



CITY OF ALBANY CITY COUNCIL AGENDA STAFF REPORT

Agenda Date: May 20, 2024
Reviewed by: NA

SUBJECT: Kains and Adams Bikeway Pilot Evaluation

REPORT BY: Ben Matlaw, Associate Transportation Planner
Justin Fried, Transportation and Sustainability Manager

SUMMARY

The action before the City Council is to consider adopting a resolution directing staff to prepare designs for a new configuration for the Kains and Adams Bikeway and additional intersection treatments and authorizing the City Manager to submit the project for a grant from the California Active Transportation Program.

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

That the Council direct staff to prepare designs to implement the contraflow bicycle lane option (staff recommendation) for purposes of completing the Caltrans Active Transportation Program grant application and give serious consideration to options 1 (Existing Pilot configuration) and 2 (Two-way Through Traffic with Forced Right Turns) due to the Transportation commission's uncertainty and out of respect for absent Commissioners.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That the Council adopt Resolution 2024-33:

1. Directing staff to prepare designs for a revised layout that includes: 1-way motor vehicle traffic, a contraflow bicycle lane, parallel parking, wayfinding signage, additional intersection treatments to facilitate safer crossings at all intersections, and additional measures to address vehicle volumes on the 700 and 800 block of Kains and the 900 block of Adams; and
2. Authorizing the City Manager to submit a grant application for the Kains & Adams Bikeway to the California Active Transportation Program and enter into a funding agreement with Caltrans upon award of grant.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA)

The project is categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15301 "Existing Facilities" of the CEQA Guidelines, which exempts the operation, repair, maintenance, or minor alteration of existing public facilities, involving negligible or no expansion of existing use.

BACKGROUND

On April 16, 2012, the City adopted the Albany Active Transportation Plan (ATP), which included an update to the Bicycle Master Plan and the development of the City's first Pedestrian Master Plan. Two of the proposed bicycle projects involved the potential implementation of two-way bicycle boulevards with partial entries on Kains Avenue and Adams Street as north-south bikeway alternatives to cycling on San Pablo Avenue. Both Kains and Adams are currently predominantly one-way streets. During adoption of the ATP, the City Council determined that more analysis was needed prior to consideration of the Kains and Adams bicycle boulevard concepts and that targeted public engagement needed to take place before approving bicycle proposals along those corridors.

In 2017, funded through a grant from the Alameda County Transportation Commission, Parisi Transportation Consulting was selected to conduct [a study of design alternatives](#) for bikeways on Kains and Adams. On October 26, 2017, the Traffic and Safety Commission recommended the two-way shared street / bike boulevard concept for both Kains Avenue and Adams Street.

On December 4, 2017, the City Council moved to:

- (1) refer the matter to the Traffic and Safety Commission to develop a recommendation for a pilot program of the project with a timeline and metrics; and
- (2) direct staff to: (a) include research on parking options, (b) confer with the Orientation Center for the Blind regarding a bridge, and (c) consult the project with Public Safety.

On December 18, 2018, the Traffic & Safety Commission reviewed the pilot program design and proposed timeline and metrics, received public comment, and made the recommendation provided above.

On September 16, 2019, the City Council approved designs for the pilot project and directed staff to include the project in the next update to the Capital Improvement Plan as a pilot with a duration of one year.

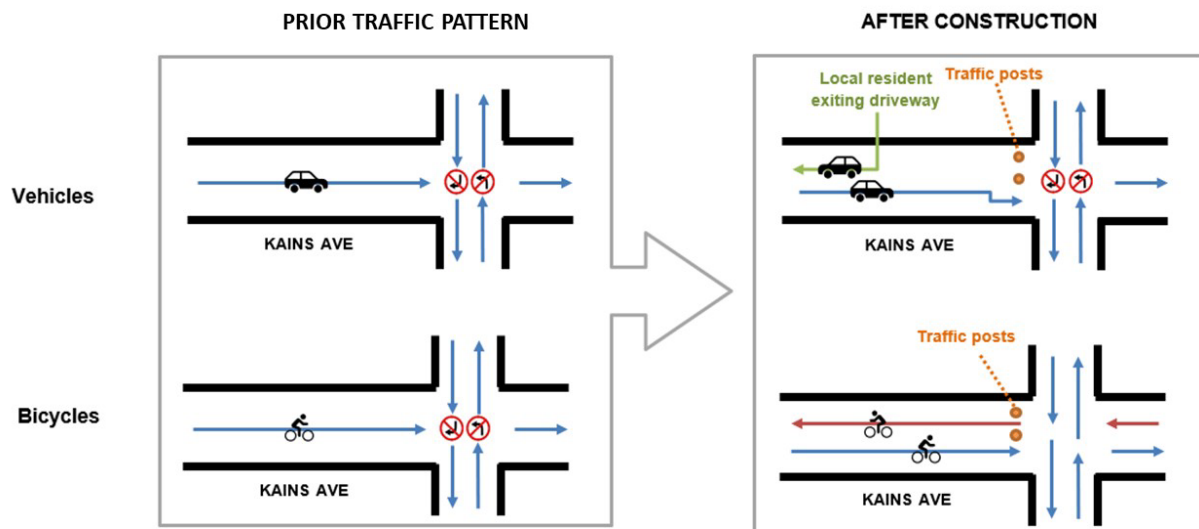
In January of 2023, contractors for the City began installing the pilot, including striping, signage, and delineator posts. The project was substantially completed in February with minor additional work completed in May. Additional two-way traffic signage was installed at four locations in June. It is now 15 months since the installation was substantially complete.

Pilot Project

The pilot was the outcome of a planning effort that looked at a range of design concepts detailed in the Adams Street & Kains Avenue Traffic Calming & Bikeway Study. Along with the bicycle network objectives, the study identified resident concerns related to existing conditions of Adams & Kains, including high-speed traffic and cut-through traffic diverting from San Pablo Avenue, difficulty crossing intersections, wrong-way traffic, visibility exiting driveways, blocked driveways, and large vehicles blocking the street.

The current pilot project permits two-way vehicular traffic internal to each block, with barriers restricting entrance to the block for motor vehicles, maintaining the prior existing one-way through traffic. Bicyclists are allowed to pass through the barriers and ride in the travel lane as is customary on other City streets with similar width and volume of motor vehicles.

Traffic Pattern



Given concerns around parking, and the lead time required in settling on policy direction, developing designs, identifying funding, and installing any desired changes, staff prepared an initial evaluation of the pilot and identified options for discussion and presented those to the Transportation Commission at their meeting on October 26, 2023. At that meeting, the Commission recommended that the pilot project continue through May 2024 so that there was more time to develop enhanced signage and pavement markings, consider alternatives, and review additional data.

Staff brought the pilot evaluation back for Transportation Commission discussion at their April 25, 2024, meeting in order to enable the City to meet a June grant application deadline for the California Active Transportation Program.

Four members of the Transportation Commission were present at the April meeting. While the Commission did make a recommendation regarding the design, some concern was expressed given that only four members were present. The Commission included in their motion that two other design options warranted additional consideration.

Staff included a survey in the Commission meeting notice on this item, sent the notice to residents along Kains and Adams, and circulated the information through the City's eNews. A total of 155 responses were received before the survey was closed on May 8.

DISCUSSION

The objective of the Kains and Adams Bikeway Project has been to provide a north-south route through Albany, on or near San Pablo Avenue, which is safer and less stressful than bicycling on San Pablo Avenue. This segment also is a link in a regional bicycle network that includes implementation by neighboring cities. With the installation of the pilot, cycling is permitted in both directions along Kains and Adams, allowing a lower-volume alternative to San Pablo Avenue.

Parking

Parking was one of the key issues of discussion during the approval process of the pilot project. By keeping access to the block restricted to the one-way direction, access to the ‘contraflow’ parking lane can only be gained by turning around within the block or by parking with the left wheels to the curb as is allowed on a one-way street. However, parking with the left wheels to the curb on a two-way street is prohibited by state law. The safety concern with parking in this way on a two-way street is that the driver does not have a clear view of the roadway in the oncoming direction as they pull out. While parking with the left wheels to the curb is now prohibited on these blocks as they are two-way streets, this continues to be the predominant parking behavior.

Cyclist Circulation and Public Feedback

24-hour bicycle count data is mixed and may reflect variation in small data samples, changes in behavior, variations in conditions, or some combination. The number of cyclists counted at San Pablo and Solano increased from 78 to 109, while cyclist counts collected at 665 San Pablo decreased from 81 to 48. Kains cyclist numbers showed increases, while Adams numbers decreased at the northern location.

24-Hour Bicycle Counts

	Pre-Project April 19, 2022	Mid-Project May 18-25, 2023	Post-Project March 26, 2024
665 San Pablo Ave	81	62	48
San Pablo at Solano	78	100	109
708 Adams St	49	34	43
Adams at Solano	21	22	27
635 Kains Ave	20	49	42
Kains/Solano	61	69	86

Initial feedback received by staff was mixed. Most feedback was supportive of the two-way facility with some commenters providing suggestions for additional improvement. There has also been some cyclist feedback that the use of the street as one-way by vehicles continues to make it feel unsafe to cycle in the contraflow direction, with vehicles tending to drive in the middle of the street. At the October 26, 2023, Transportation Commission meeting, the majority of feedback from cyclists indicated a benefit to safety and comfort from

predominantly one-way motor vehicle traffic by reducing the range of potential conflicts with motor vehicles. Additional feedback pointed to the need to clarify permitted cyclist movements from Marin to Kains, and to increase daylighting at intersection approaches beyond the current red zones. It has been noted that the pilot facility has not been incorporated into route mapping software to direct cyclists to utilize Kains and Adams as a two-way facility. There has also been the suggestion to look at stop controls at intersections to improve the utility of Kains and Adams for bicycle through movements.

On April 12, 2024, staff released a public survey to collect additional feedback on the existing pilot project, and to assess preferences for future changes. The survey was closed on May 8, 2024, after having been completed by 155 respondents. Almost 80% of survey respondents indicated that they travel along Kains Avenue or Adams Street at least a few times a week, with over 50% indicating they use the street every day. The vast majority of respondents use the street to drive and walk along (78% and 74%, respectively), while almost 50% of survey respondents also bicycle along the street.

Among respondents, the primary challenge to the current configuration is the confusion around existing traffic and parking laws, with a secondary challenge being the speed at which motor vehicles travel along the street. In terms of preferences for future changes, a desire to convert the streets back to one-way vehicle traffic as well as an interest to install additional traffic calming measures rose to the top of the list. Additional feedback suggested a need for better intersection crossings for both cyclists and pedestrians, as well as better signage to both navigate through the bikeways, and to indicate in which direction motor vehicles are legally allowed to travel.

Public feedback before and during the April 25, 2024, Transportation Commission meeting largely focused on the need to reduce vehicle volumes, improve safety at intersections, and install signage clarifying the correct path of travel for both motorists and cyclists. Feedback was mixed on which cross-section design to employ, with significant support for three of the options: the existing pilot, two-way through traffic with forced right turns, and the contraflow bike lane (Chicago Contraflow).

Traffic Circulation

There has not been significant change in motor vehicle circulation observed after the pilot installation. Comparing March 2024 counts to April 2022 pre-project counts, vehicles exiting in the now-permitted contraflow direction increased from 8 to 20 on Adams at Solano and from 11 to 49 on Kains at Solano, showing an increase in utilization of the option to exit the block in the new direction. Southbound Kains traffic showed a more-sizable change on the 800 block from 24-hour video counts, while 3-day traffic surveys showed average daily volume on the 900 block changed much less, from 729 to 785, so that may be a factor of the one-day sample size for the video count rather than significant change in behavior.

Staff has received comments and questions regarding the new traffic circulation pattern through various communication channels. Via email, phone, public comment at the Transportation Commission, and the recently disseminated feedback survey, a wide cross-section of the community has weighed in to provide feedback on the pilot project. Much of

the feedback has been related to confusion surrounding the now-permitted option to exit the block in the new direction, a desire to return to the one-way street configuration, and concerns about cut-through traffic. With vehicles parked with the left wheels to the curb, the streets continue to 'read' as one-way, even with the additional two-way traffic signage installed. There have been requests for additional signage and outreach on the traffic circulation; however, with the parking remaining in the one-way direction, the effectiveness of this may still be limited.

Vehicle volumes due to cut-through traffic continues to be a concern for residents of the streets and for cyclists utilizing the bikeways. While the streets are set up as one-way against the adjacent San Pablo Avenue travel direction, Adams provides a route for some motorists exiting the freeway along Buchanan and Kains provides a route for some motorists exiting El Cerrito Plaza to avoid a portion of San Pablo Avenue. In terms of cyclist comfort, daily motor vehicle volumes are in the target range for bicycle boulevard facilities, while peak hour motor vehicle volumes are high enough to merit a look at reducing volumes on the 900 block of Adams and the 700, 800, and 900 blocks of Kains (based upon NACTO Contextual Guidance for Selecting All Ages and Abilities bikeways).

Public Safety

Staff has not identified any vehicle collisions related to the pilot design since installation.

The predominant parking behavior of parking with the left wheels to the curb - when that is now prohibited on these blocks as they are two-way streets - continues to be of concern for the Albany Police Department, as the pilot has generated a behavior of non-compliance with California parking regulations.

The Fire Department has expressed a general preference for one-way streets for speed of access on narrow 30-foot streets but has not identified specific issues with the pilot project configuration nor with navigating the Do-Not-Enter barrier placement.

ANALYSIS

Street Configuration

The April 25, 2024, Staff Memorandum to the Transportation Commission analyzed a number of street configuration options (see Attachment 2). The Transportation Commission recommendation discusses consideration for two of these besides the staff recommendation.

The first, maintaining the existing pilot configuration, relies on the ability to secure state legislation to legalize left-wheel-to-curb parking for this roadway configuration. Staff does not recommend this option as there has not been progress in preparing legislation for this amendment to the California Vehicle Code.

The second, converts Kains and Adams to two-way streets with forced right turns at intersections. This maintains the current street cross section while moving the motor vehicle movement restrictions from the entrance of the block to the median of the cross-street. This

configuration provides access to each block from both ends to enable right-wheel-to-curb parking and increases restrictions on cut-through traffic by prohibiting traveling along Kains or Adams for multiple blocks. This would create greater changes to vehicle circulation for residents, as it would restrict a motor vehicle from straight and left-turn movements entering and exiting the block while allowing new right-in and right-out movements compared to the one-way street configuration. While this would likely reduce the overall volume of motor vehicle traffic on these streets, it would be more evenly split between northbound and southbound traffic. Lower volumes would improve comfort for cyclists while additional two-way motor vehicle traffic may reduce comfort, so the overall impact on the cycling facility is difficult to determine for this configuration.

After reviewing the pros and cons of the various street configuration options, staff recommends what we describe as the Chicago Contraflow, which reverts both streets to a one-way motor vehicle and parallel parking configuration and introduces a contraflow bicycle lane. This configuration was also fully developed and reviewed as part of the Kains Avenue & Adams Street Traffic Calming and Bikeway Study. It was not recommended at that time, primarily out of safety concerns with respect to potential conflicts between cyclists in the contraflow bicycle lane and left-wheel parked cars and motor vehicles exiting driveways. This configuration does, however, provide dedicated space for cyclists in one direction and limits the motor vehicle approach to one direction, reducing some of the safety concerns with a shared lane facility. This configuration returns motor vehicle traffic to one-way, thereby permitting motor vehicle parking with the left wheel to the curb and returning motor vehicle access and circulation to the condition from before the pilot. This option also provides clearer direction for motorists and cyclists on permitted movements, reducing potential confusion. Staff finds that this configuration best responds to the feedback and issues identified with the current configuration while providing a cycling facility that can continue to build on the improved safety and comfort identified with the pilot project.

Intersection Treatments and Additional Traffic Calming Measures

Based on a review of existing intersection configurations, data on motor vehicle counts, and feedback from both the Transportation Commission and public survey results, staff has determined that intersection improvements are a key component to any revised street design along Kains Avenue and Adams Street. Specific designs have yet to be identified for each intersection along the two routes. Designs will be based on a variety of factors, including existing intersection configuration, crash data, traffic count data of street segments and cross streets, width of intersections, and existence of a perpendicular bike route. Design options will be based on those provided in the Traffic Calming Toolkit chapter of the 2017 Adams Street & Kains Avenue Traffic Calming & Bikeway Study. These options include corner red curbs, painted bulb-outs, stop sign modifications, mini-traffic circles, rectangular rapid flashing beacons, and speed humps and/or cushions.

Independent of the city pilot, the Alameda County Transportation Commission is preparing a project of improvements to the bicycle facilities parallel to San Pablo Avenue. While they stayed out of the pilot area to allow time for the city to develop policy direction on these facilities, they are preparing plans for the addition of a rectangular rapid flashing beacon at Kains and Solano and a Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon (like the one for crossing San Pablo Avenue

at Dartmouth) at Kains and Marin that will include a median island that limits motor vehicle movements to right-in and right-out. This may help reduce some cut-through traffic along Kains Avenue.

Based on feedback from the Transportation Commission and the public, staff is considering additional intersection treatments that would have an impact on motor vehicle circulation along these blocks and/or adjacent streets. Such treatments would further improve bicycle and pedestrian safety and comfort at street crossings, as well as reduce cut-through traffic, but would simultaneously require some motorists to alter their routes to their homes or other destinations throughout the city. These intersection treatments could include partial traffic closures, traffic diversions, or alternating direction of one-way streets. Staff has identified three intersections where such intersection treatments may be warranted due to higher traffic volumes. These intersections include Adams Street and Buchanan Street, Kains Avenue and Washington Street, and Kains Avenue and Portland Avenue. Developing designs for additional measures to address vehicle volumes on the 700 and 800 block of Kains and the 900 block of Adams is included in the staff recommendation.

Signage

Public feedback at the Transportation Commission and in public survey responses also suggested a significant amount of confusion surrounding the existing pilot project along Kains Avenue and Adams Street. This confusion extended to both cyclists and motorists, and ranged from the correct direction to legally park, to which modes are legally allowed to access the streets in either direction, to where the bicycle facilities start and end. As a result of this feedback, staff proposes to incorporate into the project new signage along and adjacent to both bikeways to clarify which modes have access to the street, in which direction each mode can travel, which street segments comprise the bikeways, and which intersections traverse the bikeways.

ENVIRONMENTAL CLEARANCE

This project consists of rehabilitation of existing streets and is determined to be categorically exempt under CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act).

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

To achieve bicycle mode share goals and greenhouse gas emission reduction goals in the Active Transportation Plan and the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan, a network of cycling facilities has been in development throughout the City. This project supports these goals by providing safer bicycle facilities parallel to San Pablo Avenue.

SOCIAL EQUITY AND INCLUSIVITY CONSIDERATIONS

The project improves safety for vulnerable roadway users and improves access for those without motor vehicles.

CITY COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVES

- GOAL 3: Promote Streets that Support Safety & Transportation Mobility Options – This project implements Active Transportation Plan projects to provide two-way cycling facilities on Kains Avenue and Adams Street

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Staff time to prepare a grant application for the project is within existing capacity. Costs associated with a new project would be considered under separate Council action when the project is further developed.

NEXT STEPS

Grant applications are due June 17, 2024. Notification of grant recommendations are expected in November 2024 with adoption of Active Transportation Program awards by the California Transportation Commission to follow in December 2024.

Attachments

1. Resolution No. 2024-33
2. April 25, 2024, Transportation Commission Staff Memo and Public Correspondence