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Cherie Cole: Traffic corridors need to protect, not harm neighborhoods

Safety is supposed to be the highest priority in community and transportation planning, and is supported by multiple policies in most communities. As a result of the past and upcoming heavy growth, some streets in our neighborhoods should be reclassified to promote the public health, safety, welfare, and best interests of children. We should not be bound to the errors of the past.

Rapid growth has been well-documented as leaving communities permanently damaged, swamped under traffic impacts, sacrificed air quality and water supply, lost heritage, increased crime, heavy tax burdens, unaffordable housing and a lost sense of community. Many problems are directly linked to traffic planning and management.

Sustainability can be defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Tomorrow's viability is dependent upon today's decisions in regard to local agricultural land, water resources, cultural and historic legacies, air quality, family-oriented communities, economic security, public services, educational excellence, a sense of community, transportation planning, enhancement of alternative transportation, including walking and cycling, community policing, disaster prevention and public health and safety. Unfortunately, development is subsidized by taxpayers for the benefit of a small segment of wealthy people and their hired representatives who dominate our planning processes, often with undeclared conflicts of interest, and at the expense of the greater good. Other improvements needed in planning processes include timely and full disclosure of content and intent of proposed plans; improved information and outreach to stakeholders and communities; inclusion and analysis of all possible scenario alternatives; consideration of the full scope of data and impacts, including cost-benefit analysis and social capital implications. Traffic corridors are supposed to be placed at the outer edges of neighborhoods to reduce the volume of people, properties and neighborhood functions impacted. In our neighborhood, traffic management is blighting too many core streets and hundreds more homes than necessary, striking hardest against our multiple schools' streets and thousands of children and their families daily, (moral, safety, equity, and fiscal responsibility problems), and is about to force the closure of one of Boise's oldest landmarked historic schools in a perfect walkable location along the original Ridge to Rivers bikeways. Washington Elementary has been updated, has a long record of excellence in education, and has a waiting list of students. The Boise Comprehensive Plan, new urbanism and smart-growth principles, the neighborhood plan, and FHWA safety and corridor planning requirements indicate that this school in this location should never have been traffic blighted in the first place. Interesting that some of the same people that forced the opening of 15th and Fort streets to cut-through traffic two decades ago to save their own streets are still on committees proposing these increased strikes against the many schools along this one route. Conflicts of interest.

The recent Downtown Boise Mobility Study, DBMS, is recommending adding traffic lanes at the intersections of 15th, Fort, Hays, 8th, and 6th streets. This will likely lead to arterial reclassifications and dangerous traffic barriers for these schools' streets, unless people get involved now to protect the thousands of children from many neighborhoods that attend these schools every year. In addition to unnecessary increased hazards for the highest concentrations of people, heritage tourism assets and future economic potential will be gutted.

Your insights are desperately needed at today's Communities in Motion meetings at Boise's Historical Museum. Transportation planning is social engineering, and the primary determining factor between good growth and bad results. You might provide some balance for decision making.

There are approximately 22 streets in the North and East End historic neighborhoods that suffer from Foothills traffic impacts. Maybe the Foothills loop road concept could be modified to run along the base of the Foothills to greatly reduce community damages, number of accidents, and health risks from air pollution.

Cherie Cole lives in Boise.