

Safety is big key to trail's design

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To the editor,

We are obliged once again to respond to a letter from Dan Fox (“Shame on Blue Star Trail Friends,” July 11) which contained misstatements regarding the Blue Star Trail. We respond briefly to each assertion:

Supporters of the Trail should be “ashamed” for marching in the Fourth of July Parade – Really? This was the fifth year the Friends have marched in the parade. Saugatuck City Council indicated it wants more evidence that residents support the Trail. We had a very large contingent of supporters and strong vocal support from the onlookers.

Council supports the Trail but not a configuration that risks safety – Although some council members have said that they support the Trail, their inaction indicates otherwise. After providing formal support for the Trail between 2010-15, council de-prioritized it in 2017 and has declined to provide the approvals necessary to fund further construction. Council continues to resist multiple options designed by its own engineering firm that address all its stated concerns and meet all safety standards.

The current plan is unsafe in five respects – The author of the letter, whose career was in marketing and advertising, seems to feel he knows better than the city’s licensed professional engineering firm, which specializes in designing safe roads and trails.

No physical barrier between trail users and vehicles – The latest design provides a 5-foot buffer zone between trail users and vehicles. This design accommodates council objections to options for a physical barrier. The buffer approach is used in many towns and is deemed safe by the experts.

Emergency vehicles would enter the cycling lane – the buffer zones and existing shoulders provide ample room for motorists to move out of the way. Pedestrians would remain on the sidewalk.

No room for motorists to avoid “serious” cyclists – a few avid cyclists prefer to ride in the road - Michigan law grants this right. The plan maintains the current 5-foot paved buffer lane on the northbound side of the bridge and adds a 5-foot buffer on the southbound side –sufficient room for these cyclists to stay outside vehicle lanes

Northbound left turn lane onto Lake St. will accommodate fewer vehicles – Not true; the left turn lane remains unchanged from the current one in the engineers’ plan.

The crosswalk across Lake St. adds pedestrian traffic – The crosswalk is for both pedestrians and bikers using the Trail. There is already a crosswalk at Lake St., slightly farther to the west. The engineers determined that Trail users would only add 3 seconds to the existing 41-second wait time to turn left onto the highway during peak times. The recommended seasonal traffic signal would reduce wait time to 12 seconds. The crossing and traffic signals will make that intersection safer, not less safe. The traffic signals represent more than 50 percent of the new route cost, and resolve a traffic problem at the intersection that many acknowledge already exists.

Just let cyclists walk their bikes over the bridge on the existing sidewalk with pedestrians – as the Trail is built and usage grows, this would prove unsafe. There is ample room for a safe bicycle lane. Moreover, because MDOT requires the entire trail to be 14-feet wide to qualify for grant funding, this idea is a non-starter.

We agree the council should insist on a design for the Trail that is safe and consistent with the welfare and character of the city. The proposed designs meet those goals. Go to our website, BlueStarTrail.org, or attend the council workshop Thursday, July 18, at 4 p.m. to see for yourself.

John Adams, President
Friends of the Blue Star Trail