

**Brandon Avenue Review of Safety and Pedestrian & Bicycle Accommodations**

Date: 13 August 2020

Time: 10:30 – 11:30 am

Lighting: Overcast

Weather: Hot, humid

Participants	Affiliation
Hong Liu	City of Roanoke
Ian Coffey	City of Roanoke
<b>Bike/Ped Committee participants</b>	
Andrea Garland	City of Roanoke
Ken McLeod <sup>1</sup>	League of American Bicyclists
Cecile Newcomb	Roanoke County
Tim Pohlada-Thomas	RIDE Solutions
Rachel Ruhlen	RVARC
Wayne Wilcox	Halcyon Planning & Design



Figure 1. A memorial at the residence of the two victims of a fatal pedestrian crash near the site of the crash.

**Context**

On May 15, 2020, a vehicle struck two pedestrians crossing Brandon Avenue at 7:11 pm, killing one and seriously injuring the other (Figure 1). Recognizing that Brandon Avenue is on the repaving schedule for 2020-2021, local advocates created the “[Build a Better Brandon Avenue](#)” Facebook page hoping to generate interest in using the repaving opportunity to improve safety. City staff delayed repaving Brandon Avenue in order to address community concerns. The Bike/Ped Committee and City staff met to observe and discuss options to improve

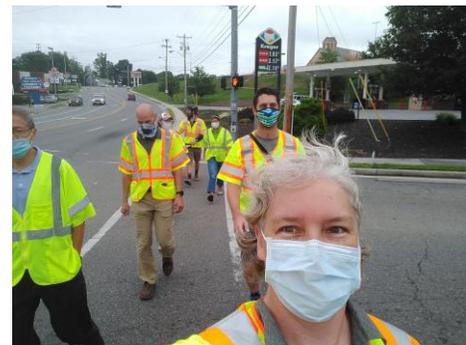


Figure 2. Crossing 23<sup>rd</sup> Street on Brandon Avenue.



Figure 3. Brandon Avenue facing west

safety and accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists (Figure 2).

The average annual daily traffic on Brandon Avenue is 21,000. It is a commuter corridor and an important connection to Towers Shopping Center and points beyond. Towers Shopping Center has two of the closest grocery stores to downtown Roanoke and many other essential retail businesses. The #61/#62 bus route serves

<sup>1</sup> Ken McLeod wrote a [blog article](#) about Brandon Avenue.

the road. Brandon Avenue was identified as a priority corridor in the Regional Bikeway Plan in 2012 and for several pedestrian improvements in the Regional Pedestrian Vision Plan in 2015. There have been numerous fatalities and serious injuries on the corridor between Main Street and Franklin Road.

### **Route**

Participants walked from 23<sup>rd</sup> Street to Main Street and back using the sidewalk on the south side of the road. Two participants biked from 23<sup>rd</sup> Street to Colonial Avenue, from Colonial Avenue to Brambleton Road, and from Brambleton Road to 23<sup>rd</sup> Street where they joined the walkers.

### **Conditions**

#### Pedestrian generators:

- Residences on the south side of the road and in neighborhoods north of Brandon Avenue.
- Bus stops on both sides of Brandon Avenue.
- Residential streets that intersect on the north side of the road.

#### Pedestrian attractors:

- Bus stops on both sides of Brandon Avenue.
- Towers Shopping Center on the south side and businesses along the north side of Brandon Avenue.
- Businesses along Colonial Avenue, across from Towers Shopping Center.

Crossing: The marked crosswalk at 23<sup>rd</sup> Street has pedestrian signals with push buttons. The push button on the north side is a few feet away from the marked crosswalk and there is no sidewalk connection between the push button and the crossing.

The only marked crosswalk on Brandon Avenue is the one at 23<sup>rd</sup> Street. The next closest marked crossings of Brandon Avenue are more than ½ mile to the east (Franklin Road) and ½ mile to the west (Brambleton Avenue). During the walk, the group saw multiple pedestrians cross at unmarked crosswalks or mid-block. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Street crosswalk is the only option for pedestrians coming from the south side to access businesses on the north side. Once on the north side, there are many wide driveway entrances pedestrians must cross to access these businesses.

The intersection of Main Street and Brandon Avenue is strangely designed and problematic for all users. There is no marked crosswalk at Main Street where the south sidewalk ends.

#### Sidewalk condition:

- The south sidewalk is complete from Main Street to the eastern Towers Shopping Center driveway.
- There is gap in the south sidewalk between the two driveways of Towers Shopping Center.
- The north side has very little sidewalk and it does not connect to the marked crosswalk at 23<sup>rd</sup> Street.

The south sidewalk is about five feet wide but encroaching grass covers the edges and trees grow over the sidewalk in places, effectively narrowing the width. Driveway ramps punctuate the sidewalk, also effectively narrowing the width. Several trash cans block the sidewalk partially or completely.

#### Alternate route:

- Pedestrians and bicyclists use Windsor Avenue which parallels Brandon Avenue on the north. Windsor Avenue intersects Brandon Avenue near 23<sup>rd</sup> Street.

Bicycle: The two bicyclists reported limited visibility of traffic when eastbound between the Towers sign and the western Towers Shopping Center driveway, with a steep uphill grade, a curve, and vegetation. The vegetation impeded visibility when exiting Towers Shopping Center at the eastern driveway. The traffic, even the reduced mid-day volume, was discouraging to casual bicyclists, as were the slopes, particularly westbound approaching the oddly configured Main Street intersection.

### **Suggestions**

Repaving: Repaving is an opportunity to change the lane configuration to one that improves safety. A four-to-three lane conversion, or road diet, on Brandon Avenue would improve safety for all users. Pedestrians would be able to cross more safely with only one lane of traffic in each direction to contend with (the pedestrian fatality in May was a multiple-threat situation). However, a road diet may result in longer delays and extended backups at the signalized intersections. It is uncertain if this tradeoff would be understood or tolerated by drivers.

The Federal Highway Administration [Road Diet Informational Guide](#) advises that roadways with less than 20,000 AADT are good candidates to evaluate for a road diet and notes that road diets have successfully been implemented on roadways up to 26,000 AADT. With 21,000 AADT, Brandon Avenue is within this range. The two-way left-turn lane in road diets can improve capacity by providing a space for left-turning vehicles to wait out of the way of through-traffic. Road diets reduce crashes between 19 and 47 percent and improve bicycle and pedestrian safety. The City of Roanoke has completed four road diets successfully. Road diets in Virginia have universally received a majority of positive feedback.

City staff discussed:

- Collecting current speed information.
- Temporarily shutting down one lane in each direction with traffic cones to get real multi-modal traffic feedback in different scenarios.
- Collecting data on multi-modal traffic flow during temporary lane closures.
- Running a survey to collect public input about temporary closures.

With public input, a decision could then be made about altering the lane configuration to improve safety.

The group also had suggestions for proposals to submit for funding outside of the repaving opportunity:

- Complete the sidewalk on the north side of Brandon Avenue, filling in gaps, noting the terrain challenges.
- Consider alternatives or interim measures to completing the north sidewalk, such as promoting pedestrian and bicycle use of Brandon Driveway (Figure 4) or Windsor Avenue with visual elements that call attention to these options, or converting a culvert into an underpass.
  - Brandon Driveway is steep, narrow, and in poor condition. Residents park on both sides and there are no sidewalks. The angle and terrain impede visibility of oncoming traffic. Consider interviewing residents about how they use the road and walk in the area.
- Install a pedestrian-actuated signal at Malcolm Street, consider a pedestrian refuge island. There are currently no pedestrian crossings between 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and Main Street, a distance of 2000 feet (and no crossing at Main Street either).

- Reconfigure the Main Street and Brandon Avenue intersection, perhaps as a T-intersection or roundabout, closing off access to Sherwood Avenue.



Figure 5. Brandon Driveway is a low-traffic parallel route on the north side of Brandon Avenue that is almost continuous with the north sidewalk of Brandon Avenue (blue line).



Figure 4. Another view of the sidewalk that almost connects Malcolm St to Brandon Driveway