

# Frequently Asked Questions

## First Street One- to Two-Way Conversion Project

### Mesaba Avenue – 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue East

***Why is a change in direction of flow being considered?*** Duluth's one-way street pattern, including Michigan, First, Second, and Third Streets is left over from the pre-Interstate 35 era when one-way streets were needed to move traffic efficiently. Since I-35 was constructed traffic volumes have declined markedly on the parallel streets. Over time, segments of First Street have been changed to serve new development, especially in the medical district. Currently First Street's direction of flow switches from 1-way to 2-way four times: at 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue W, 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue E, 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue E, and 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue E. This project would implement the *Imagine Duluth 2035 Plan* which recommended evaluation of First Street for conversion from 1-way to 2-way flow.

***What are the benefits of a 2-way conversion?*** The changes in direction of flow lead to driver confusion, especially for visitors who are unfamiliar with the city. Two-way flow will allow more direct travel routes, improving access to Downtown Duluth and the Medical District. Other benefits include reduced travel speeds, improved pedestrian safety and security, and better residential character in the neighborhoods along the corridor.

***Is pedestrian safety a factor in making the change?*** The existing four changes from 1-way to 2-way direction of flow cause wrong-way drivers, creating safety issues for people walking and for motorists. The conversion to 2-way flow is expected to reduce travel speeds by 5-10 mph, improving safety for pedestrians. This speed reduction is enough to dramatically reduce the likelihood of serious injuries or fatalities in the event of vehicle-pedestrian accidents. With the existing 1-way flow, pedestrians only have to look one direction, however the two travel lanes in one direction still present a double-threat situation. Also, motorists turning from Avenues only have to look in one direction for oncoming traffic and may not see pedestrians coming from the other direction. Slower traffic speeds will be better for residents who live in the adjacent neighborhoods.

***Are there any examples from similar projects?*** Within recent years the City converted 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenues West in Downtown Duluth from 1-way to 2-way without incident. In 2019, West First Street was converted from 1-way to 2-way in the section from Piedmont Avenue to 30<sup>th</sup> Avenue West. The City's consultant also identified a number of example conversion projects in other Midwest cities

including Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, and Ottumwa. Conversions from 1-way to 2-way have been helpful in supporting redevelopment and revitalization of many downtown areas.

***How would the 2-way conversion affect future traffic volume and levels of service?*** The feasibility study considered both existing and future traffic operations. It concluded that traffic flow will remain at good levels of service, and with underutilized capacity, except at the Mesaba and Lake Avenue intersections, which are already congested in peak hours.

***There are traffic signals now that only face east for westbound traffic. Won't it be difficult to change them for 2-way traffic?*** The consultant analyzed all the intersection traffic controls along the corridor. Existing traffic signals along First Street at 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue West, 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue West, 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue East, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue East are no longer warranted and will be replaced by stop signs. The needed signal changes at Lake Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue East, and 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue East can be easily modified. The changes will reduce wait time for roadway users and also reduce ongoing operating and maintenance costs for the City.

***Delivery vehicles frequently block a driving lane for loading/unloading. How can that work if First Street becomes 2-way with only one lane each direction?*** Loading from the driving lanes is illegal and creates safety concerns. In response to business concerns, the Police Department analyzed block-by-block loading zones and reviewed them with businesses. As a result, six new curbside Truck Only zones are recommended Downtown to better serve business loading activity. The space for these zones will mostly be reallocated from unneeded Loading and Drop-Off Zones. The proposed new Truck Only zones will be located on the lower side of First Street between 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenues West, the lower side between 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenues West, on both the upper and lower sides between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenues West, the upper side between Lake Avenue and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue East, and the lower side between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenues East.

***How will the on-street parking be affected along the corridor?*** The existing on-street parallel parking will be mostly unchanged, except for the change in direction. Overall, there will be a reduction of six on-street metered parking stalls within the 9-block long Downtown segment from Mesaba Avenue to 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue East. East of Downtown, on-street parking can be accommodated with only minor changes for 2-way flow. In order to retain on-street parking from 21<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> Avenues East to serve residents, the City plans to change First Street's classification to a local street (removing it from the MN State Aid system). This is consistent with its low traffic volume and neighborhood access function.

***How would DTA bus routes be affected?*** Existing DTA routes would not be affected. The DTA has indicated that the proposed change would allow increased flexibility for future bus routing to serve the First Street corridor.

***How will the 2-way conversion affect public security along First Street?*** One of the benefits of 2-way traffic is improved visibility of buildings and other spaces along the corridor. With 1-way flow, the typical perspective from the roadway covers 180 degrees, creating blind spots. The conversion to 2-way flow increases that to 360 degrees and opens up new viewsheds; improving what is called natural surveillance. This has a public safety benefit in terms of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (or CPTED).

***Are bike lanes being included in the 2-way conversion?*** Incorporating bike lanes would require removing on-street parking and loading spaces. Bike lanes are not part of the proposed project.

***Snow banks narrow the driving lanes in winter. Is the roadway wide enough for 2-way traffic then?*** The feasibility study indicates the curb-to-curb width of First Street is adequate for two travel lanes year-round for the entire length of the corridor. Snow banks do narrow driving surfaces in winter. However, in 2020 the City will implement a Snow Emergency Route System. The portion of First Street from Mesaba Avenue to 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue East is a proposed Snow Emergency Route. This designation will help remove parked cars within the most commercial part of the corridor to allow plowing the street from curb-to-curb after a snowfall.

***What was the cost of the consultant engineering feasibility study?*** The City's initial contract with Alliant Engineering was for \$84,344. An amendment was approved in June 2019 to add final design work, bringing the total contract cost to \$112,171.

***What will it cost the City to convert First Street to carry 2-way traffic?*** The cost is undetermined at this time. After completion of the design work the City will be better able to estimate the cost of the changeover. It is expected that the City will be able to make the needed changes with its own workers and equipment, significantly reducing costs.

***How long will it take to complete the 2-way conversion?*** The previous 1-way to 2-way conversions done by City forces on the Downtown avenues and on West First Street in 2019 were carried out in non-peak periods within a day or two, and with minimal disruption.

Assuming the project obtains the needed approvals, City staff will consult with affected parties before the implementation in order to minimize negative business impacts.

***Won't it be difficult for people to adjust to the change?*** First Street currently serves three different land use subareas within the corridor: Downtown business uses in the west, the Medical District in the middle, and residential neighborhoods in the east. The four current changes from 1-way to 2-way effectively defeat First Street's function as a throughway. As a result, the street operates within each subarea independently of the others. Traffic volumes vary significantly within the corridor, but are highest in the Medical District (between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Avenues East) and lowest on the ends. The 1-way to 2-way conversion should better integrate the three districts within the corridor, making it easier for people to travel between them, and from one end to the other.

***What approvals are needed before the 2-way conversion of First Street can take effect?*** The changes to on-street parking and loading will require action by the Parking Commission. The 1-way to 2-way traffic flow conversion will require action by the City Council.

***Are other 1-way to 2-way conversions under consideration?*** The one-way couplet of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets carried Trunk Highway 61 designation prior to the construction of I-35. It continues to be important for emergency services, connecting the main fire station at West 2<sup>nd</sup> Street/6<sup>th</sup> Avenue West across the hillside and through the Medical District. In addition, it provides a high function alternative to I-35 for situations when there are special events, maintenance activity, and/or emergency closures on the freeway. Michigan Street is the other one-way street in Downtown. Several segments of Michigan Street have carried 2-way traffic during the re-construction of Superior Street as temporary detour routes. Additional 2-way detour routing has been requested by the DTA on Michigan Street to facilitate access to the Downtown Transit Center during re-construction of Superior Street and Lake Avenue. The City will be temporarily converting the section of Michigan Street between 4<sup>th</sup> Ave W and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue West to 2-way traffic when the intersection of Superior Street and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue West is closed to accommodate the DTA.