

RIVERSIDE DRIVE TO RETURN TO ORIGINAL CONFIGURATION TEMPORARILY

Pilot Project Temporarily Halted for Safety Concerns, Future Developments, Need for More Data Collection

Memphis, TN – Mayor A C Wharton, Jr. announced today that Riverside Drive will be returned to four lanes for vehicle traffic in June, pending further study.

“The pilot project, which includes two lanes for vehicles, and lanes for bikers and pedestrians, showed no measurable shift of vehicle traffic to alternate routes. Travel speeds were reduced inconsistently, and the number of crashes was up over the year prior,” said Mayor Wharton. “Public safety is my paramount responsibility and we will use the information gathered thus far, collect more data, and come up with a more optimal configuration that could include additions such as turn lanes, and separating the two lanes of vehicle traffic with a median. In the meantime, we will return Riverside Drive to the configuration drivers are most familiar with.”

After consulting with Kyle Wagenschutz, Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator and John Cameron, City Engineer, Mayor Wharton said it was determined that there are still some questions to be answered on Riverside Drive that require additional data collection regarding traffic that will be generated with new developments downtown, and the new I-55 / Crump Blvd. interchange to be rebuilt by TDOT.

“Once Riverside Drive has been completely repaved in 2016, we will again review the traffic patterns, the impact of major new developments, and gather public input to determine the best permanent Complete Street configuration to accommodate all users – pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists – safely and comfortably,” said City Engineer John Cameron. “We appreciate the high level of engagement from citizens on both sides of this issue and anticipate an equally robust process next year when public hearings continue.”

The City is committed to making Memphis a better place to live, work and play, Mayor Wharton said.

“Part of that is making sure citizens can access all the things that make Memphis a special place. Memphis is a river city. It is in our DNA. To separate ourselves from the river is to separate ourselves from our heritage.” Mayor Wharton said. “We must make the river, Tom Lee Park, the cobblestones and Wolf River Harbor accessible to all our citizens and all those visiting our city and wish to understand what it means to be a Memphian.”

Two years ago, the City commissioned nationally known urban planner Jeff Speck to review how we making use of the wonderful asset the City has in the riverfront and how to make better make use of it. He presented his recommendations at a well-attended public meeting in March of 2013. High among his recommendations was a reimagining of Riverside Drive. He observed it was functioning more like a highway than an urban street, with four lanes of high speed traffic connecting I-55 to I-40. He pointed out this formed a daunting obstacle to those who wished to visit the riverfront by any means other than motor vehicle. Speck recommended that Riverside Drive be reduced from four lanes of motor vehicle traffic to two and utilize the remaining space for bicycle lanes and on-street parking. These measures were aimed at reducing the speed of traffic, reducing the distance and number of lanes that pedestrians have to cross to get to the riverfront and providing better access for bicyclist.

After reviewing his recommendations, it was decided that some of the concepts should be tried on a temporary basis through a Pilot Project. We announced our intention to run a temporary, reversible pilot

project last March. The City committed to run the project from 12 to 18 months to test one possible roadway configuration, gauge traffic impacts of lane reductions and gather public input.

The pilot project was put in place at the beginning of June last year. Since it was to be a temporary installation physical changes to Riverside Drive were kept to a minimum. The pilot project does not represent the optimal configuration of Riverside Drive with reduced vehicle lanes, but it does allow for collecting data on traffic distribution, speed and crash analysis.

During the pilot program public feedback has been solicited at public meetings and through web surveys. Well attended public meetings were held July 29, 2014, October 30, 2014 and March 26th this year. Feedback gathered at these meetings, validated by field data will help guide the future direction of the project.