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Flagstaff Mayor and City Council
City Hall
211 W Aspen
Flagstaff, AZ 86001
Submitted electronically

Dear Mayor and Council-

We are writing you today to express our concern that the proposed design of the Beulah/University roundabout as presented at the October 5th, 2021 Council meeting is incompatible with the city's goal of promoting safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. People are more likely to choose active transportation modes when it is both convenient and safe, and this design appears to fall short in both of those regards. We commend the city for certain design features that have been incorporated thus far, including removing the bike lanes from the street, raising the elevation of the crossings to slow traffic, the Milton underpass, and the addition of bus-only lanes, but this project has problems in its current form.

The design for the roundabout requires cyclists to make multiple crossings across the traffic going through the roundabout. The disconnect here is manifestly obvious: One of the selling points of roundabouts is that they allow vehicular traffic to flow without stopping, and with the proposed design cyclists will potentially have to make four distinct crossings across several lanes of vehicular traffic just to make a left turn. This is neither convenient nor safe. We note that the much of the purported safety of the proposed design hinges on the creation of raised crossings to slow vehicular traffic, a design feature which the city has been reluctant to adopt in the past due to concerns over snow plowing.

The proposed design appears to be a variation on existing roundabout designs in the Flagstaff area, including the relatively new roundabout at Switzer Canyon and Turquoise. We know from firsthand experience on that particular roundabout that cyclists will take the lane and ride through the roundabout rather than following the “engineered” solution of dismounting and using the crosswalks. Because there is a gap between the design of the infrastructure (cyclists stop and make crossings) and the way that people actual use it (cyclists take the lane and ride through the roundabout because it’s faster and likely safer) this creates a potentially dangerous situation.

When deciding on the appropriate scale of this project (two lanes vs one lane through the roundabout and associated streets), did the project engineering team take into account the city’s Carbon Neutrality Plan, which calls for holding vehicular traffic at 2019 levels, or was design set using ADOT standards of endless traffic growth? The use of design standards that directly conflict with approved city policy would seem to favor wasteful overbuilding of vehicular infrastructure. We encourage Council to ask these questions regarding other large capital projects, such as the Lone Tree Overpass.

If the city is committed to a roundabout at Beulah/University, we have identified two alternate ways to improve the project:

1. If the current design of a two-lane, high-speed roundabout remains, crossings for pedestrians and cyclists should all be grade-separated, preferably through tunnels.
2. Adopt a lower speed, one lane roundabout design that incorporates design features that prioritize the safety and convenience of users of active transportation. Such features include a small radius roundabout with relatively sharp angles entering and exiting the roundabout, which slows vehicle traffic. We recommend a review of this video, which details appropriate and proven roundabout design features for municipalities that desire to prioritize active transportation: <https://youtu.be/41XBzAOmmlU>

Thank you for your consideration-

John Dailey and Anthony Quintile

On behalf of the Board of Flagstaff Biking Organization