

August 13, 2024
719-520-7276
Centennial Hall, 200 S. Cascade
Colorado Springs, CO 80903

Board of County Commissioners
Holly Williams, District 1
Carrie Geitner, District 2
Stan VanderWerf, District 3
Longinos Gonzalez, Jr., District 4
Cami Bremer, District 5

Todd Frisbie, City Traffic Manager
Kerry Childress, Multimodal Program Manager

Re: Proposed Road Diet to South Cascade Avenue

Thank you for your letter dated July 29, 2024, explaining the City of Colorado Springs' rationale to remove a vehicular lane in both directions on Cascade Avenue south of Bijou Street and convert paved roads into bike lanes. As the property owner of Centennial Hall, the Pikes Peak Center for the Performing Arts, the Terry R. Harris Judicial Complex, the El Paso County Sheriff's Office building, the 4th Judicial District Attorney's Office building, and several other buildings in the immediate area of this proposal, I must communicate our opposition to your plans.

El Paso County is concerned that the measurements used to justify the proposed change do not reflect the current traffic volumes of the downtown area near critical county facilities. According to the letter, the weekday traffic volume closest to our facilities is 7,650 vehicles per day, while the bicycle traffic volume in the area averages 49. The former measurement was taken in June 2022, while the latter was done in March 2022. For the purposes of this letter, we will set aside our skepticism at the methodology that concluded 177 bicyclists traverse the intersection at Cascade Avenue and Vermijo Street; as a property owner in the area, that volume of traffic has never been observed. Nonetheless, this timeframe is concerning because much has changed in downtown Colorado Springs since these studies were concluded. For instance, much of downtown Colorado Springs was still underutilized due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Jury trials at the Terry R. Harris Judicial Complex had only resumed three months before the vehicular traffic volume study. Many businesses and downtown entities were still using hybrid work-from-home models, and other companies were still recovering customers and revenues after state-mandated shutdowns. Also, significant developments in the area – such as “Experience at Epicenter” – were incomplete, and attractions such as Weidner Field are utilized more now than in 2022.

The examples above also don't account for how residents travel from every part of the county to access services at one of the county facilities. It's unclear whether a singular study from years ago adequately captured the extra traffic volume of thousands of people dropping off their ballot at the 24/7 drop boxes located at Cascade and Vermijo during every general election, primary election, presidential primary election, or City of Colorado Springs' election. Neither of the traffic studies referenced in the letter occurred during these peak volume times. Nor do they capture community events that area residents usually travel downtown to enjoy, such as shows at the Pikes Peak Center for Performing Arts, holiday parades, or sporting events. Given the area's current use, pre-existing

wide sidewalks and the fact that many access downtown Colorado Springs by using the Bijou or Cimmaron exits off of I-25, it may be prudent to keep Cascade Avenue's vehicular volume between these two intersections at its current capacity.

Furthermore, taxpayers, who contribute to Road and Bridge fees through their vehicle registration or pay sales taxes into the Pikes Peak Rural Transportation Authority, become frustrated when traffic volume capacity is reduced and they idle in traffic next to an empty bike lane. When this happens, their trust in government is diminished, and they may think that both the City of Colorado Springs and El Paso County must have resources to spare if we can afford to re-purpose functioning streets to accommodate – at most – 177 bicyclists a day. County residents who travel from Falcon to the Terry R. Harris Judicial Complex to serve on a jury, from the City of Fountain to the Sheriff's Office to obtain their concealed carry permit, or from Manitou Springs to Centennial Hall to renew their vehicle registration may come away with the false impression that their tax dollars are being diverted to projects that benefit a disproportionately small population.

As a dedicated partner committed to serving our residents, we respectfully ask you to reconsider your decision to convert lanes originally built for vehicular traffic into bike lanes. As the owner of multiple buildings that provide essential government services in the area, we have concerns about the changes that have occurred downtown that may require a re-measurement of traffic volumes in the area. We stress the need for your plan to better account for the services the county offers outside of your measurement window, such as elections. We ask that you consider the impacts that this change will have on the perception of government throughout the Pikes Peak region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bret Waters". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "B" and "W".

Bret Waters
County Administrator