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Word on the Street: City officials stand firm on reconstructed intersection

Who are you going to believe? The [city of Peoria](#) and [Advanced Medical Transport of Central Illinois](#)? Or your lying eyes?

Some who regularly drive through the reconstructed intersection of Main and University streets might be asking that in response to statistics revealed last week.

The stats show AMT ambulances aren't being impeded by intersection changes unveiled in May. Those changes elevated the intersection, reduced the number of traffic lanes and widened sidewalks in an attempt to slow and limit vehicular traffic near Bradley University.

The findings might surprise the masses that have taken to social media, among other places, to express disdain about the redesign and the length of time it takes to traverse the intersection. Although maybe there aren't as many critics as there used to be.



PHOTO/ DAVID ZALAZNIK/JOURNAL STAR FILE PHOTO

Traffic moves through the redesigned Main Street and University Avenue intersection in Peoria.

City Engineer Scott Reeise said the number of gripes the Public Works Department is receiving about the Main-University junction is negligible.

"It was definitely a change for Peoria on how we were looking at building something," Reeise said about a project that emphasized pedestrian utility. "So we expected some feedback that wasn't positive from the very beginning.

"People are change averse. They don't like to see change, necessarily. But really, in the last two months, it's quieted down quite a bit."

Reeise was among a phalanx of city officials in attendance at the news conference where the ambulance travel times were released. Mayor Jim Ardis, City Manager Patrick Urich and City Council members Chuck Grayeb and Beth Jensen joined Reeise in defense of the new intersection.

That isn't surprising. As Reeise said, the city tried something different with this. It's pulling out all the stops to support it.

Or, as Grayeb put it: "We just want to put to rest some of the myths and fallacies that have emerged."

The Mark Twain bromide about lies, damn lies and statistics might come to mind for some. And an average Joe or Jill's Buick doesn't have the same priority on the road as does an ambulance.

Delays for typical vehicles at Main and University were expected, Urich said. But they aren't out of line when compared to other communities with busy intersections adjacent to college campuses, according to Reeise.

Once construction on nearby Sterling Avenue is completed, a fair assessment of the Main-University changes will be possible. Sterling provides an alternate route for through traffic.

Meanwhile, the city should do everything it can to mitigate Main-University delays. And drivers should do everything they can to avoid the intersection, unless they're going to Bradley or to neighborhood businesses.

Gripping about new municipal things is a not-so-proud Peoria tradition. The Peoria Riverfront Museum, the Louisville Slugger Sports Complex, the Downtown hotel project and a host of other alterations over the years provide ample Debbie Downer evidence. Skepticism is not the same as cynicism.

But time heals all wounds. Sometimes, it also wounds all heels. The Peoria Civic Center — can you imagine this city without it? — proved that.

Six months or a year from now, it's believable Main and University might follow suit. (N.V.)

Travel of the future

What do you want the transportation infrastructure of the future to look like?

That's not just a question for policymakers, or even for the well-connected.

Every five years, planning groups including the local [Tri-County Regional Planning Commission](#) work to put together what's called the Long-Range Transportation Plan. And while they always try to hear from stakeholders, this year co-project managers Katy Shackelford and Jill Goforth are taking the questions directly to the public, to determine what Goforth refers to as the "major needs and wants" of the region.

They're using an innovative website, envisionhoi.mindmixer.com, to ask residents to answer questions, identifying places where they see transportation bottlenecks, deciding how they'd slice the transportation pie between roads, rail, river, air, biking trails, mass-transit and more.

"We want to engage stakeholders who don't know they're stakeholders," Shackelford says, describing the process as more than just a traditional survey. "... The most important thing is to be engaged so as a citizen it's no longer happening to you, it's happening with you."

There are chances to interact and to make a case, and to supplement information the duo will gather from other meetings with more traditional, in-person focus groups — as well as from a couple of traveling boards they're placing at community events including at the First Friday art events in town to gather input on specific questions.

Conceptually, it's quite interesting, and it's a good opportunity not just for advocates of specific forms of transportation — biking trails or a more thorough bus system, for example — but also folks who see just a few tweaks to make life simpler.

Members of the planning commission were asked for their own thoughts last month during an impromptu discussion Shackelford led during their meeting, and just the funding question alone — in an era of declining motor fuel tax revenue — seemed to stymie commissioners. In short, they can use all the help from the public that they can get. (C.K.)

The Ballot Box

This is the final Ballot Box for the 2014 campaign. We will resume accepting submissions for Ballot Box in January 2015 for any municipal primary elections, and will continue through the April municipal general election.

The Ballot Box is a weekly listing of election-related events. Deadline to submit information for Monday publication is by 2 p.m. Thursday. Notices should include candidates attending and political offices sought, or referendums proposed, as well as time and place of the event. Email notices to Mickey Wieland at mwieland@pjstar.com or send faxes to 686-3296. To confirm arrivals, call 686-3246.

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