

View looking west from Lexington Avenue showing the wide, buffered bicycle lanes that will be removed. Motorists, people walking to their parked cars, and faster cyclists who so choose, must share the narrow traffic lane.



Summit Avenue Regional Trail

Less Safe ~ Millions of Dollars ~ Fewer Cyclists

It will irreparably harm Summit Avenue's nationally significant historic character.

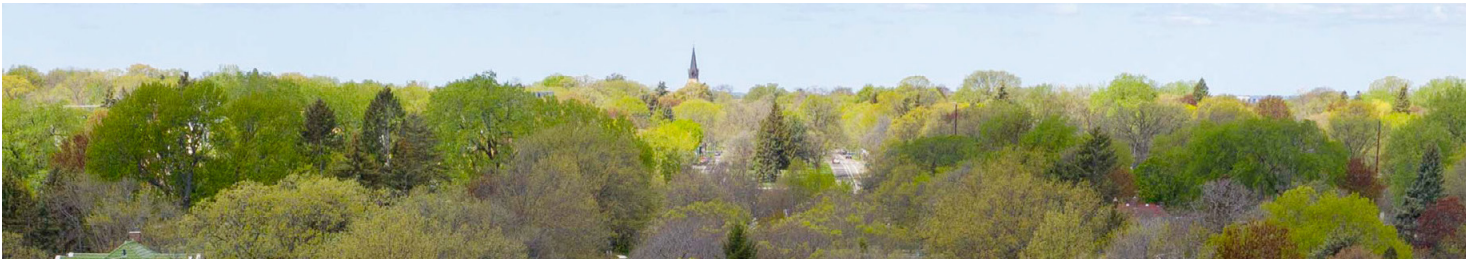
Saint Paul says a \$100 million total reconstruction of Summit is needed. But its own data refutes this. See page four.

If the above-grade bike trail is built, more than just trees will be lost. Of even greater concern is losing the 9-foot-wide buffered bicycle lanes on Saint Paul's most popular bike route. This will be gone, replaced by a narrow 6 to 8-foot-wide path. *Also gone will be 16 blocks of parking on one side of Summit from Lexington Avenue to the Cathedral.*

Minneapolis has 20 miles of buffered bicycle lanes. Their public works department states, "there are no upcoming reconstruction projects that would replace buffered bicycle lanes with above-grade trails." Why is Saint Paul charging ahead? *What proof does the city have that Summit will be safer or have more cyclists than enjoy it now?*

The future has arrived with the exponential growth of e-bike and e-scooter enthusiasts, ages 12 to 80, traveling at speeds of 10 to 28 mph or more. With bicycle lanes gone, cyclists of all stripes will have to share a narrow trail designed for recreational use. "E-bikes would have to use the street if/when they are going this fast," acknowledges Saint Paul's public works director. *A street now lacking bicycle lanes.*

The trail disenfranchises the great majority of cyclists who are comfortable on bike lanes, especially the wide buffered bicycle lanes west of Lexington Avenue. It tells thousands of motorists every day that bicyclists don't belong on the road ~ *even though the vast majority of bicycle infrastructure is, and always will be, on-street bicycle lanes.*



The Many MYTHs of the Summit Avenue Regional Trail (SART)

There are many myths of the Summit Avenue Regional Trail – that the trail will be safer, that it can be built for a pittance and that it won't impact our showcase street's historic character.

MYTH 1 ~ SART is the future.

The future is flexibility. Think nimble buses not fixed rail. The buffered bicycle lanes west of Lexington are especially welcoming at the dawn of a new era of e-vehicles. Above-grade, off-road trails are expensive to build and maintain. The city's first such trails in downtown have been pricey and poorly received. In Saint Paul over 95% of non-park/parkway bike facilities are on-street lanes. Even in Minneapolis, 80% of their street grid bicycle facilities are on-street bike lanes.

The future is electric bicycles and scooters whose growth knows no limits, and whose speeds of up to 28 mph are unsuitable and dangerous on a narrow path shared with families and folks going far slower. Wide buffered bicycle lanes in urban areas are the future as *they allow faster cyclists to easily and safely pass slower cyclists.*

For a desirable future with more cyclists, relegating everyone to a narrow 6- to 8-foot trail is not the future, it's failure.

Saint Paul planned SART using bicycle design manuals from MnDOT, 2021 and the Federal Highway Administration, 2015. *Neither document has a single reference to e-bikes or e-scooters, the vehicles of the future.*

MYTH 2 ~ Summit Avenue must be completely rebuilt to be safer for biking and walking.

The back page shows that much of the reconstruction is unnecessary. While *Summit is already quite safe it can be made even safer for far less money than SART.* The bicycle lanes would be more visible and safer if the lanes had high visibility paint. A rumble-strip could be added along the lanes to alert drivers. The bike lanes east of Lexington could be wider and the traffic lanes narrower.

Rebuilding key intersections along Summit with bumpouts shortens the crossing distance for pedestrians and helps slow traffic. Innovative crosswalk designs (see 34th and Portland in Minneapolis) allow bike lanes to flow freely. Slowing cars is a key concern and Minneapolis is seeing large reductions in speeding thanks to a program using cameras to issue tickets.

MYTH 3 ~ SART will be safer.

This may be the biggest myth of all. Removing the bike lanes makes Summit more dangerous for bicyclists, pedestrians and motorists. If the bicycle lanes are removed:

1. Everyday cyclists, bike commuters and e-bikers will be riding on a recreational trail designed for slow-moving families and kids. *Hazardous for slow riders and frustrating for faster cyclists.* Or...
2. As city officials readily acknowledge, faster riders will have to bike in a traffic lane *with justifiably angry motorists.* Plus...
3. Pedestrians going to their parked car will be walking in a traffic lane. East of Lexington, parking will be banned on one side of Summit. *People will need to cross two traffic lanes* to reach their car. And...
4. Along all of Summit, motorists will be sharing a traffic lane with people walking to cars, faster bicyclists, opening car doors and parked delivery vehicles.

Intersections are where almost every bike-car crash occurs. All 32 crashes documented in the SART plan were at intersections. How does an off-road trail make Summit safer than a bike lane when crashes occur at intersections?

The perceived safety of an off-road trail may even make it more dangerous. Cyclists may be biking behind parked cars, less aware of *and less visible to turning vehicles.*

Besides all that, it will be difficult and dangerous for bicyclists to turn left from the path as it will be next to the sidewalk.

Without the year-round presence of painted, on-street bike lanes ~ and bikers! ~ bicyclists will no longer be top of mind. *Out of sight, out of mind adds to the danger for bicyclists.*

MYTH 4 ~ SART will eliminate the danger of bicyclists being "doored."

When challenged by email, city staff could not produce a single report of a bicyclist being "doored." When asked the same question, the president of the Saint Paul Bicycle Coalition told me he wasn't aware of a single case. *It can happen, but buffered bike lanes make it much easier to see and avoid open car doors.*

MYTH 5 ~ SART will attract more riders.

While e-bike use has surged, overall biking in the Twin Cities has declined. Minneapolis reports that recreational riding remains steady but bike commuting dropped 50% in 2020. Summit was Saint Paul's busiest commuter route and MnDOT's counter at Fairview shows about a 27% drop post-COVID.

SART's plan for growth starts by endangering and impeding bicyclists who comfortably use Summit daily. The city says cyclists prefer off-road trails, but these cyclists are likely thinking of paths along lakes and rivers, not along Summit with its traffic, driveways and busy streets to cross.

What is the city's return on investment? How many more riders for how many million? *Any more riders than there are now? Many at all in winter? How much to maintain?* If built, we'll be stuck with this inflexible, mega-million dollar dice roll forever.

One thing is certain. *Everyday bicycling will never grow if cyclists are only comfortable on trails.*

MYTH 6 ~ SART won't cost much as it's part of a much larger reconstruction project.

For starters, most of Summit does not need a \$100 million total reconstruction according to the city's own data. See back page.

The 2023 SART plan estimated a cost of \$11.2 to \$12.4 million for building the bike trail. The city says the "incremental cost of the trail is less with street reconstruction," though there's every reason to believe the cost will be far higher.

Costs are listed with hardly a hint as to what the intersection designs will be. The plan lists major construction works along Summit that are "being considered" but clearly aren't part of the three-year-old estimate. Substantial reconstruction of 40 often unique intersections includes building tabled bike/ped crossings, curb extensions and bumpouts at corners.

The replacement costs for replanting hundreds of trees (estimates vary) is not included. And how do you replace a 150-year-old oak? Replacing the historic granite curbs is not included, nor is rebuilding up to a dozen medians.

SART says the estimate, "does not include costs for lighting, utility relocation or trail amenities." It doesn't include inflation, tariffs, worker shortages and other unknowns over the next several years. No one will be surprised if the cost doubles.

Couldn't this money be better spent anywhere other than in the wealthiest neighborhoods? Places it is truly needed?

MYTH 7 ~ Building SART is an environmental win.

The greenest building is the one that's already built.

This maxim in the historic preservation world is another dagger in the SART argument. The less new construction the better. A licensed, professional, *independent* engineer needs to examine the whole project. The city's own data shows much of it is unnecessary. Today's horizontal directional drilling installs underground infrastructure without digging trenches, without removing curbs and without massive reconstruction.

Less is more because road construction is a major source of greenhouse gases. One estimate links 10% of global emissions to materials like concrete and asphalt. SART requires over 10 miles of new paving for trails, 10 miles of new curbing, building 40 new intersections and extending all storm sewers.

SART is bad news for the environment without even considering the forest of life-giving trees that will be lost.

MYTH 8 ~ SART won't impact Summit Avenue's nationally treasured historic status.

Bolton & Menk, the city's historical consultant was clear: "Additions to Summit Avenue should be as simple as possible and not change the existing curbline."

Ignoring their consultant's recommendations, the city is plowing ahead with a *massive displacement of over ten miles of curbline, dramatically narrowing the road* and degrading the historic streetscape.

The balanced symmetry of Summit will disappear east of Lexington with street parking banned on one side.

The bitterest irony is the threatened loss of the state's oldest bicycle lanes. Striped in August 1992, these were the first in Minnesota with straight-through European-style design.

Summit Avenue is America's last standing "Grand American Avenue" as noted in the 400-page book by the same name. A dozen contenders are described, from Fifth Avenue in New York to Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles. The book's subtitle gives it away, "1850 to 1920." A century ago most major cities could proudly point to a showcase street like Summit but they're all gone. Summit stands alone, its stately homes, majestic churches and leafy parkways intact.

All of Summit Avenue is on the National Register of Historic Places, but the 200-foot-wide boulevard west of Lexington is especially important as it was designed by the visionary landscape architect Horace Cleveland without whom many of the parks and parkways in both Minneapolis and Saint Paul would likely not exist. It is his most important remaining work, its expansive width made possible by the largesse of adjacent homeowners in the 1880s.

The beauty of Cleveland's design is the flexibility it has provided over all these generations; carriages, bikes and horses in the 1890s, cars as they came into vogue in the 1920s, four lanes of traffic for a while in the 1980s (Yikes!), huge events like the Twin Cities Marathon, and buffered bicycle lanes today. Horace Cleveland's signature street is a historic and functional gem that can serve us well, far into the foreseeable future.

Produced by Richard Fred Arey,
Founder of the Saint Paul Classic Bike Tour
Author of *Twin Cities Bicycling*

PS ~ Setting aside Summit, Saint Paul could focus on other projects ~ like rebuilding the hazardous combined trail along Mississippi River Boulevard to provide separated space for biking and walking. And focusing on neighborhoods where car ownership is lowest.

Summit Avenue Regional Trail:

Saint Paul's Proposed Plan Contradicts Its Own Guidelines

City officials claim that required reconstruction of Summit Avenue justifies including the proposed Summit Ave Regional Trail (SART). City guidelines provide that streets should be evaluated for reconstruction approximately every 65 years. However, the proposed work plan contradicts this standard.

The current reconstruction schedule focuses on the **West End of Summit**.

- 2028: Mississippi River Blvd → Fairview Ave (**Segment 1**)
- 2029: Fairview Ave → Hamline Ave (**Segment 2**)

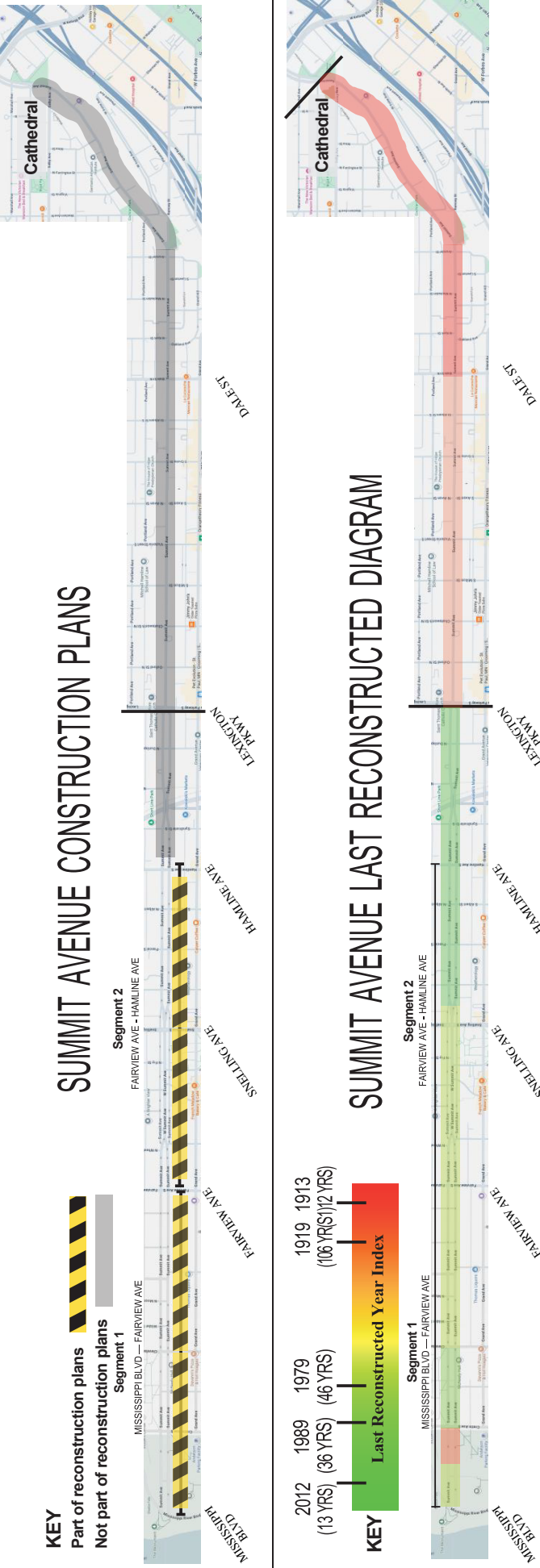
Save Our Street, a nonprofit 501(c)(3), received maps from Saint Paul Public Works stamped, "Last reconstruction dates" to produce the maps seen below. Go to SaveSummitAvenue.org to join over 2,400 people petitioning against the bike trail's construction.

THE DISCREPANCY

The city's 2022 CAD (computer-aided design) data shows:

- Using the City's standard, 83% of Segment 1 is not due for reconstruction until 2044–2054, giving it more than 20 years of useful life.
- Within Segment 2 the roadway from Snelling to Lexington recently received a complete mill and overlay in 2022, making it the best-conditioned section of Summit Avenue.
- The East End, from Lexington to the Cathedral, is the only section that needs to be evaluated - with most portions having been constructed since 1913–1919.

THE CITY OFFERS NO EXPLANATION FOR WHY IT IS RECONSTRUCTING THE SECTION OF SUMMIT THAT NEEDS IT THE LEAST.



NOTE The \$100 million cost is a Saint Paul data request response. Minneapolis quotes and numbers are responses to OpenCity data requests. MnDOT data summarizes a midweek September day, 2017-2019 vs 2020-2025. The first three pages written and produced by Arey, page four produced by SOS, My Villager insert paid for by SOS. May 2026