



Agenda Item Summary

File #: MOT 20-033, **Version:** 1

Submitted By

Ron Burke, Transportation Commission Chairperson
Village Engineer

Bill McKenna,

Reviewed By

LKS

Agenda Item Title

A Motion to Concur with the Transportation Commission's Recommendation to Adopt a Slow Streets Pilot Program Generally Located on the Streets Bounded by Van Buren Street, Kenilworth Avenue, Thomas Street, and Harvey Avenue and Direct Staff to Prepare the Necessary Resolution and Ordinance

Overview

The Village Board requested the Transportation Commission review the concept of creating "Slow Streets" on certain residential streets in the Village to allow for greater social distancing for people walking and biking during the COVID-19 pandemic. Slow Streets involve allowing only local traffic on streets to reduce the volume of traffic and encourage slower speeds allowing the streets to be shared with pedestrians and cyclist. The Transportation Commission recommended creating a pilot program for these Slow Streets. Generally staff is not supportive of this recommendation as there are great safety concerns with intermixing moving cars in a shared space that encourages pedestrians and bicycling.

Recommendation

Approve the Motion.

Staff Recommendation

Deny the Motion.

Fiscal Impact

The FY2020 Budget does not include funds for a Slow Street Pilot Program. Should the Village Board approve a pilot program, staff recommends funding the project with the Sustainability Fund for Bikeway Capital Projects, account no. 2310-41020-101-570967. A Budget amendment would be presented at the next quarterly Budget Amendment to amend the budget to include funds for this project.

Staff does not have a current exact cost estimate for this pilot program. Current cost estimates for the rental of the necessary barricades and signage to create the Commission's pilot program are approximately \$59,060. Staff will provide a more detailed cost estimate with the follow up Board Resolution and Ordinance needed for this pilot program should the Village Board approve this Motion.

Background

During the Village Board meeting on May 18, 2020 as part of the discussion on the Oak Park Business Recovery Taskforce, the Village Board referred an item to the Transportation Commission to review the concept of creating “Slow Streets” on certain residential streets to allow for more space for social distancing while walking or biking during the COVID-19 pandemic. Slow Streets involve partially closing the road to through traffic and encouraging only local traffic to use the street. This would potentially reduce the number and speeds of cars driving on a street which allows it to be shared with pedestrians and cyclists. During the pandemic Slow Streets have been implemented in a number of cities and the City of Chicago has recently started to install some.

Slow Streets are typically created by installing barricades and signs at the ends of each block. Signs typically consist of “Road Closed to Thru Traffic” or “Road Closed Local Traffic Only” which are also supplemented with a pedestrian or bike sign and typically some sign related to maintaining social distancing. Examples are included in the last two pages of the attached Transportation Commission Agenda packet from their June 9th meeting.

The Transportation Commission met on Tuesday, June 9th to discuss the item. The Commission reviewed a proposal from the Bike Walk Oak Park Group (a local advocacy group) recommending using the proposed Neighborhood Greenway or Bike Boulevard system and converting these streets to Slow Streets. The Commission recommended to create a pilot program of approximately 5 ¼ miles of residential streets generally located on and bounded by the streets of Van Buren, Kenilworth, Thomas, and Harvey. The Commission recommended staff adjust locations or create omissions in the route as necessary to address potential concerns. Staff has reviewed the recommended route and has drafted a final version of the Commission’s recommended route with a number of changes for omissions due to conflicts with schools, fire stations, Lake Street construction, traffic signals, etc. The final map of the Transportation Commission’s recommended Slow Street pilot program route is attached.

The Transportation Commission also recommends not providing advance public notice to the residents on or adjacent to these proposed Slow Streets in order to expedite the implementation of the Slow Street Pilot Program.

Staff does not support the creation of Slow Streets or a Slow Street Pilot Program for a number of reasons. Staff believes there are safety concerns with intermixing moving cars in a shared space that encourages pedestrians and bicycling is not safe. Creating a Slow Street will provide for a false sense of security for pedestrians and cyclists and especially children. Since these streets still allow for traffic to enter them with their partial closures, staff believes cars will still choose to drive on these streets. Enforcing these restrictions on over 5 miles of roadway will be extremely challenging, if not impossible.

Staff has concerns regarding the cost of the pilot program since it is over 5 miles long and includes around 65 intersections. The Village does not have sufficient barricades and signs to implement this program and would need to rent all the barricades and signs needed. Staff has received a quote for an estimated number of barricades and signs to implement the Transportation Commission’s Slow Street pilot program with a cost of approximately \$60,000 for a two month pilot project. Staff also has concerns with maintaining all of these signs and barricades and making sure they are not moved, knocked down, or defaced.

The recommended Slow Streets also include areas with high parking demand on most of the length of

Kenilworth between Madison and Superior Street and also on sections of Harvey Avenue from Madison to Washington and between Pleasant and South Boulevard. The high density of parked cars reduces the available space for biking and walking and moving cars. The lack of space creates safety concerns since people have less areas to get out of the way from a moving vehicle.

Staff has concerns that the Slow Streets will create opportunities for residents to close their streets on weekends for block parties despite requirements regarding larger gatherings during the COVID pandemic.

Staff also has concerns regarding the lack of public notice and input regarding these partial street closures. Closures of these roads to thru traffic will push traffic onto adjacent roadways. Normally closures of this magnitude would involve a robust public notice campaign and generate considerable public input and involvement.

Staff does not recommend any implementation of a Slow Street program; however, should the Village Board recommend moving forward with a pilot program staff is recommending an alternate pilot program area than the Transportation Commission's recommendation (see attached staff's recommended alternate route map). Staff is recommending a smaller area be chosen which uses roughly Kenilworth from Chicago Avenue to Thomas Street, Thomas Street from Kenilworth to Harvey, and Harvey from Thomas to Chicago Avenue. Chicago Avenue would not be part of the Slow Street system due to its higher volume of traffic. A loop can be created by pedestrians using the sidewalk on Chicago Avenue or cyclists using the existing bike lanes on Chicago Avenue. The length of Staff's recommended pilot program is approximately 1.6 miles. This smaller pilot area would help address cost concerns, staff's ability to monitor the barricades and signage and block party concerns, and eliminate conflicts with highly parked areas. A smaller pilot program will also allow for notification to the residents on the proposed and adjacent blocks so that the Village Board can receive public comments on the Slow Street Pilot Program.

Should the Village Board recommend moving forward with any version of a Slow Street Pilot Program, staff will develop the final recommended locations for the route, get more refined costs for barricades and signage, prepare the necessary Ordinance for closing these roads to thru traffic, and prepare a Resolution to adopt the pilot program.

Alternatives

Should the Village Board concur with the Transportation Commission's recommendation to adopt a Slow Streets Pilot Program, staff recommends a smaller pilot program area.

Staff recommends a smaller pilot program area using Kenilworth Avenue north of Chicago Ave to Thomas Street, to Harvey Avenue. The current bike lanes along Chicago Avenue would connect this smaller route. An exhibit showing this smaller pilot program area is attached. The smaller pilot program area would limit interactions between bicycles and pedestrians with the heavily parked areas of Kenilworth from Madison to Superior and on Harvey Avenue from Madison to Washington and Pleasant to South Blvd. The smaller pilot area would also reduce costs; improve staff's ability to monitor the condition of the barricades; improve staff's ability to ensure these partial closures are not turned into full closures on weekends and allowing for block parties; and enforce the No Thru Traffic restrictions.

Previous Board Action

At the May 18, 2020 Village Board meeting, the Village Board referred an item to the Transportation Commission to review creating Slow Streets to allow for more room for walking and biking during the COVID-19 public health pandemic.

On July 20, 2015 the Village Board approved the Oak Park Neighborhood Greenways System Study and Bike Share Feasibility Study as an Addendum to The Oak Park Bicycle Plan.

Citizen Advisory Commission Action

The Transportation Commission recommended to adopt a Slow Streets Pilot Program generally located on and bounded by the streets of Van Buren, Kenilworth, Thomas, and Harvey and direct staff to implement this pilot program as quickly as possible.

The Transportation Commission recommended staff determine final locations, any omissions, and treatments of the Slow Streets based on any site constraints or concerns.

The Transportation Commission also recommends not providing advance public notice to the residents on or adjacent to these proposed Slow Streets in order to expedite the implementation of the Slow Street Pilot Program.

Anticipated Future Actions/Commitments

Pending Village Board concurrence, staff will prepare a Resolution establishing the Slow Streets Pilot Program and an Ordinance closing various streets to thru traffic.

Intergovernmental Cooperation Opportunities

N/A.