

November, 27, 2018

Dear Middlebury Selectboard Members,

Thank you for engaging with the public in the rail platform siting project. It has been great to see the community feedback and comments during this process, giving confidence in the direction of where to site the platform. While I do believe that the Seymour Street site has the potential to provide better connectivity to downtown and ACTR (no need for a bus to turn around), the Maple Street site is also a decent and reasonable location and these comments assume that Maple Street is the selected choice.

My primary concern is the pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to downtown and points west via the Marble Works. As highlighted by the pop-up sidewalk project and its surveys last summer, Maple Street is an important bicycle and pedestrian connection for many people in our community and will only become more so with the addition of the rail platform. Maple Street, the Marble Works, and Printers Alley form the most direct and flat connection to the downtown. While hills and slight detours may not mean much for automobiles, people walking and bicycling will often take the most direct and least-hilly route to their destination. We can easily anticipate that College students, residents, and tourists arriving by train will walk or bicycle through the Marble Works and Printers Alley rather than looping down the underpass and up another hill on Seymour Street or braving the steep hills of Mill Street with luggage. The question is not whether people will use Maple Street and Printers Alley, but rather if we can make it appropriately safe and convenient for them when they do so. Addressing these connectivity concerns will not only help those who are moving under their own power, it will also help drivers by reducing the competition for parking spots.

There are two primary connectivity challenges in this route that need to be addressed:

- A sidewalk or pedestrian buffer on Maple Street.
- Uphill bicycle connectivity on Printers Alley.

As we saw in last summer's evaluation and pop-up sidewalk project on Maple Street, there is heavy use of this road by both pedestrians and people on bicycles. In addition to providing access to the new rail platform, Maple Street also serves as an important connector to the many residents of Seymour Street, providing them direct and relatively flat access to downtown. My belief is that a sidewalk or buffered pedestrian walkway is the most important improvement for Maple Street. Speeds are slow enough through the curves that bicycles can easily keep up with auto traffic and take the lane. I have looked at the tax maps and appreciate the right-of-way constraints on Maple Street, however pursuing these improvements must be a priority, even if it requires pursuing easements or slight property acquisition.

The second connectivity concern is southbound (uphill) bicycle access to Main Street via Printers Alley. Providing a safe and smooth connection in this direction will prevent the conflicts

that inevitably occur when people try to squeeze or shortcut through inadequate infrastructure. The latest plans for Printers Alley and the small park there seem to retain two 5' sidewalks and a 14' roadway. At the last public meeting about the park design the engineer stated the expectation that cyclists would dismount and walk up Printers Alley. Unfortunately, this is not a good solution as a person pushing a bicycle takes up about 3' or more of width depending on the style of handlebars, making pushing up the sidewalk a potential conflict with downhill traveling pedestrians. The other option -- riding uphill against auto traffic in the single one-way lane isn't safe enough to be allowed via signage, but will be something people do anyway if no better option is presented. Given the space available in Printer's Alley and contours of the tunnel, my suggestion is to provide an uphill bicycle lane along the bank side, similar to the lane installed on S. Winooski Avenue in Burlington:



*S. Winooski Ave, Burlington. Note the opposite-direction bike lane to the left of the double-yellow line. Screenshot from Google Street View.*

The engineer for the park project indicated that 14' was dedicated to the road surface of Printers Alley, even with a 5' sidewalk along the bank. Dividing that into a 10' downhill lane for all wheeled travel and a 4' uphill bicycle lane will more fully connect the Marble Works and future rail platform with the downtown. Making it easier to ride out of the Marble Works on Printers Alley has the additional benefit of not discouraging residents from running errands by bicycle, aiding visits to our local businesses while cutting down on parking demand. If we want to fix our parking crunch we must make it easier and safer to get around without cars.

Respectfully,  
Adam Franco, resident, bicycle commuter