

Community Feedback Responses

2026 Pelham Boulevard Reconstruction
Department of Public Works, City of Saint Paul
December 2024

Between June and October 2024, the City of Saint Paul opened an online survey to gather feedback on the community's goals for the 2026 reconstruction of Pelham Boulevard between Mississippi River Boulevard and Franklin Avenue. The survey collected 328 unique responses to several survey questions.

Across the feedback received, there were consistent themes, concerns, and questions. This document groups the feedback into generalized and paraphrased themes, and provides responses from city staff.

For a summary of engagement events and feedback received, please see the Phase 1 Engagement Summary and Feedback document posted at stpaul.gov/pelham.



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Theme 1: Concern about “cut-through” or “non-neighborhood” traffic on Pelham.

While feedback from people showed an interest in limiting the amount of non-neighborhood cut-through traffic, there are as many people who appreciate the convenient connectivity out of the neighborhood that Pelham provides. It is very difficult to design a street that both connects conveniently to destinations for neighborhood or “local” drivers while at the same time restricts and prohibits access to people passing through the neighborhood (“non-neighbors”). In other words, the design that gives Desnoyer Park neighbors easy access to desired destinations is the same design that allows non-neighbors to reach their destinations outside Desnoyer Park.

There is evidence through observation and neighborhood conversations that evening commuters southbound on Hwy 280 exit at University Avenue, drive south on Eustis Street, east on Wabash Avenue, then south through the neighborhood on Pelham to destinations to the south and into Minneapolis. This is likely due to the lack of connection between southbound Hwy 280 and Cretin Avenue via I-94. A similar pattern occurs in the morning, though not to the same level – a northbound traveler can access northbound Hwy 280 via Cretin Avenue and I-94.

Pelham is designated as a “collector” street. It collects residential street and local traffic, then connects that traffic to other “arterial” streets like University Avenue and Marshall Avenue. The amount of traffic currently on Pelham, even with the southbound Hwy 280 connections, is consistent with other streets designated as collector streets in Saint Paul. In other words, Pelham is doing its job as intended. For context, traffic volumes on Cretin Avenue (an arterial street) during the evening commute are three times the amount of traffic on Pelham during that same time of day.

The 2026 Pelham Blvd reconstruction will not limit vehicle access to Pelham. A goal instead is to calm and slow traffic that uses Pelham. Planning work is currently ongoing for future changes to I-94, known as [Rethinking I-94](#), being led by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT). City staff will share the concerns of cut-through traffic with MnDOT Rethinking I-94 staff.

Theme 2: Concern about driver speeds, stop sign compliance, and driver yielding to pedestrians.

The posted speed limit on Pelham is 25 mph. A June 2024 traffic analysis showed driver speeds vary along Pelham by direction of travel and location. Driver speeds were measured at four locations along Pelham, in both the north and south directions. The highest average speeds were collected between Desnoyer Avenue and Beverly Road in the northbound and southbound direction (31mph). The lowest average speeds were collected between Wabash and Myrtle (26 mph).

To address speed concerns, survey respondents suggested more stop signs, or changing the locations of stop signs. Changes to the locations of stop signs are being considered for consistency with city and industry standards, but adding stop signs is not a best practice for controlling driver speeds – they are used for assigning right of way at intersections. When stop signs are installed where a driver believes they are unneeded based on lack of conflicting traffic, they will not obey the stop sign (or coast through) - another concern raised by survey respondents. This can lead to crashes when there is conflicting traffic. In other words, stop signs are used where they are needed to assign right of way at intersections, but not as a way to slow drivers.

Instead of stop signs as a solution for slowing drivers, the project plans to include changes to the street that will encourage slower driving speeds. This includes narrowing the “curb-to-curb” width of the street

to two travel lanes (currently two travel lanes, plus the bikeway). There is evidence that narrower streets encourage slower driving speeds. The project is also considering additional traffic calming and design changes to limit excessive speeds. These additional traffic calming measures have not been fully determined.

Slower driver speeds also lead to a higher likelihood of drivers yielding to people walking across Pelham. A narrower roadway also allows drivers to more easily see people waiting to cross the street, which allows them to yield more easily.

Theme 3. The mature tree canopy is very important to the community. So are the wide boulevards between the street and the houses.

A goal of the project is to protect and maintain the mature tree canopy along Pelham, and plant additional trees where feasible. At this stage of the project, staff have not yet determined impacts to trees. As design of the reconstruction begins winter 2024-2025, project staff will work closely with City of Saint Paul Forestry to identify high value trees and limit any impacts to tree canopy. There are areas of Pelham that have a higher likelihood of tree impact, including areas where the project plans to add sidewalks where they are currently missing. Adding elements such as on-street parking, mini-roundabouts, or a center-running median or boulevard to Pelham would expand the roadway past its current limits and would come with impacts to trees.

Theme 4. The street surface is very rough, which creates noise and an uncomfortable drive and bicycle experience.

The reconstruction project will remove the existing concrete street and reconstruct a completely new one with bituminous pavement (aka asphalt or blacktop). Bituminous roadways are generally considered quieter than concrete. A new off-street path will be added for people biking.

Theme 5. Questions about the ongoing construction at Otis and Pelham, the duration, and the planned completion. Concern about the impact on visibility for people using the intersection.

The work at the intersection of Pelham and Otis is being led by the Metropolitan Council and is replacing underground wastewater and sewer infrastructure. The project was scheduled for completion in December 2024. A recent project update expects completion in Spring 2025 due to delays with equipment fabrication and shipping. The community can learn more about the project timing and sign up for updates at: <https://metrocouncil.org/Wastewater-Water/Projects/Sewer-Planning-Construction-Updates/Projects/Minneapolis-MEI-807643.aspx>

City staff have been in touch with Met Council project staff and alerted them of the visibility and sightline challenges due to the storage of project machinery and equipment.

Theme 6. The intersection of Pelham and Otis smells bad.

This is likely due to the sewer and wastewater work being done by the Met Council at the intersection. See previous theme.

Theme 7. The railroad tracks crossing Pelham at Wabash make biking hazardous and driving uncomfortable.

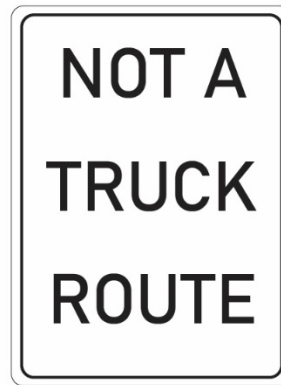
City staff have been in contact with Minnesota Commercial Railway, the operator of the tracks on Wabash. City staff have communicated the desire to remove the tracks from the street and build an extension of the planned bikeway on Pelham to the east on Wabash. Coordination is still ongoing and requires support from the railroad company and their ownership group.

Theme 8. Trucks driving on Pelham south of I-94 create noise and vibration. There are at least two TRUCKS PROHIBITED signs posted on Pelham south of St Anthony.

The noise and vibrations from trucks experienced by the community can at least partially be explained by the surface quality of the road. It is in poor shape, and a reconstruction of the street will fix that. The existing surface of the road is concrete, which compared with bituminous (or asphalt), is less forgiving and results in more street noise, especially from heavier trucks. Pelham will be reconstructed with a bituminous surface in 2026, which will ideally reduce the noise and rumbling from both cars and trucks.



TRUCKS PROHIBITED sign



NOT A TRUCK ROUTE sign

The entire length of Pelham – including the portion designated as a “parkway” south of I-94 – is a “state aid” street, and part of the larger state aid network. According to state rules, cities and counties may not ban trucks from using the state aid network. The existing TRUCKS PROHIBITED signs on Pelham are in conflict with these rules and will be removed separately from the Pelham project. Where appropriate, the city will consider the installation of “NOT A TRUCK ROUTE” signs to more accurately reflect the truck restrictions and inform truck drivers that the street has not been designed for very large vehicles. Several of these signs already exist on Pelham and the adjacent streets.

Theme 9: The bridge over I-94 is uncomfortable to walk on.

The bridge includes pedestrian space only on the west side, and the existing guardrail height makes walking on the bridge uncomfortable. The 2026 reconstruction of Pelham does not currently include any work on the bridge over I-94. City staff have discussed the need for improvements to the bridge with the bridge owner, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT). Any potential modifications to the bridge in the future will be made by MnDOT.

The existing chain link fence on the bikeway-side (east side) of the bridge was installed in 2018 when the bikeway was added to Pelham and to the bridge.

[Theme 10. Sidewalks are in poor shape, and there are missing sidewalks approaching the I-94 bridge and south along the golf course, and between Otis and MRB.](#)

With a full street reconstruction project, everything is replaced, including the street surface, bike surface, and sidewalks. Street reconstructions also fill gaps in the sidewalk network where feasible. As of December 2024, the project plans to fill gaps in the sidewalk network, including the east side of Pelham between Beverly and Otis (along Town and Country golf course), as well as between Otis and Mississippi River Blvd. Efforts will be taken to minimize tree loss, but sidewalks are generally built in a straight line; they are not built to weave around trees. A straight sidewalk is easier to navigate for people with low or no vision. A meandering and weaving sidewalk is difficult to navigate. Project staff will work with Saint Paul Forestry to determine the optimal sidewalk path that also considers impacts to trees.

Sidewalk is also missing immediately north and south of the bridge over I-94 on the east side of the street. Project staff are coordinating with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), which owns the bridge, to determine if filling these sidewalk gaps is feasible with the bridge approach.

[Theme 11. There is limited on-street parking south of I-94.](#)

Parking was removed on much of Pelham in 2018 when the flex post-separated bikeway was installed. South of I-94, parking is prohibited on both sides of the street on every block except the west side of Pelham between Doane and St Anthony, where the street is slightly wider. North of I-94, and especially on the blocks between Wabash and Franklin, parking demand is high.

The project has not made any decisions about on-street parking. The introduction of on-street parking south of I-94 – along with the two drive lanes and the separated bikeway – would likely come with impacts to trees. The project team will work with Saint Paul Forestry to consider impacts from adding on-street parking.

[Theme 12. Concern about the design of the existing flex post-separated bikeway: two-way operation and sightlines, location on the east side, drivers in bikeway, flex-posts.](#)

The white flex post-separated bikeway was installed on Pelham in 2018. It was always intended to be an interim design and installation that provided some level of protection and separation for people biking until a larger reconstruction could be funded. This 2026 reconstruction of Pelham is that larger project. The reconstruction plans to remove the white flex-post bikeway from the street and repurpose that space for a separated bikeway/path/trail built at sidewalk level and outside the street.

Pelham Boulevard is part of the Saint Paul Grand Round, and the design of the new bikeway on Pelham is planned to be consistent with the other segments of the Grand Round like Como Avenue east of Snelling, Wheelock Parkway, and Johnson Parkway. These segments feature a separated two-way bikeway at sidewalk level, plus additional sidewalk space for people walking.

Survey feedback described drivers parking or driving in the current bikeway on Pelham. This behavior is rarely reported on the other existing segments of the Grand Round described above, and the

expectation is that the planned changes to Pelham will reduce or eliminate the confusion some drivers have that leads to illegally driving and loading in the current bikeway.

Some respondents to the survey mention the concerns of a two-way bikeway design – that it is not intuitive to drivers and that drivers do not expect bikers traveling both directions in the bikeway. While research is inconclusive on the safety of one-way bikeways versus two-way bikeways, what is clear is that bikeway separation with cars is always better than no separation, and that thoughtful intersection design of two-way bikeways is important to improve safety and comfort. The project team is considering intersection enhancements as part of ongoing designs.

One-way separated bikeways come with additional challenges and tradeoffs that two-way bikeways do not. Maintenance (sweeping, snow clearing) of two one-way separated bikeways requires more investment than a single two-way bikeway. Additionally, two one-way bikeways require more space than a single two-way bikeway. This additional space can lead to tradeoffs with boulevard space and trees.

Finally, survey respondents asked about constructing the bikeway on the west side of Pelham instead of the east side, to connect directly to Desnoyer Park. While a desire for a connection to the park is meaningful, there are other factors to consider. Compared to a bikeway on the west side of Pelham, an east side bikeway:

- 1) doesn't require a crossing of Pelham to continue east on Myrtle or a potential future Wabash connection to the east of Pelham (see Theme 7)
- 2) avoids heavier traffic at Wabash (much of the traffic at this intersection comes from the west)
- 3) has no crossing of Desnoyer Avenue, while a bikeway on the west side would. Limiting the number of conflicts with vehicles/crossings has an effect on comfort and safety
- 4) is consistent with the recommendation in the Grand Round Design and Implementation Plan; projects prefer to be consistent with past planning.

Theme 13. Sightlines and intersection design is complicated at several intersections on Pelham, including Otis and Desnoyer

Both people driving and people biking noted in the survey feedback that skewed intersections, like those at Otis and Desnoyer, can be challenging. The angle requires a driver or a biker to look back over their shoulder when scanning for cross traffic. With the reconstruction, Otis and Desnoyer can be realigned to approach Pelham at a 90-degree angle, which will improve safety and sightlines at these intersections. The changes at Otis will also make the entire intersection feel “smaller” and require drivers to make slower turns.

A mini-roundabout at Otis was mentioned by some survey respondents. This was analyzed by staff, but there is not enough space within the public right-of-way for a mini-roundabout.