



February 18, 2025

Bike Anchorage comments on initial Fireweed Lane rehabilitation alternatives

Dear Fireweed Lane Project Team,

Bike Anchorage would like to offer comments for the Fireweed Lane Rehabilitation project. We advocate for a city where it's safe and convenient to go by bike. We are very excited to see the project get started and hopeful for positive changes in this corridor. Many of our members were able to attend the Open House on October 30th, 2024 to learn about the options and ask questions of the project team.

Fireweed Lane is not currently a viable choice for those traveling by bike. No dedicated bike facilities exist. Though it is legal to ride on 4-foot sidewalks in this area, travel by bike on sidewalks is impeded by utility poles, frequent driveways and curb cuts, sloping angles, dangerous intersections, high vehicle speeds, pedestrian conflicts and poor winter maintenance with snow stored on sidewalks. Declining car traffic volumes over the last 10 years indicate there is also a declining desire and need to drive vehicles on Fireweed Lane.

In spite of these shortcomings and declining use, people want and need to bike to destinations in this area, especially to schools, so improvements prioritizing nonmotorized safety are highly supported. Looking forward to what we want this road to be in our city planning efforts, we see community desire for this to be a mixed-use destination that's walkable and bikeable - a safe place for students to travel to schools, a vibrant commercial and residential area and a future connection from Midtown to greenbelt trails via Denali/Eagle Streets. Given that Fireweed will be transferred from the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities to the Municipality of Anchorage to maintain after this project, we also want to see a design that is within the municipality's budget and resources to maintain; excess lane-miles and lack of space for snow storage create a significant future maintenance burden for the city. Keeping those priorities in mind, we see great potential for this project to deliver benefits to the whole city that far outweigh improvements to traffic flow.

Safety For All Road Users

As our city re-evaluates our approach to transportation with a Safe Systems focus in light of the extremely high number of pedestrian fatalities due to traffic violence last year, we place safety for all users as our first priority for this project.



Reviewing the Municipality's traffic crash analysis for the most recent 5 years available (Jan 2018-Dec 2022), the following items should be targeted in this project:

- Red-light running was a major factor in crashes. Mini-roundabouts, lower speeds and better intersection treatments could reduce this danger.
- The region where Fireweed meets A and C Street is particularly dangerous. Focus on that area is important due to the high speed of traffic on A/C intersecting with slower, local traffic on Fireweed.
- Most crashes on Fireweed are vehicle-vehicle collisions, while pedestrian/bike presence is likely suppressed due to poor existing nonmotorized facilities. This project should plan for more bike and pedestrian use than current and ensure safety measures align with that expectation.
- Because the data shows angle and rear-end vehicle crashes are the most common, we hope to see designs that promote safe and attentive driving while reducing severity of crashes that do occur by lowering speeds.

Our priorities for this project are:

- **Protected bicycle facilities:** We prefer a raised cycletrack over on-street unprotected bike lanes, as recommended by the Anchorage Non Motorized and Spenard Corridor Plans.
- Traffic calming and **safe speed** limits (maximum 25 mph, lower if necessary such as in school zones) which prioritize non-motorized safety in line with Safe Systems.
- **Safe intersections** - design for continuous, safe nonmotorist crossings at signals and unsignalized crossings.
- Snow storage and winter maintenance for **safe year-round travel** for all modes (snow not to be stored on sidewalks/bike lanes with consideration for best use of ice and snow clearing equipment).

Some specific outcomes we hope to see are:

- Fewer driveways—consolidate parking and provide business access from side streets to reduce conflicts from vehicles traveling across non motorized facilities.
- Project stays within existing Right of Way (ROW) to eliminate cost increases, time delays and design restrictions imposed due to ROW acquisition.
- Reduce angle crashes from turning by limiting turning maneuvers and slowing vehicles. We prefer this treatment over a center turn lane which has negative impacts to nonmotorized users by increasing pedestrian crossing distances. Center turn lanes are an inefficient use of limited ROW if they are not used for snow storage and remain empty the majority of the time, which encourages speeding.
- Maintain grade of pathways at driveways (eliminate sloping and ramps on the sidewalk).
- A facility that is right-sized for the municipality to maintain going forward.



- School traffic should be managed by dictating school time traffic patterns such as prohibiting left turns from/onto Fireweed from schools during school start/end times. This is successfully implemented at neighboring West High/Romig and is a better way to handle these short surges in traffic volume than overbuilding the entire road with unnecessary capacity.

In discussion with the municipal traffic engineer and the project team at the October open house, we learned that the following options are available and we fully support utilizing them for this project:

- Pilot a 2-lane roadway in spring 2025 and analyze data prior to selecting an alternative.
- Reclassify the section of Fireweed west of C Street as a local road rather than an arterial to match land use with safe transportation facilities.

Fireweed Lane Concept Report Comments

We request an additional issue be added to Section 6, Table 1: For improved non-motorized safety, the frequency of driveways (noted in the existing conditions) as a danger to non-motorized traffic on sidewalks and bike facilities needs to be addressed.

Preliminary Alternatives

We support the following initial concepts:

- Undergrounding of utilities. Removing power poles and other such obstacles from the sidewalks will facilitate more efficient snow removal in winter so that the sidewalks remain functional year-round.
- Potential use of roundabouts at Arctic and Denali Streets. Roundabouts could slow car speeds while eliminating stopping at traffic lights when there is no cross-traffic approaching. For two-lane alternatives, roundabouts would allow drivers to reverse direction to enter driveways with right turns (instead of a left turn from a 3rd center lane). If roundabouts are used, please ensure that bicyclists can travel continuously and safely through the roundabout rather than having to navigate multiple right-angle turns (which is difficult for long-axle bikes like cargo bikes or when pulling a trailer, as well as discouraging use of the bicycle facility by impeding flow).
- Adding an east-west crosswalk to the north side of Fireweed at the Seward Hwy. A sorely needed intersection safety improvement, especially for bicyclists traveling west across the Seward Hwy that conventionally travel the same direction as motor vehicle flow.



We hope to see continued refinement of the following concepts:

- *Snow Management* Several of the depicted alternatives use the bike lane for snow storage in winter, including both of the 3-lane options. This eliminates dependable, safe, year-round transportation mode for people who use a bicycle as their mode of transportation. In particular, below we show two alternatives for a 2-lane road which can store snow within a landscape/utility buffer, instead of on the bike lane.
- *2-lane concepts* We appreciate the inclusion of 3 concepts with 2 lanes, but we challenge the project team to present a viable 2-lane option that meets project goals.
 - On-street parking is not favored by cyclists or businesses and can be eliminated for better designs.
 - We'd like to see a 2-lane option with a raised cycletrack; all options presented have on-street bike lanes.
- *Design presentations* While pros and cons lists can be helpful to consider the impacts of the design, be mindful of introducing bias, especially regarding anticipated negativity from the business community who are just one group using this public facility. Claims that improved bike facilities will hurt businesses are not supported by data, and [research consistently shows](#) that [businesses actually benefit](#) from bike and pedestrian infrastructure. The public must evaluate all options with an open mind focused on safety and function of the facility. We recommend instead presenting how each design will address functional deficiencies in the road and refraining from speculating on perceptions of user groups. Possibly a matrix of deficiencies with ticks for each alternative would be a more effective presentation.
- *Cost and urgency* As this facility will be transferred to the Municipality to maintain going forward, an analysis of maintenance cost for alternatives compared to current would be helpful. As the Municipality has limited resources, we want to ensure we choose a design that fits our budget. We also urge heavily weighting against options that require working outside the ROW to reduce project costs and timeline.

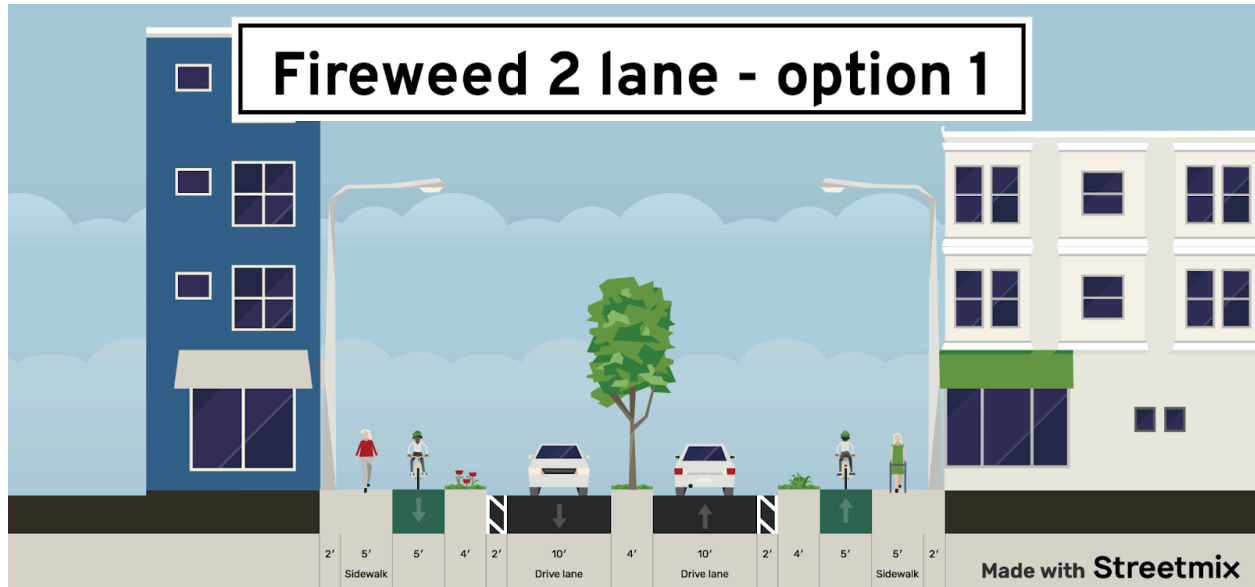
Proposed alternatives for consideration

We support 2-lane alternatives for the length of Fireweed. If justification is found for 3-lane alternatives east of A Street, protected bicycle facilities should still be provided within the ROW. We see no justification for more than 2 lanes west of C Street and all land uses (schools, small businesses, residential) fit a local road design better than a collector or arterial design.

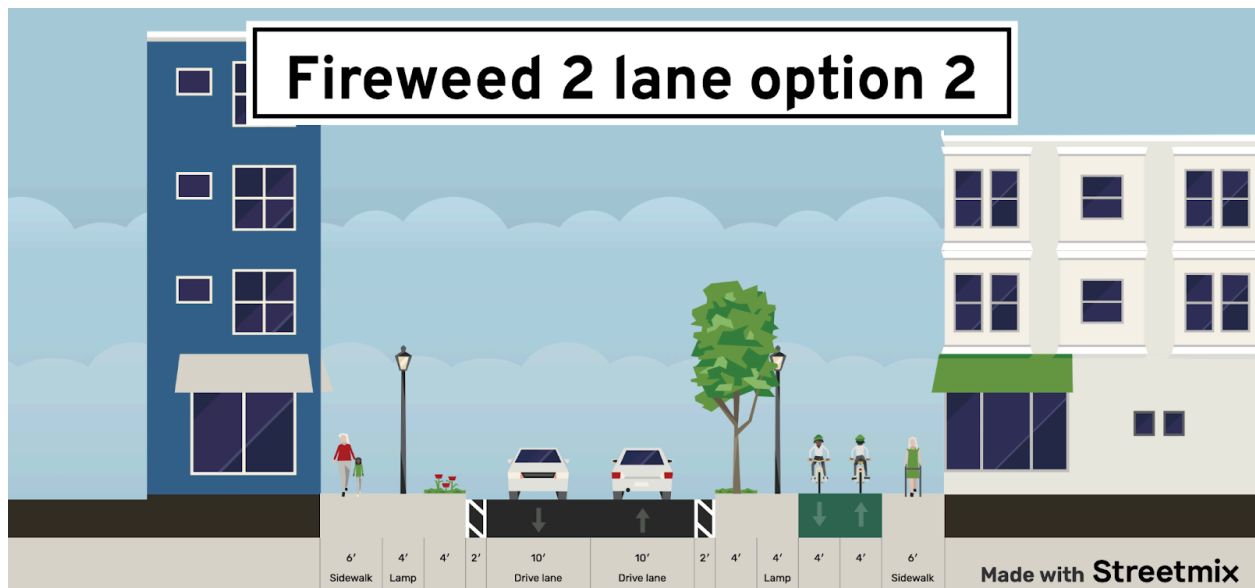
Proposals below fit within the ROW and serve current and future desired vehicle volumes and land use.



Proposed option 1: 10' shared use path with bike/pedestrian separation, 6' snow storage, center raised continuous median with landscaping/snow storage



Proposed option 2: 6' sidewalks, 7–8' snow storage, two-way cycletrack:





We appreciate the project team's work to engage the community in the design process thus far. It is clear in the alternatives presented that safety is a priority you are taking seriously, and you are open to considering new ideas in this project. We would welcome a meeting to discuss our goals and vision for this project in person this winter, as it is so important to align this initial design with our goals to save time in future revisions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alexa Dobson", is positioned below the word "Respectfully,".

Alexa Dobson
Executive Director, Bike Anchorage

With support from the Bike Anchorage Advocacy committee