



Prepared by Jonathan Harms and Members of the 29th Ave Project,
a subcommittee of the Audubon Neighborhood Association

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To Whom it May Concern,

As Executive Director of the Audubon Neighborhood Association in Northeast Minneapolis, I'm writing to alert you to an issue of great concern to our families with children, our businesses, and residents of our neighborhood. There exist serious safety issues on 29th Avenue NE, a major collector that runs directly through our vibrant Johnson Street and Central Avenue business districts, Northeast Middle School, and Audubon Park Recreation Center. Slated for reconstruction in 2022, the project has now been downgraded by Public Works with a proposed band-aid solution that is unacceptable at best (see attached petition) and may result in tragic, possibly fatal outcomes at worst.

As it stands today, 29th Ave has many safety hazards:

- Wide lanes encourage speeding, with cars regularly traveling in excess of 40mph outside Northeast Middle School, which serves students from multiple wards
- Freight traffic has increased dramatically in the last three years, after Canadian Pacific demolished Shoreham Yards' roundhouse in 2019 to expand its trucking operation
- There are no crosswalks for either the school or Audubon Park, which is used every day by local families
- It's a dangerous street for bikers, even though the city has labeled it as a bicycle collector route, and has poor lighting despite being labeled as a pedestrian lighting corridor

As mentioned in the 2023 Capital Long-Range Improvement Committee (CLIC) Report presented on July 13th, Public Works has been prioritizing plans for a full reconstruction of 29th Ave NE since 2017 - with work originally planned to begin in 2021. That work was delayed over the last few years, until this January when it was dropped from the budget. Instead, Public Works decided to downgrade 29th Ave to a Resurfacing project (milling and overlaying the top layer of surface asphalt) to save money and extend the life of the road.

We are concerned that this decision will intensify safety hazards, risking the health of our community. If the street is repaved while keeping the street's existing wide lanes, cars will be more emboldened to speed, and trucks will be incentivized to use our area as a thoroughfare. While we understand the unique budgetary constraints the city is facing in 2022, it does not make sense to cut corners like this when the city is trying to combat traffic fatalities through its Vision Zero campaign.

Only a full reconstruction would address the street's embedded problems. We could address safety issues through data-proven design standards and traffic calming techniques. A new design would allow the city to address long-standing flooding issues at the corner of 29th and Central near Chimborazo, and provide pedestrian lighting to connect to the new Metro Line F coming in 2027. Your support for full reconstruction would allow our neighborhood to make dozens of changes and improvements we've been planning for since 2008, when we released our *29th Ave Streetscaping Plan* with assistance from the NPCR, CURA, and the McKnight Foundation.

A full reconstruction would also allow our neighborhood to plan for the future - designing to encourage walking, biking, and public transit in ways that make our community stronger, more resilient, and better prepared for the challenges we have already begun to face.

We would love to have the chance to show you first hand why it's so important to not just paper over, but fix the problems on 29th Avenue NE.

We look forward to working with you,

Deborah J Brister

Deborah Brister
Executive Director, Audubon Neighborhood Association

29th Avenue NE Redevelopment Plans

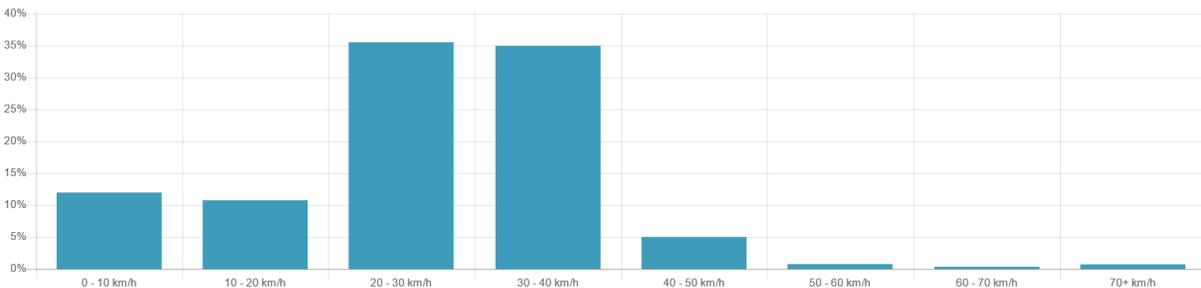
Supporting Documentation

We would like to present these findings, not as an end point, but as the beginning of a conversation together on how to move forward.

Design Failures - Speeding along 29th

There are fundamental issues to street design that cannot be fixed by lowering city speed limits.¹ It's now widely understood that drivers tend to drive as fast as they feel comfortable within the street's overall design. The data below shows the already large levels of unsafe driving happening along 29th Ave NE - problems that will only become worse if Public Works only resurfaces the street, without narrowing lanes or implementing traffic calming methods.

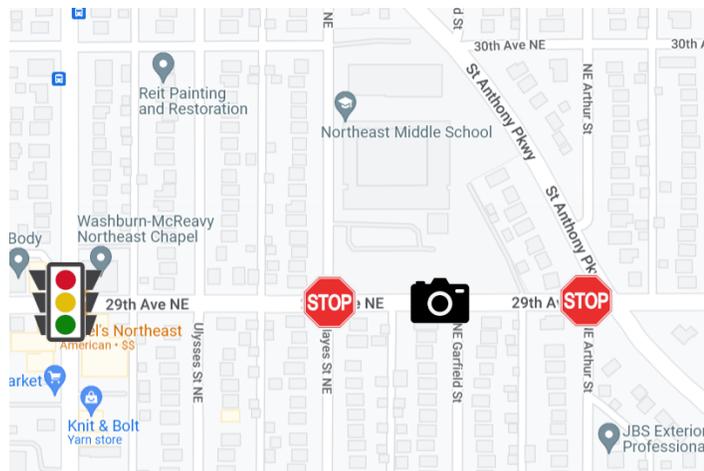
Our project has been collecting automated, anonymized traffic data to learn about the habits of drivers at 29th Ave and Garfield, close to Northeast Middle school. We've found that there is a small, but worryingly consistent number of cars driving at 45 mph and above.



This data is from the month of June; 50 kmh roughly translates to 30 mph

While this may seem like a normal distribution at first blush, it is actually very surprising considering its location: these cars had to accelerate very quickly, between two stop signs, in the middle of a school zone, in order to achieve these speeds.

Either these drivers are flooring their accelerators after the stop, are testing their breaks in a dangerous way, or are blowing through the stop sign entirely.

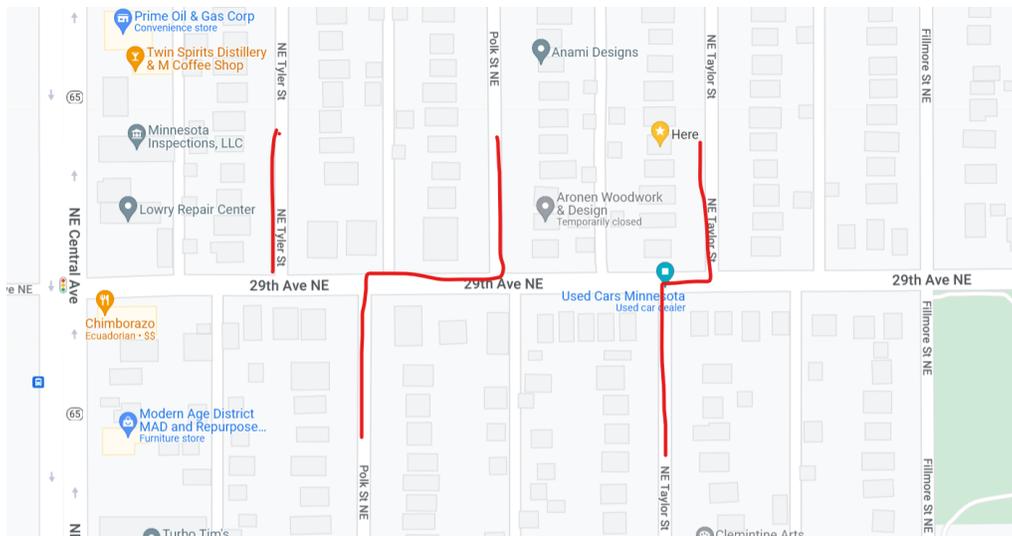


In addition, our neighborhood is unusually hilly compared to the surrounding area. When driving westbound on 29th, after stopping at Johnson St, the view opens up, giving drivers a sense that it is free to let their cars coast and pick up speed. Unfortunately, that coincides right where pedestrians cross to access Audubon Park.



Watch out for kids! Many drivers struggle to stay within speed limit on this hill

At the bottom of the hill, 29th Ave has many cross streets that do not line up with each other, sometimes causing cross traffic to proceed slowly as they try to figure out how to navigate. Some drivers use the opportunity to execute a U-Turn. Neighbors at 29th and Taylor, Polk, and Tyler, have seen many close calls resulting from cars careening down the hill and meeting slow-moving cross-traffic.



Big Rise in Freight Traffic

Most neighbors, when talking about the issues of 29th Ave, will reference the increased freight traffic, which has seen a marked increase in the last three years. These trucks discourage and harry bikers, endanger families crossing the street, cause a large amount of noise pollution, create vibration damage to nearby structures like retaining walls, and hurry the rate of the street's declining health.



Trucks should stay on truck routes

Your recent story regarding street repairs on 29th Avenue in the Audubon Neighborhood was of great interest to me. The stretch of 29th between Central Avenue and Stinson Boulevard has become one of the worst stretches of pavement in the Twin Cities.

The story mentioned briefly that residents in Audubon have noticed large truck traffic as the cause of various issues. I invite all of our readers to spend a few minutes at the intersection of 29th and Central. Chances are you will often see heavy trucks turning from Central to travel eastbound on 29th Ave. NE. This stretch of road is not a truck route, yet heavy trucks continue to travel with impunity along this residential street.

I was recently in my car at this intersection, waiting for the traffic light on westbound 29th to turn onto Central. Several cars were waiting behind me. Meanwhile, a semi tractor trailer travelling southbound on Central was attempting to turn onto eastbound 29th Ave, but there was not enough room for him to navigate his rig through the narrow intersection. But that did not stop him, he just pulled into the intersection and blocked traffic until all of us waiting to turn onto Central put our cars into reverse, and backed up. There were pedestrians, including children, all around to watch out for, as we all had to sequentially back up when we realized this scofflaw tractor pilot was going to demand that we get out of his way. I somehow doubt this situation is a rare occurrence.

Another problem we have is heavy trucks defying the directions requiring they either turn left or right onto Central when exiting the Canadian Pacific yard at this same intersection. The lanes are curved to try to force the trucks to turn, but I have regularly seen trucks disregard this direction and proceed directly forward onto eastbound 29th Ave NE from the Canadian Pacific property. Why are these types of scofflaws allowed to continually use our residential street as a trucking shortcut?

Gerhard Vogel,
Audubon Park neighborhood

In July 2019, Canadian Pacific demolished the historic building to make space for increased storage and capacity for empty shipping boxes, and to expand its shipping operation. Canadian Pacific had been in negotiation for years with the city to develop the site; however, when those plans fell through, Canadian Pacific moved quickly to demolish the structure with little notification to the city or the neighborhood.



While the city lamented the lost opportunity for redevelopment, the outcome for neighbors was a growing safety hazard, with those along Central experiencing the biggest changes. Despite Canadian Pacific's efforts to try to keep their drivers off 29th, neighbors can attest to seeing freight trucks in much higher numbers. State Sen Kari Dziedzic was told by a Canadian Pacific representative at the time the truck traffic "could be up to double the existing traffic."³ That has proven true.

Our goal is not to legally limit trucks on 29th Ave - as a State Aid road, MSAS rules don't allow banning traffic types when roads are in good condition. However, MSA routes can be designed in many different ways. For instance, Johnson St. has been a MSA route for decades. But when it was reconstructed in 2021, lanes were narrowed and a median was installed at 22nd Ave that discouraged speeding, but as a side effect also discouraged trucks from using the route. As confirmed with Ahmed Omar, the project's Design Engineer, "No variances on the design of Johnson St were required for [meeting] MSA standards."



We would like to see similar designs made on 29th Ave that would discourage - but not ban - trucks from using 29th, as a way of bringing the truck traffic back down to a more manageable level.

CLIC's Comments

On July 8th, the Capital Long Range Improvement Committee (CLIC) published its annual report. Included, under *Transportation Task Force Comments*, was a section about rescoping former Street Reconstruction projects into Asphalt Repaving. The report stated that, of the six that were rescoped, "two of them in northeast Minneapolis raise questions." Here is their comments on the topic in full (emphasis added):

"29th Avenue NE is a collector street and borders Audubon Park, Northeast Middle School and the Johnson Street small business node. In 2019, Canadian Pacific Railroad opened a new Shoreham Yard entrance at Central & 29th which has increased container truck traffic on 29th Avenue to County Road C in Roseville. The Audubon Park Neighborhood Association has long planned for a 29th Avenue streetscaping, producing a planning document in 2008 with University of Minnesota Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA). Since becoming a CBR in 2017, the neighborhood refocused its planning for the upcoming reconstruction originally proposed for 2022. Rescoping this to the asphalt repaving program in 2022 with an estimated 2026-28 implementation will do little for the long awaited streetscaping and extend a possible future reconstruction

beyond 2038. The asphalt repaving alone will not substantially improve safety. A full street reconstruction would provide much needed traffic calming, boulevards, pedestrian lighting and an All Ages and Abilities bike/ped facility.

“In 2021, Public Works pushed back the implementation of both [29th Ave and 33rd Ave] to 2026 and 2027. CLIC provided a comment in its 2021 report requesting that this schedule be reconsidered. To date, Public Works has not responded to that comment and the decision- making process on rescoping these projects and implementation have proven difficult to follow by CLIC, the Audubon Park, and Waite Park neighborhoods. This has created a loss of confidence in Public Works and the validity of the capital budget request process for these neighborhoods, as communicated by northeast residents at the joint public hearing on May 12, 2022, as well as the community press.

“CLIC again requests that Public Works, along with the Mayor, review these decisions, and reinstate these back to street reconstruction projects.”

Considering Reconstruction on Budgetary Merits

During the CLIC Joint Public Hearing on May 12, 2022, Public Works’ Transportation Planning Supervisor Nathan Koster explained Public Works’ reasoning behind removing 29th Ave from the Capital Budget process. While equity and demographic trends were one factor, project PV137 was shelved primarily due to budgetary constraints. This is despite the fact that, in 2020, 70% of the project’s budget was projected to be funded through MSAS funding.

We recognize that we are not experts in city budget planning. Our main focus is that city’s savings with a repaving do not outweigh the safety concerns represented here. We do believe, however, there are important factors, relating to our unique financial circumstance, that would make pulling the trigger on an inferior outcome would be unwise in the current moment - and why a full reconstruction of 29th Ave should stay on the 5 year capital budget.

Shortfall in the Midst of Surplus

While the city of Minneapolis may be experiencing a budget shortfall, the State of Minnesota is experiencing a historic surplus. State legislators were unable to come to a conclusion with how to spend Minnesota’s surplus this session, but the agreed framework of \$4 billion in spending opens the door to opportunities in the future for budget flexibility.



Considering the long-term nature of Public Works' spending projections, we think it would not be unreasonable to continue to keep 29th Ave in the 5 year capital budget in light of the fact that we may be seeing more funding coming from the State as soon as next year.

Another Source of Flexibility: New Federal Funding



There have been several new federal funding sources that have appeared this Congressional session - including the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021, as well as the new Inflation Reduction Act that was signed into law this week, which includes 3 billion in funding to right historic discriminatory highway policies.

Nathan Koster, in his presentation to CLIC and the Planning Commission, was very helpful in showing how a reconstruction of 29th Ave would not qualify for these funds, due to the competitive nature of federal grants for individual projects. However, we believe that these funding sources will still affect the broader nature of Public Works' five year capital projections, possibly freeing up general funds, MSAS funds, or municipal bonding in ways we can't predict.

If we don't keep 29th Ave reconstruction on the capital budget, those potential opportunities will go wasted.

How much time will it buy?

The central idea in the plan to downgrade the project to Resurfacing is to extend the lifespan of the street by another 10-15 years, at a lower cost. However, if this does work (and it may not - see "Resurfacing May Not Even Work"), how much time would truly be bought?

Because Public Works budgets five years in advance, a full reconstruction CBR would need to be resubmitted to CLIC in *five short years*, to begin the process all over again. If all we're buying is five years without 29th Ave in CLIC's docket, doesn't it make sense to just continue planning for full reconstruction?

The Cost to Neighbors

Maybe most importantly, even if it saves the city money, resurfacing will pass more costs along to residents. Each project, whether reconstruction or resurfacing, requires a special assessment to be added to residents' property taxes, based on their proximity to 29th. While a resurfacing does cost less money, residents (and indeed, the city as a whole) will have to pay more in total over the next twenty years if a resurfacing is completed, followed by a reconstruction.

Paying for two special assessments would be especially difficult for neighbors living on fixed income, or those who are stretching every dollar - this has been a key focus for many members on the 29th Ave Project. This assessment would be coming for residents who are still paying off bills from mandated curb renovations - which has not yet been met by the city for ADA compliant curbs.⁴ And while we appreciate that the city can put in ADA compliant curbs when it does a simple resurfacing of 29th Ave, a basic reading of the city's special assessment document shows that this procedure will raise costs to residents yet again.

The neighborhood is ready to do its part to help fund the work for 29th Ave - but only to pay for it once, not twice.

Resurfacing may not even work

Of course, an Asphalt Resurfacing project will only extend the street's lifespan by 10-15 years if the conditions are right. There have been several similar projects in our area that suggest it may not last that long.

In August 2021, Saint Anthony Village completed a mill and overlay on 29th Ave NE, between Stinson and Silver Lake Road, in a similar attempt to extend the street's life. Nine months later, in May 2022, large cracks already started to appear on the road. The Midtown Greenway is another example of how repaving projects can be more difficult in practice than in concept.



While we understand the need to stretch city budgets in creative ways, this roll of the dice both for safety and efficacy does not seem to be a good gamble - especially considering whose safety we're referring to.

Planning for a Warmer Future

The latest IPCC report from this year, as well as numerous city documents, reflect that the reality of climate change is coming to our state - including unexpected climate shifts, increases

and decreases in water, and impacts to the local vegetation. There are many ways to plan for and mitigate those effects, but not without city intervention.

Both the 2013 Climate Action Plan and Minneapolis 2040 Plan tout the benefits of an urban canopy in reducing how much heat is absorbed by asphalt, heating up the city. However, 29th Ave's current street design doesn't have a buffer area to plant trees. Only through changing the division of right-of-way can the city designate places to plant trees and increase the urban canopy in this neighborhood.



In planning for a more taxed water system, the neighborhood has already begun making strides, but doesn't have the ability to make full use of its improvements. In 2017, thanks to a grant from the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization, Northeast Middle School converted part of its parking lot into a rain garden that would store and process up to 23,000 gallons of water before outflowing into the stormwater system. While this was an impressive project, its potential is missed by not connecting it to the street, which continues to funnel water (with trash and pollutants) straight to the Mississippi.

Design and Racial Equity

Public Works' scoring metrics look at decennial census data to determine whether a street is eligible for points under equity and economic guidelines. (It's worth noting that some blocks along 29th Ave, such as at Polk and Tyler, do meet those criteria, but not all do). However, this focus on residency means that scoring does not pay attention to minority residents who use, but do not live on, the street in question.

Northeast Middle School is the main public feeder school in the area; its enrollment is approximately three quarters students of color, and serves both all of Ward 1 and much of Ward 3. Students leaving the school for the day will often frequent the commercial cluster at 29th Ave NE and Johnson, requiring them to cross the street. This is also the path to take bus routes 4 and 10.

The Audubon Neighborhood Association is committed to advocating for (and with) residents of color who both reside and frequent our neighborhood. As is outlined both in the Minneapolis 2040 Plan and Transportation Action Plan 2030, access to transit and public facilities are also equity issues. People of color are most likely to use Audubon Park and Northeast Middle School, year round, in ways that may or may not be reflected in census records.

A History of Neighborhood Involvement

2008 Streetscape Plan

To coincide with Minneapolis' 2008 Comprehensive plan, Audubon Neighborhood received a grant and support from CURA (funded through an arm of the McKnight Foundation). After months of research, community engagement sessions, and goal development efforts, they released a 29 page report titled "29th Avenue NE - A Streetscaping Plan for Audubon Park".⁵

This in-depth report shows a level of rigor not seen from similar neighborhood reports at the time. It includes design specifications and measurements of the road as it is today, breaking apart the corridor into separate zones for separate analysis, and provides plans for each area. Each proposal comes with detailed color drawings and case studies for comparison).

Although any city engineer would want to make their own plan, this analysis is an invaluable first step that can get the ball rolling in the planning and design standards phase of the project. If nothing else, the detailed street measurements and community feedback provide a great way to begin.

PROPOSALS

JOHNSON STREET TRANSITIONAL

The intersection of 29th + Johnson is a city-designated commercial node. In form and operation, three of the four corners of this intersection meet the parameters of this designation. However, the NW corner, currently a laundromat and clinic, has parking at the front of the building abutting Johnson Street. This expanse of asphalt takes the significance of the intersection. Given the size of the parcel, mixed-use redevelopment is possible and should feature a landmark corner with a turret-like structure. This concept is similar to the intersection of 50th + France.

29th Avenue, a residential corridor, should visually contrast with the commercial corridor. This might include dense boulevard trees along 29th and more streetscape furniture along Johnson. In keeping with the landmark nature of the intersection, bump-outs should feature flower beds, bollards, flower urns and other decorative features.

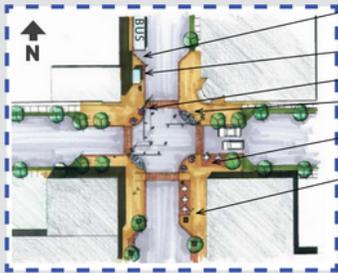
JOHNSON STREET RETAIL anchors this district. In order to create a true node for the commercial area, a new 2-3 story structure at the corner is proposed. To visually separate 29th from Johnson, 29th is adorned with more green and Johnson is largely a hardscape environment. Flowers at opposing corners bring color and vibrancy into the intersection. Bollards and topiaries are used to frame the brick pedestrian crossings. This gives the crossings more visibility and calms traffic through the intersection.



EXISTING INTERSECTION
29th + Johnson, looking NW



ILLUSTRATIVE AERIAL VIEW
Johnson Street Transitional District



- bollards at bump-outangles
- bus shelter
- flower urns
- flower beds
- cafe seating with brick pavers
- pedestrian-level lighting (12)

PLAN
Johnson Street Retail Node



PERSPECTIVE
29th + Johnson, looking NW



29th Avenue NE

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Community Feedback

The Audubon Neighborhood recognizes that some changes - both in thinking and in demographics - have taken place since the 2008 study was first published. In recent years, in part as an effort beginning around 2018 to keep the project alive, the 29th Ave Project has tabled at community events and farmers markets, collected surveys from neighbors, and done other reach outs to get an updated understanding of the community's desires for the street.

Shake, rattle and roll

Street improvements not coming



Budget cuts mean reconstruction of streets in the Logan Park and Audubon Park neighborhoods won't happen soon.

(Photo by Patti Hoffmann)

by Cynthia Sowden

If you live in the Logan Park neighborhood between 12th and 15th and Jackson and Van Bur-

ren, don't expect your streets to be fixed soon. The same goes for folks who live along 29th Avenue in Audubon Park.

These pothole-strewn roadways

are due for maintenance, but the money to do the work isn't there, according to Nathan Koster, transportation planning manager for Minneapolis Public Works. They are on the department's radar, he said, and have been for some time; in Logan Park's case, since 2016.

The Northeast's interest in these streets was heightened when F

29th Avenue NE

Folks in Audubon formed a task force in the early 2000s to study 29th Avenue repairs and get the neighborhood's input. There was talk of a dedicated bike lane and shade trees to make the thoroughfare more pedestrian friendly.

Road r

Koster said when Public Works looked at the streets up for reconstruction, the design that guided the work "didn't flag." Engineers were sent out to take core samples from the street and found that 29th, built in 1958, has never been resurfaced. In addition, nearby St. Anthony Pkwy. has off-street bike lanes, so creating a multi-modal lane on one side of 29th probably isn't cost

effective.

Blake Hampton, 29th Avenue Task Force, said neighbors have implicated truck traffic in sewer pipe failures and indoor plumbing leaks caused by vibrations that break and loosen pipes. "Simply resurfacing 29th does not do anything to get the street any closer to making it a pedestrian first, bicyclists second and vehicle traffic third road as outlined in the City's 2030 Transportation Action Plan," he said.

"We have 1,000 miles of street to maintain," said Koster. "We try to be good stewards of the public's dollars. It's more cost effective to resurface 29th and stretch its life out a little longer." He said a striped commuter bike lane might be a possibility.

Public works is coming up with a schedule for resurfacing 29th. Koster cautioned, "It would be two years at the earliest, four years at the longest."

The 29th Ave Project is still collecting feedback - and recording feedback that has been given by the community, such as articles printed in local paper The Northeast. As of now the street has over 200 signatures for a petition on Change.org - with that number continuing to rise.⁷

Conclusion

We ask for your help and support in reinstating a Full Reconstruction of 29th Ave NE into the 2023 City Budget, as a part of Public Works' five year capital projections.

While Public Works' current plan to remill and resurface the street would improve the quality of asphalt for a short time, it would result in higher costs, worse safety outcomes, and a lost opportunity for our neighborhood to meet our target climate goals for 2030 and plan for a better future.

We believe that a full reconstruction is the best way forward for our neighborhood, and for the city.

Sources

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- ⁴ Schlee, Alex. "Neighbors Decry 'Sidewalk Scam'." *Northeaster*, 30 June 2020, <https://www.mynortheaster.com/news/neighbors-decry-sidewalk-scam/>. Accessed 25 June 2022.
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- ⁷ Harms, Jonathan. "29th Ave NE Reconstruction Can't Wait Another 15 Years." *Change.org*, Apr. 2022, <https://www.change.org/p/29th-ave-ne-reconstruction-can-t-wait-another-15-years/>.