

Road to the Future

Over the last decade, numerous River Road Community Organization (RRCO) Board members and neighbors have been thinking about and working long range on River Road and how to improve it. Widening River Road to five lanes has created many problems and has been the most frequently mentioned concern by neighbors. It is unsafe for children who live east of River Road and need to traverse to the public schools on the western side. The traffic speed of 40 miles per hour is rarely obeyed by drivers. The business community has shared their frustrations with traffic that speeds by without stopping to shop at their retail stores. Pedestrians and bicycles are fearful to even use pedestrian refuges with lights, because vehicles do not reliably stop when the stutter flashers are on. The road is so wide that it cannot be easily crossed without stopping in the middle to wait for the next stream of cars to pass. And then there is the basic unattractiveness of the road as many large trees were cut down to widen the road. A wide swath of valuable land has been dedicated to a single mode of traffic: motorized vehicles.

As we think about the current problems with River Road and seek modes of transportation infrastructure to reflect the needs of a diverse culture, the implementation of bus rapid transit on River Road would solve many problems. Lane Transit District's (LTD) plans for a metro-wide Emerald Express (EmX) system would provide funding and the opportunity to redesign River Road with the new knowledge we have about traffic safety, land use, stormwater drainage, and multi-modal transportation options to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases. In addition, the attractiveness of our River Road would be enhanced with landscaping that would increase the livability of the neighborhood.

We all need a variety of traffic modes that flow easily without interfering with one another. In order for people to get out of their cars, they must be able to bicycle and walk without fear or intimidation by motorized vehicles. And bus services must be reliable and convenient. Currently, if you miss a bus, it could be about 30 minutes before you can catch the next bus. With EmX, if you miss a bus, you know that the next bus will arrive in about 10 minutes. It is more feasible to plan on using a bus when you know you will probably arrive at your destination within a half hour of leaving home. That might be about the amount of time it would take to drive to town, find a parking place, and walk to your destination.

A River Road neighbor recently told me, "Whether we like it or not, the River Road neighborhood and the metro region is going to become more densely populated. We need transportation options. If EmX served our neighborhood, residents might choose to not buy a second car."

River Road's future depends on transportation options to support ourselves economically and to protect neighborhood livability. RRCO recently wrote a letter of support to plan the expansion of EmX up River Road, along with segments up Highway 99 and out to Lane Community College. At the September 9 General Membership meeting, neighbors will have an opportunity register their views on this letter and bus services for our community. The letter and a map of the EmX corridor can be seen at the RRCO website (www.riverroadco.org). Public comment time is available at each meeting, and we anticipate ongoing discussions about EmX services as planning for this corridor gets underway. Your engagement with the planning process will make these services even more relevant to your specific needs as our neighborhood progresses into the 21st century.

Carleen Reilly
RRCO Secretary