

# Set aside differences; let's connect

*Douglas City Council member Kathy Mooradian shared this letter regarding the city's CMAQ (federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality) grant project for extending a bike trail over the Blue Star Bridge with Saugatuck City Council members recently:*

My reasons for supporting the CMAQ grant project (in no particular order): We need connectivity between our two cities. Neither is large and if we are to continue to attract visitors, we need offerings in both to be easy-access and like one "larger area." People want choice. Families are diverse. Parts do one thing while others do another. This makes it easier.

For example, Douglas is about nature, kayaks, small boats, marsh, vintage base ball, etc. while Saugatuck brings the bars, nightlife and more shops.

Safety: The cities are 1.5 miles apart and people do want to walk into one or the other. Walking and biking are not very safe over the bridge or from any street in Douglas to Saugatuck (getting across, etc.). Make it easy for people to stay in either town.

The Extreme LA Design group that came here 18 months ago drew plans, studied traffic and city flow and recommended a friendlier bridge and distinct walkscapes to draw younger people. Our drawings are similar to their proposals. These young design professionals were very in favor of such aesthetic looks for it.

Children and parents with young ones will walk more, use strollers, skateboards and other means to face parking situations in Saugatuck, especially during busy weekends. They want to and can then enjoy the water views on their stroll while feeling safe. That is not how it is now.

Drinking issues will be reduced. People who want to drink but not drive afterwards can walk to or from town. If not drinking but walking home, they can do so without fear of a drunk on the road hitting them at night because barriers will be there. Our chief of police says the bridge currently is and has been a major safety concern.

Traffic tie-ups seem to be a fantasy issue in my mind. Think about it. The bridge is crossed in seconds at 35 mph. It has two narrow lanes and a third lane never used at all by traffic. It is only used by emergency vehicles such as fire trucks.

The new design makes the lanes wider and allows for cars to still pull aside, allowing for emergency vehicles. In the end, two lanes still exist under normal circumstances and traffic flow should be just the same — maybe better. since drivers truly might honor the 35 mph speed limit seeing the green, the wall and the walking area.

There is no getting around tie ups about three weekends a year with heavier resort traffic. That won't change. Most of the year bridge traffic is easy flowing, even in fairly busy summer months. I travel across the bridge often, all year round. The hardest part is coming out of Lake Street to make a left onto Blue Star, not a right.

The non-motorized trail will bring both communities sustainability during changing times. This is huge. Cities across the country are changing roadscapes, making things walkable, bikeable and more.

It is what people want, particularly young people. It reduces vehicle use, increases exercise in our overweight populations, reduces emissions and offers other health benefits. Even older people are embracing biking, but are afraid to do it on our bridge as is. If we build it, they will come.

I believe residents of both cities desire more green space and walkability moving forward.

Economic value: Being shortsighted on this now will have people going elsewhere for the type of nature and walking they want. Our cities will suffer as time goes on.

Our aging populations who fight this saying, "We don't need biking, bikers

are a pain or there is already a place for them” are wrong. They say it because they just don’t care about biking. It wasn’t culturally the thing as it is now with young people.

Aging people do make up a good deal of our population, but must think beyond themselves. In fact, shop owners have told me they don’t stay alive on older populations. They are not big spenders and browse because, in general, they already have a lot and everything they need.

It is tourists and younger folks who come in that will keep us going. They have money, vacation and want nature and walking. Shops will get new energy if we adapt to the changing times and stay on the leading edge. Without shops and family eateries, fewer tourists come, which in turn means fewer shops can stay open. Get the buyers in.

Image: Being seen as one happy community via connectivity makes us a destination. People get two-for-one as opposed to going to a New Buffalo or other little town. Both cities are unique, have waterfronts and nice people. Let’s capitalize on that and play off one another, not against each other. We are not in a competition.

I think there is confusion about the CMAQ grant and the bike trail project. Yes, it involves the Douglas part of the trail, but what the City of Saugatuck does is still their business! They don’t want the trail, to move the palette sign, legacy costs, etc.? Those decisions are theirs.

It’s important to note, the component from the half bridge to Lake street is free to them (no legacy cost either), will enhance the beauty of the area, connect us and is a no-brainer.

The engineer revised. then kept the right turn out of Lake Street to accommodate concerns from Saugatuck about backups so, that problem too was taken care of along with other physical concerns. We did listen.

Emergency vehicles have been taken care of in not one but two ways. Cars can be separated as they come through (lanes were made wider) or trucks can fit on the bike/walking part if it comes to that. Between those two, we should not have

any different situation than exists today.

Cars now pull aside to let emergency trucks through and this won’t change. There just are not the line markings for it as today’s bridge has. It can be worked around for the benefit this brings.

It will likely be even better if the fire chief’s request for a light that controls bridge crossing is installed. I support that too.

Finally, let’s work together to see this happen. Forget pride; past baggage; he said, she-said types of grudges.

I believe this is the right thing to do for both cities. Take personalities out and let’s get it done, taking into consideration everyone’s design needs.

**Kathy Mooradian  
Douglas**