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## Comments of AARP Wisconsin Regarding Appleton's Proposed College Avenue Reconfiguration

On behalf of AARP Wisconsin's almost 16,000 members in Appleton, we write to submit comments regarding the City of Appleton's proposed College Avenue Reconfiguration, also commonly known as a "road diet". AARP is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, nationwide organization that helps empower people to choose how they live as they age, strengthens communities, and fights for the issues that matter most to families, including issues that support the creation and preservation of livable communities. Appleton has been a member of AARP's Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities since May 2022 and it is this relationship that brings me here today.

Environmental psychology tells us that most drivers regulate their driving speed on what feels comfortable based on street design. This means that in wider, more open spaces, people tend to drive faster, no matter posted speed limits. These faster travel speeds have a negative effect for people traveling by foot or mobility device. Not only do people feel less safe around cars traveling at higher speeds, research shows they *are* less safe. Here are some statistics to help frame the importance of designing roads for all people in Appleton:

- Wisconsin Department of Transportation estimates that at least 40% of the city's residents are non-drivers.
- A typical person outlives his or her ability to drive by 8-10 years.
- People over the age of 65 are disproportionately represented as victims of pedestrian-auto crashes.
- Optimum speeds in a commercial district where high pedestrian and biking activity is desired is 25 mph. At 35 mph there is an 85% chance that a person walking will be killed if hit by a motor vehicle.

We would like to highlight some relevant information contained within AARP's publication Road Diets: A Livability Fact Sheet which, we noted, is linked within the supporting material on the city's project information page. People often worry that road diets will divert traffic, but research does not support this. People in cars tend to use the most direct route to their destination and timing traffic signals correctly can actually decrease the time it takes to get through an area even with less travel lanes and slower speeds.

Some may also worry that the road diet will decrease business. Again, research does not support this. In fact, it shows that customers are more comfortable parking on a street due to the

slower speeds. But more importantly, research also shows that people walking or riding bikes tend to spend more money locally than people in autos.

AARP recommends that the city engage in the following:

- Coordinate a public education/engagement campaign to minimize anxiety about the change to the downtown landscape.
- Consider this as a pilot project giving road users, downtown business owners, and residents a chance to get used to the concept.
- Document change not only to traffic flow, but also walking, biking and retail activity during the pilot project time period.

AARP Wisconsin appreciates the opportunity to comment on this important matter. We believe that the city of Appleton is on the leading edge of promoting the creation of a robust commercial district to make Appleton a vibrant city where residents of all ages can participate fully and live independently. We commend you for the proposed College Avenue reconfiguration and your efforts to ensure the safety of all people in your downtown.

Should you have any questions or need any further information, please feel free to reach out to me at [dwasniewski@aarp.org](mailto:dwasniewski@aarp.org) or 608-286-6303.

