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## A More "Complete" Madison Street?

Consultants lay out vision for less traffic and more bike lanes on one of Oak Park's busiest thoroughfares.

By Casey Cora | [Email the author](#) | April 4, 2012

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An artist's rendering, looking east on Madison Street at Taylor Avenue, shows a bike turn lane onto Taylor. The area outside of village hall, pictured at the top right of the drawing, could become a "civic plaza." Credit Courtesy Village of Oak Park

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### How do you use Madison Street?

Before you answer that, consider some stats: The east-west corridor is four lanes of traffic between Harlem Avenue and Austin Boulevard, interrupted by eight stoplights. An average of about 17,000 vehicles travel the road everyday, and an estimated 25 to 30 percent of that traffic won't stop while passing through Oak Park.

"It's turning into a standard strip," said Josephine Bellalta, cofounder of [Altmanu, Inc.](#), a design firm that's sketching out a redesign of Madison Street. "Is that what we want?"

Well? Is it?

That's a question pondered by the committee overseeing what could be a major overhaul to one of Oak Park's most heavily trafficked thoroughfares.

The plan, known as a road diet, is getting a serious look by the Oak Park Village Board, which met on Monday to "discuss and land on a vision as a first step," Trustee Colette Lueck said.

"What this is attempting to do is to bring street back to the neighborhood and not be there for the cars but for the neighbors and for the pedestrians," said village planner Craig Failor.

Guided by a philosophy known as "[complete streets](#)," the Madison Street road diet encompasses four different scenarios, ranging from a major \$17 million project, a slightly scaled-back \$15 million renovation and a less ambitious \$6.9 million makeover. There's also the considerably cheaper option of doing nothing.

The two more expensive plans aim to reduce the number of traffic lanes down to two, from four. Gone would be the median between Austin and Oak Park Avenue, replaced with a single turn lane running the expanse of the entire Madison corridor. Bike lanes would be added to each side of the road, along with more walking space for pedestrians and some cosmetic improvements.

The goal is to reduce traffic speed and the number of accidents and increase overall safety and quality of life. Proponent say the plan carries a number of other benefits, including the promotion of physical activity, less pollution and more "social integration" among the community.

**Earlier:** [Plan Trims Madison Street, Adds Bike Lanes](#)

Retailers could be in for a boost, too. Slower traffic means less zooming past local storefronts.

Still, there are challenges.

For example, it's unclear if the motor traffic theoretically eliminated by reducing the number of lanes would just spill over into the surrounding neighborhoods.

"That's a wild card," said Mark de la Vergne, with [Sam Schwartz Engineering](#).

And cost remains a major factor.

To pay for whatever plan could get selected, Oak Park has budgeted \$9.3 million for work along Madison Street. And officials are also planning to tap into tax increment financing funds from the Madison Street TIF, roughly \$7.7 million.

Failor said officials would also use a recent \$575,000 grant from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning to pay for the proposed bike lanes.

For now, the vision for the next incarnation of Madison Street remains bold.

"Who knows?" asked Bellalta. "You start to create multiple uses instead of just carrying cars."