

NE 98th Street Traffic Tamers Tour Notes

Saturday, November 15, 2003



A fun and determined group gathered at 8:30 a.m. on a Saturday morning at Merilee Catero's. More than 15 people from the neighborhood, Feet First, and the City of Seattle spent 2 hours walking the neighborhood. Here's a group photo on Merilee's porch overlooking Thornton Creek.

These "Traffic Tamers Tour" notes list the problems we observed on the tour and highlight some possible improvements. There are three categories of actions:

- ✓ (1) what neighbors can do right now (green dot),
- Ⓢ (2) possible with existing funding sources from the City of Seattle (blue dot), and
- Ⓟ (3) problems that demand new pedestrian funding or policies. Neighborhood organizing to establish a "local improvement district" (L.I.D.) could raise funds locally to take on some of the larger projects, such as sidewalks and curbing (purple dot).

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We walked a loop up NE 98th Street to 15th NE, back down 96th to Sacajewea Elementary at 20th and returning to 98th to look at the intersection with Lake City Way.



Here's an aerial photo of the area. The large building at the center is Sacajewea Elementary School. Thornton Creek runs through the upper, wooded portion of the photo. Merilee reported that a big Chinook made it up to this point just a few weeks ago.

A recent traffic study recorded over 2,000 vehicles a day cutting through on 98th Street between 15th NE and Lake City Way. NE 98th is a residential street. Despite signs, traffic circles and multiple chicanes, traffic is cutting through, driving fast, and making it unpleasant for people walking and living on the street.

Simply stated, this residential street is being treated as an arterial. Arterial streets in Seattle can be identified by their having a painted centerline. East-west connections in this neighborhood are available at NE 80th Street and Northgate Way (110th St). The combination of there being an arterial at 95th Street and the traffic controls on Northgate Way make 98th Street an attractive route. The one-and-a-half mile spacing between east-west arterials here is the largest spacing between arterials found anywhere in Seattle. With ongoing and planned development in the Northgate Mall area, the folks expressed real concerns about increasing traffic volumes and rising speeds on this street.



Drivers will use as much space as you give them! This photo shows a typical scene, with two cars just having passed at the east-most chicane in front of Merilee's house. The soil at the edge of the pavement is rutted where drivers have pulled over to allow a car to pass. If a planting box were constructed with railroad ties or cement bricks, the raised area could be an attractive feature and reduce speeds at this chicane. It would need to be installed a few feet beyond the mailbox here to allow the USPS truck to get in to the box. Drivers would yield to oncoming traffic further back from the chicane.



✓ 1. Rutting



2. The Costs of Speed

Do folks gather on the street? Without a group this large, it is probably rare for people to gather on the street. As a group we were standing further into the street than a single walker might be, and some drivers appeared to be less than pleased with having to accommodate us. By inhabiting the street to a greater extent, you will dissuade drivers from taking this option and force them to drive slower. One neighbor mentioned waving to all drivers as they pass. This helps make them feel like they're coming through your living room. ✓

3. Severe Crashes

Damage, injury and death, correlate exponentially with speed. A portion of this fence was rebuilt after a car ended up going off the street. Taming the traffic is not just about preferences or ideals, it is a significant solution for a problem with real consequences.



NE 98th St west of 20th NE






4. Parking Slows Traffic

At the eastern chicane, neighbors observed some east-bound drivers cutting around the right side of the chicane onto the dirt to avoid on-coming westbound traffic. They started to park in that area so as to block this option and force cars to slow down and take turns through. Here, it is apparent that the red car to the left also causes west-bound drivers to feel “visual resistance” and behave more cautiously.


5. On-Street Parking

When streets have no curbs, people tend to park off the side of the street. *It is fully legal to park on the pavement.* Think of the streets of Capitol Hill, where only one car at a time can get through with cars parked on both sides. If  98th Street neighbors start parking on the pavement, it will dramatically reduce the speed of through traffic.

It might be a fun event to schedule a day when neighbors would all park their cars on the street. On that day, speeds could be measured with radar for a direct comparison.



6. Speed Humps

At the entrance to the street, a speed hump could be installed to reinforce the message that this is a residential neighborhood. It provides a reminder to drivers that they are on your territory. The neighborhood traffic control program at  SDOT has a standard process for getting these installations approved.

Other options suggested during the tour such as a row of “buttons” or a set of rumble strips can be effective, but the noise impacts to adjacent residents are not desirable.

7. Sign Not Visible

The Residential Street sign at 15th Ave is not readily visible to drivers turning onto 98th. Moving it back would increase the visibility.



NE 98th St at 15th NE



8. Gateways

Items that express care and community define your place and create intrigue and uncertainty for drivers. This mailbox is an example of that kind of celebration of public space. What sorts of projects could be initiated at the ends of 98th Street?



9. Slope Effects

There are some effects of the steepness of the terrain in the area. One person described the problem of drainage water accumulating during heavy rains. Curb and gutter projects offer rainwater controls.



Another concern relates to slipping. Some of the steeper streets could have ribbing installed at the edges to provide more traction. This used to be typical practice on Seattle's steep sidewalks and could be extended to improve the edge of residential street surfaces.





15th Ave NE

10. 15th Ave Sidewalk

\$ In 2004, one block of sidewalk will be constructed on 15th Ave. There is funding for sidewalk design and construction of one block of new sidewalk. The block has not been determined yet. Contact Shauna Walgren at SDOT for more information.

One person described the difficulty of crossing 15th Street when out running in the morning. He said that he often crosses at 96th Street in order to take advantage of the crossing guard. This program is under budget review and needs all the support it can get.



11. Sidewalk on NE 98th

A sidewalk could be added here. It appears that it was a serious oversight of the project manager installing this railing west of 20th NE not to include a sidewalk. It would be possible to use asphalt and curbing here to build out a sidewalk to the width of the chicane in the foreground. The steep grade reduces a pedestrian's ability to step quickly out of the way of on-coming traffic, making a sidewalk even more desirable.



This would be a good project for the neighborhood matching fund or the new sidewalk program.



NE 98th east of 20th NE



20th Ave NE at NE 96th St

12. Sacajawea Sidewalk?

The worn trail here demonstrates the strong demand for a sidewalk at the entrance to Sacajawea Elementary. We need to support Washington State "Safe Routes to School" legislation that would help provide funding for projects like this. Seattle also needs to support more sidewalk construction.



13. Sidewalk L.I.D.?

Neighbors would like to see a sidewalk here. 20th Avenue connects several important walking routes and destinations. An LID would enable the project to go ahead without funding from the city. Neighbors would tax themselves for the cost of construction. Matching funds might be available through the State or other sources.



20th Ave NE



20th Ave NE @ 97th Street (trail)

14. Sacajawea Creek Trail

The wood chips in the foreground are the result of a clean-up just completed. The red line indicates the path of the trail up the hill. A sign identifying the trail and describing the creek would be a nice addition.



15. Scarecrow Anyone?

Merilee poses as a scarecrow. Or should it be a scarecar? How about adding some of these to traffic circles and chicanes? Yes, I think the driver behind her was scared.



20th Ave NE & NE 98th St





NE 98th & Lake City Way

16. Curbing Needed

Drivers here cut to the right. Though there is a pedestrian push button, there is inadequate protection at this crossing. Curbing would make this a much safer crossing point and reduce the convenience for people turning right to reach NE 95th St.



17. Sidewalk Section

This is a significant missing link for children who would like to walk to school, as it leads from the busy intersection with pedestrian controls past businesses that border on the beginning of the residential portion of NE 98th Street.



NE 98th & Lake City Way



Western chicane on NE 98th Street.

18. 20 mph Speed Limit

Presently the speed limit is 25 mph. Feet First is promoting the concept of a 20 mph residential street speed limit. This change would require strong support from citizens such as yourself. It would mean that the police could more easily ticket drivers for going 30 mph, and it would allow the posting of white 20 mph speed limit signs. (The yellow 20 mph limit posted beneath the residential street sign is only an “advisory” speed.)





What are the next steps?

Merilee Catero set up the Traffic Tamers Tour. She can be reached at acatero@comcast.net or 523-1575

Shauna Walgren of Seattle Department of Transportation is a good contact for the items that require funding or construction. Her contact info: shauna.walgren@seattle.gov or 684-8681.

David Levinger of Feet First can offer general assistance.



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