



Reconnect Rochester
1115 East Main St.
Mail Box 61
Rochester, NY 14609

September 10, 2021

Dear City Officials and Inner Loop North Project Design Team,

Reconnect Rochester is excited about the Inner Loop North project and the many opportunities it presents for our community. This project will shape the area for a very long time. We hope the City and its partners take an integral approach, restoring the grid and making connections to High Falls and the Intermodal Station. We feel it is important to build not for current circumstances, but for what is best for future Rochesterians and achieving the ambitious mobility and climate goals set out in the Rochester 2034 Comprehensive Plan.

Concepts

Of the six concepts developed by the City of Rochester and Bergmann Associates, the concept that Reconnect Rochester believes is closest to the ideal design for the project area is Concept 6, "City Grid Restoration." This concept is the most comprehensive at removing a legacy, discriminatory piece of infrastructure and provides the greatest amount of both developable land and public green space. It also provides the greatest pedestrian and bicycle connectivity and the narrowest streets which enhance walkability. We also encourage the City to continue to be open to additional ideas and concepts in the community that may have valid elements to consider and pull from, such as one put forward by Jon Schull and Ben Rubin. This explores the possibility of routing the Genesee Riverway Trail under the train tracks to High Falls via Brown's Race instead of Mill Street and keeps the existing Inner Loop overpass structure in place as an elevated greenway.

Hinge neighborhood

The Hinge Neighbors group supports plans that do not include roundabouts, as traditional corners are more suitable for small businesses and provide a more cohesive neighborhood feel. Reconnect Rochester supports this position both for these reasons and because a traditional street grid is safer and more accessible. We also support their preference for narrower streets to help slow speeds and knit together the community. We encourage the City to adhere to the NACTO standard: ten-foot lanes for urban streets, as well avoiding striping roadways where traffic volumes do not require it.

Interstate 490

We feel it is best for Rochester to wholly remove the Inner Loop and its pieces, including removing the connection to Interstate 490. The midcentury planning mindset of urban expressways and urban renewal was built on the now-obsolete premise of concentrating traffic onto one corridor. Modern urban planning has abandoned this premise due to the negative impacts it has on the community alongside expressways, especially air and noise pollution, and its contribution to suburban sprawl. As evidenced locally with the Inner Loop East project, as well as in other cities such as Seattle's Alaskan Way Viaduct and San Francisco's Embarcadero Freeway, traffic disperses through the street grid when a highway is removed. Maintaining a stub of the existing Inner Loop as an exit to I-490 would miss an opportunity to correct a misstep of the past. The reduction of automobile through-traffic in the affected neighborhoods will improve the quality of life for residents of the area and help encourage renewed investment.

Housing and Development

One appeal of urban living is making car ownership superfluous, which can have numerous benefits from financial well-being to environmental sustainability. Urban, transit-supportive development means that more people have destinations and transit routes within bicycling and walking distance. Reconnect Rochester supports applying downtown zoning to most of the parcels opened for development as part of this project, especially parcels abutting bus lines. We support the strategy of allowing and encouraging dense mixed-use development due to its positive effect on multimodal access and local business. In areas where a more residential zoning and development strategy is better suited to the neighborhood, such as between Gibbs St and Scio St, we recommend medium density residential zoning and subdivision plans. Providing a mix of housing styles including urban row houses and small multifamily buildings allows for a diverse and stable neighborhood. We support programs that assist neighborhood residents with home ownership opportunities, as well as affordable rental housing options.

Transit Amenities

We strongly advocate for transit amenities, seating and/or shelters at every transit stop in this project area. Including these amenities as a regular part of project plans will help increase the use of public transit and better serve those who rely on it. Regular seating also provides a place for pedestrians to rest.

Intermodal Station

The Intermodal Station is an incomplete project within the Inner Loop North study area. It's important that designs for the Inner Loop North dovetail with the designs for Phase 2 of the Intermodal Station (addition of a permanent long-distance bus station). We recommend the following:

- The segment of the sunken highway that borders the Intermodal station be filled and reintegrated into the city street grid.
- Central Ave. be maintained as part of any new street grid alignment.

- The parcel created between Joseph Ave. and N. Clinton Ave. as part of the Inner Loop fill be designed so that it can be integrated into a larger parcel when the temporary bus station is decommissioned.
- The parcel created by the Inner Loop fill and the decommissioning of the temporary bus station be developed. It should not be a surface parking lot.
- Transit stops be placed on the Intermodal Station property, not on the parcels south of Central Ave., and that concrete pads capable of supporting an RTS shelter be integrated into any streetscape design.

Cycletrack

Regarding bike infrastructure, we have a strong preference for one-way, protected bike lanes/cycletracks whenever possible. Bidirectional cycletracks along one side of the street should only be a secondary option when road geometries require it, followed by standard bike lanes. As this project will be a newly constructed street, we strongly encourage the City to install best-practice one-way protected bike lanes. Providing separated/protected infrastructure helps residents feel safer and reduces the likelihood of conflicts. Additionally, bidirectional cycletracks on one side of the street require people on bikes to cross against traffic flow in order to switch sides, which presents an additional unnecessary risk, discomfort, and often delay. We also encourage the City to create a more reasonable connection to the Union Street cycletrack at this project's east end. All six concepts show too much zig zagging, which we predict cyclists may just avoid.

Street Alignments

In general, we advocate for two-way traffic, "squaring up" odd-angled intersections where possible, restoring severed streets, and eliminating unjustified streets. We recommend consideration of the following:

- That the connection of Water Street to the newly extended Central Avenue take the form of the intersection from concepts 1, 2 and 3. Concept 6, while being our preferred concept, incorporates a needlessly complicated odd turn that wastes space and hurts connectivity.
- Extend University Avenue from North Street to Cumberland street, creating an additional street connection, as it was in the 1920's before the Inner Loop construction. While recreating this connection point would add complexity to the intersection, the additional street connection may be worth it.
- Reconnect Parker Alley, Richmond Street and Haags Alley across Union Street to restore the original grid and avoid creating a 'superblock' development parcel. These streets were split in half by the construction of the Inner Loop and should be reconnected.
- Possibilities for Wescott Street (which has a strange alignment due to the Inner Loop construction): eliminate it, reroute it to a grid, or convert it to a bike/pedestrian street.
- Convert Plymouth Avenue to two-way traffic, possibly in connection with this project. It would be simpler and open an opportunity for better bus routing, and a southbound route for bike traffic as an alternative to the dangerous State Street corridor.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our input on this project.

Sincerely,



Renee Stetzer
President, Reconnect Rochester



Bill Collins,
Multimodal Advocacy Committee Chair

And...

Mary Staropoli, Interim Executive Director
Pete Nabozny, Vice President
Jackie Marchand, Treasurer
Brenda Massie, Secretary
Susan Levin, Cycling Work Group Chair
Jason Partyka, Bus Work Group Chair

Jesse Peers, Cycling Coordinator
Arian Horbovetz
John Lam
Brendan Ryan
Victor Sanchez
Daniel Speciale