



Alliance *for* Community Choice *in* Transportation

December 11, 2007

Dear Charlottesville Planning Commissioners:

I am speaking to you today on behalf of the Alliance for Community Choice in Transportation. As some of you may remember, we urged against adding a vehicular crossing to the pedestrian mall when the issue was first considered in early 2006. Even so, the findings from RK&K are rather striking. The number of pedestrians east of 4th Street East declined by **17%** from April 2006 to April and May 2007. Of the 1,897 drivers who were surveyed crossing the Mall at 4th Street East, **2** were identified as tourists, while one of the major goals of the crossing was to make it easier for tourists to find the pedestrian mall.

This crossing may seem harmless to the pedestrian at a glance, but the data suggest that it is very detrimental to the pedestrian environment and the economic vitality of some portions of the mall.

To discuss this issue a little further, let us look at this quotation from the Transportation chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. One of the overarching goals of this chapter was to reduce the number of single-occupancy vehicle trips. One of the objectives states:

“Reduce the number of trips per person in motor vehicles, especially trips in vehicles occupied only by a driver ... to 50 percent by 2015. To achieve this, an increase in the percentage of trips by walking, biking, transit, and car pooling by enhancing incentives and opportunities to use other modes of transportation, *exploring disincentives to drive alone*, and altering land use patterns to facilitate use of non-driving modes of transportation will have to occur.” (*emphasis mine*)

It says that disincentives to driving *will have to occur*. This is true. Yet we are looking to make the most pedestrian-friendly portion of the city more auto-friendly, and less pedestrian-friendly. We are looking to make the pedestrian mall more like the streets surrounding it. Which is more successful, the pedestrian mall or the streets surrounding it? In our opinion, we are moving in the wrong direction. We should be looking to make Market Street, Water Street, and north-south intersection streets more like the pedestrian mall, we should *not* be looking to make the pedestrian mall another auto-friendly place. What streets of Charlottesville do visitors remember after leaving? Water Street? Hopefully not. The pedestrian mall/Main Street? Most probably.

One of the goals of the mall crossing was to “Increase tourists’ ability to find the Pedestrian Mall.” We think that the city should look to achieve this goal in ways that do not degrade the character and quality of the pedestrian mall. One specific way of doing this could be to significantly improve the *pedestrian* gateways into the mall. Make it clear to someone driving along Water or Market Street, or even streets further out, where all roads lead *by foot*. Enhance the crosswalks, pedestrian amenities and cues for drivers. If this is done effectively, we may find that areas beyond the pedestrian mall become more prominent tourist attractions as well.

A segment of the Economy chapter of the Comprehensive Plan reinforces the suggestions just presented: “In recent years the Downtown Mall has truly established itself as a destination for dining, entertainment and shopping. This eight block commercial district is now a key contributor to the retail tax base. The preservation and *enhancement* of the mall and *surrounding areas* is important to maintaining the economic vitality of the City in future years.” (*emphasis mine*) Reducing pedestrian traffic nearly 20% on some portions of the mall is *not* achieving this objective.

Lastly, another key goal of this vehicular crossing was to improve access to parking. In the Transportation chapter of the Comprehensive Plan, under Parking Goals and Objectives, a stated objective is: “Initiate a parking study addressing the impact of parking on the transportation network, economic vitality and transit feasibility.” Making this vehicular crossing permanent is estimated to cost up to \$950,000! We believe that before spending \$950,000 to make another permanent vehicular crossing on the mall, this parking study should be performed.

We understand that there may be important limitations to the study methodology used by RK&K, and perhaps before making a final decision on whether to discontinue the vehicular crossing or make it permanent more studies should be performed.

Thank you for your time. And, again, we are urging to discontinue the second vehicular crossing on the pedestrian mall, or at least not to make it permanent until further studies are performed.

Please feel free to contact me (434.295.6554) if you wish to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

Zachary Shahan
ACCT Executive Director