counts were taken to collect traffic data; video footage was collected to count bicyclists and pedestrians and to observe business delivery traffic throughout a standard day; public feedback was collected by phone, email and comment cards primarily through the City's 311 system.

- **Automobile Tube Counts:** Before and after counts were conducted at 26 locations within the Seward and Longfellow Neighborhoods; three additional counts were taken during the fall school semester to verify peculiarities in the data. Results are summarized in the diagram 'Figure 1' on page 4.
- **Video observations:** 24hr video was taken on 29th Ave S at the closure and at 30th Ave S at the greenway; this was used to observe vehicle movement into the business lot just south of the closure, and to count the number of bicycles and pedestrians using the greenway, 29th Ave S and 30th Ave S near the closure.
- **Public Feedback:** City 311 signs were placed on 29th Ave S and on the Midtown Greenway at the site of the closure; 331 total comments were received in six months' time. These results are summarized in 'Figure 2' on Page 5.

Results

The test closure seemed to have the greatest benefit for the estimated 2,740 daily users on the Midtown Greenway. The closure eliminated potential automobile conflicts at this surface crossing and enhanced the continuity of the greenway by removing a corresponding need for stop control. Vehicle volumes along 29th Ave S were also substantially reduced within 1-2 blocks from the closure. This was observed by a 69% decrease one block north of the closure. However, the closure had less effect at volume control near the school. There was a 14% decrease in automobile volume recorded on the block adjacent to Seward Montessori School and Matthews Park. Still, much of the feedback from those residing near the school and park was positive. A summary of the data collected is found below (ADT=Average Daily Trips - motor vehicles) (EDT=Estimated Daily Trips - bicycles and/or pedestrians):

- Traffic volumes varied along 29th Ave S by location. All but one block was within a suitable range (<1500 ADT) for a bicycle boulevard facility both before and after the closure was put in place. The block from 22nd St E to Franklin Ave SE had an ADT between 1800-1900vpd both before and after the closure. This remains an allowable volume on a bicycle boulevard for a limited section according to NACTO guidance.
- Traffic adjacent to Seward School was reduced by 14% during the closure, from 1415 ADT to 1214 ADT
- Traffic speeds adjacent to the school remained nearly the same prior to and after the closure, 28.13 mph vs. 27.49mph (85% speed)

- Traffic was reduced significantly on blocks nearer to the closure; a 69% reduction was observed one block north of the closure
- Bicycle and pedestrian traffic along the greenway at the closure was 2,740 EDT during the closure, up from 1,970 combined bicycle and pedestrian EDT in 2014 on this portion of the greenway
- 972 vehicles were counted on 29th Ave S one block north of the greenway prior to the closure
- 31st Ave S saw a 32% increase in traffic at one location, though other locations on 31st Ave S recorded a slight decrease; Other alternative north/south routes did not record a significant increase (this was contradictory to expectations)
- 30th Ave S saw a 30% increase in traffic crossing the greenway, from 442 ADT to 574 ADT (30th Ave S is also a local residential street similar to 29th Ave S)

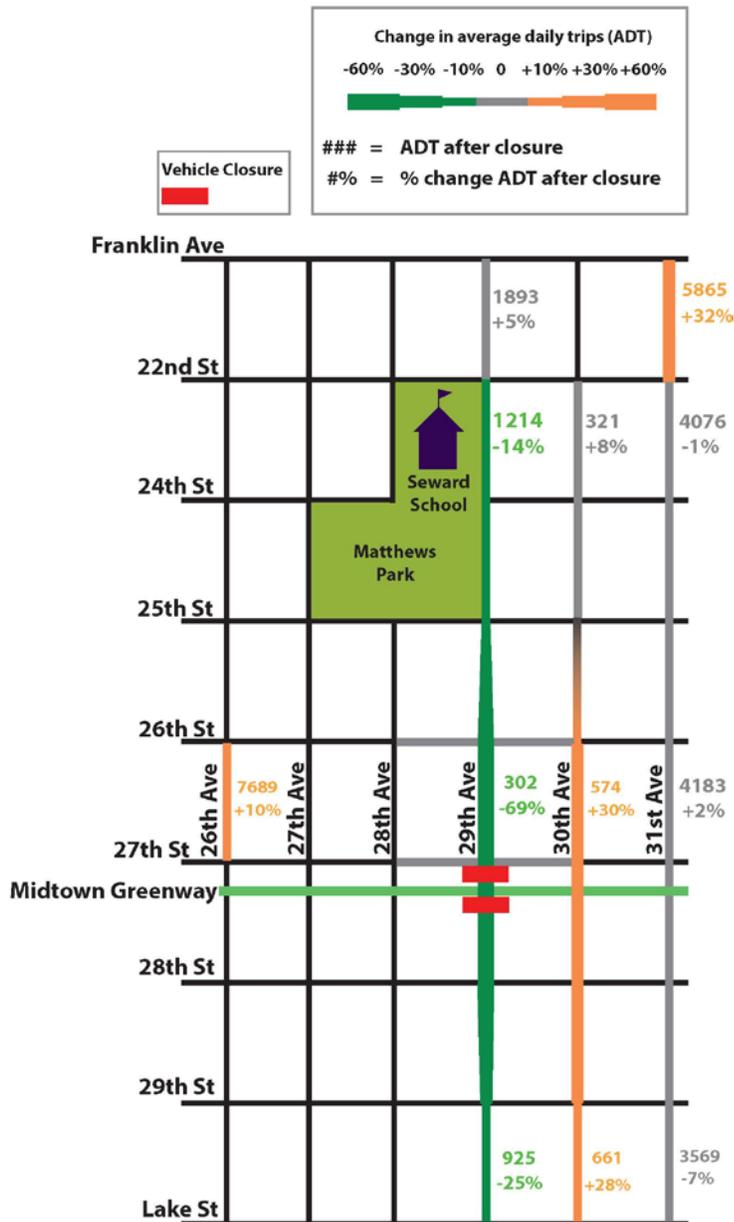


Figure 1 - Above: Changes in average daily vehicle trips (ADT) collected by tube counts taken before and during the closure

Feedback

Feedback was collected through the City's 311 system from May – Nov 2015. Signs stating "Test Closure Call 311 to Comment" were placed on 29th Ave S and on the Midtown Greenway facing all approaches to the closure. Comments were received primarily through phone and email, though several dozen comments were also received on comment cards that were distributed by Seward Neighborhood Group volunteers. The number of total comments received after six months was 331. These fell into the following three categories: 72% positive, 25% negative and 3% neutral.

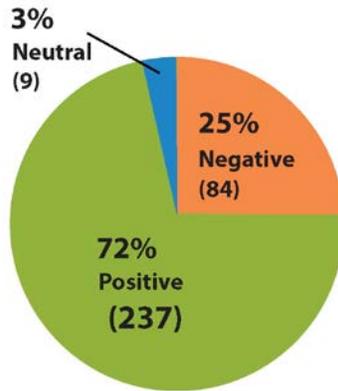


Figure 2 - Left: The pie chart displays results of the feedback taken from May – Nov 2015; the quantity of feedback in each category is shown in parenthesis.

Key points gathered from the feedback are as follows:

- Positive feedback from residents living on or near 29th Ave S cited quality of life benefits such as reduced safety concerns from motor vehicles, quieter streets and less commercial truck use. These comments were received from residents throughout the neighborhood.
- Positive feedback from greenway users cited increased continuity and perceptions of safety along the greenway due to the elimination of a surface crossing
- Perceptions from motorists reporting negative feedback was that the closure was inconvenient due to 29th Ave's direct connection with Riverside Ave S
- Negative comments received from several residents reported a noticeable increase in traffic on 30th Ave S or other nearby streets
- Negative comments from one or more residents reported that school busses and trucks now parked near their home and sometimes left their engine idling. Diesel fumes from these vehicles were reported as a nuisance and a health concern.
- Perceptions from businesses south of the greenway were that the increased traffic on 30th Ave S presented safety concerns at the steep/blind crossing with the greenway
- Perceptions from the businesses south of the Greenway were that their delivery drivers found the closure inconvenient but not unmanageable (video footage showed Semi-truck deliveries were still taking within the business lot south of the greenway with the closure in place)
- Three comments were received regarding personal safety issues due to the closure. This was a perception among nearby residents that walking at night seems less safe with the closure in place because automobile traffic is no longer present as a "watchful eye" on their block near the closure.

Conclusion, Next Steps

The test reveals that the closure has been mostly beneficial to greenway users, with only partial success at reducing traffic volumes and speeds adjacent to Seward Montessori School. Bicyclists and pedestrians traveling along 29th Ave S receive the most benefit on blocks near the greenway and less benefit farther from the closure. Based on the traffic volume data summarized on page 4, it appears that many drivers continue to utilize 29th Ave S for at least a portion of their route through the Seward Neighborhood. Furthermore, while the location of the closure at the Midtown Greenway does offer a strategic benefit for greenway users, it does not offer a logical alternative route for drivers. This is a likely reason that many drivers appear to divert to 30th Ave S, a local street that also crosses the greenway at grade.

Further exploration of alternative treatments and locations are necessary in order to provide the most benefit to Seward Montessori School and to users of the future 29th Ave S Bicycle Boulevard. One potentially viable solution is diagonal diverters closer to the arterials of Franklin Ave and Lake Street. These could discourage non-local drivers from using the bicycle boulevard, and would physically direct them to nearby arterials: 31st Ave S for southbound drivers and 27th Ave S or 26th Ave S for northbound drivers. This could have a more direct effect of reducing traffic volumes along the entire corridor, including at Seward School and at the greenway crossing. The diverters might also result in less negative impacts than would a full closure the greenway. This includes less impact to businesses located near the greenway, and less traffic diversion onto 30th Ave S. Based on the feedback received, there appears to be broad community support for traffic calming and diversion along 29th Ave S. Further engagement must take place to determine whether diagonal diverters might be a viable community preferred alternative.

The ongoing project development of bicycle boulevard treatments along 29th Ave S and 24th St E offer an opportunity to reengage neighborhood residents and businesses. In January of 2016, City staff applied for federal Safe Routes to School funds for bicycle boulevard treatments along 29th Ave S and 24th St E. The elements within this application were discussed with the Seward Neighborhood Group and Seward Montessori School prior to submission. The application did not include any traffic calming or diversion along 29th Ave S because the long-term status of the closure was unknown. Instead, it proposed crossing improvements at multiple collector streets, which run perpendicular to the bicycle boulevard routes. On March 31st, 2016 the City was awarded federal funding for these bicycle boulevard treatments along 29th Ave S and 24th St E. Project development is expected to begin in spring 2016 through the end of the year. Community engagement for this federal project will also resume in spring 2016, which will offer an opportunity to discuss the long-term status of the closure and other possible traffic calming and reduction alternatives.