

Madison's Central Business Improvement District (BID)

Input on Ride the Drive

June 15, 2011

Downtown's Central Business Improvement District (BID) welcomes bike riders every day of the year. We support bike riding for its environmental and health benefits, as a cost-effective transportation option, and for the fun it provides to people of all ages. The BID understands that Ride the Drive is a positive event for Madison. Downtown businesses want a great event that welcomes cyclists, has a family atmosphere, and brings people downtown.

At the same time, Ride the Drive needs to work better for downtown and everyone on the route, including many locally owned businesses, hotels, museums, churches and residents. Due to the circular route and the hour-glass nature of the Isthmus, Ride the Drive puts almost everything else in the downtown "on hold" for the duration of the event. It is a challenge for church-goers, visitors and residents to get to, from and around downtown. Many small businesses find that customer traffic drops dramatically on that day.

Downtown Businesses & Ride the Drive

- For the 2009 and 2010 events, the majority of businesses (retail, restaurant) reported being down 40%-60%. Business and property owners expressed concern that RTD adds to a general perception that downtown should be avoided.
- June 2011 survey results: 65% responding businesses were down. 15% avg. or "decent." 20% up (from last year's RTD or from typical Sunday).
- June RTDs are "lower impact" than August ones, because they are not on visitor-heavy Sundays. (Feedback from late August events was much more negative.)

The busiest months for downtown businesses are (in this order) September, August and October (Downtown Market Analysis Study, 2007). Weekends are very important. A Sunday on a typically busy weekend is not just one day out of 365; it is a key day for many downtown businesses to make their numbers for the year.

- Businesses directly on the route do better. Businesses within the "loop" of the route, but not directly on the route, do worse.
- Businesses that depend on local pedestrian traffic do ok, but for businesses that rely on people coming into downtown, their customers are not fully replaced by RTD participants.
- Event-specific special promotions or marketing work for some but not the majority of businesses.

BID Suggestions for Ride the Drive

We believe it's possible to have a successful Ride the Drive without the issues described above, and we suggest changes to the route, timing and access to help the event be a win-win for all:

- **Number of events:** We suggest one downtown Ride the Drive per year, and a 2nd RTD that showcases another beautiful Madison neighborhood.
- **Date for downtown RTD** –Keep early June or consider 4th of July weekend, or late July (post Maxwell St. Days) through early August. Avoid late summer/fall weekends after August 15 – too visitor-heavy with student move-in, Badger games, other events.
- **Time** – Consider 8 am – 1 pm instead of 10am to 3pm or 4pm (which interrupts key business/traveling hours).

Example: The Chicago “Bike the Drive” is on Sunday of Memorial Day Weekend from 5:30 to 9:45 am.; traffic resumes at 10:30 am. Chicago does not shut down Lake Shore Drive (a major artery like East Washington Ave. or John Nolen) during high-use hours.

<http://bikethedrive.org/routeandtiminig>

- **Route** – Rethink the “loop.”

The route creates a circle around the central downtown (already on an isthmus with limited street access), choking off access to and from downtown. Access from the east side of Madison is especially problematic, with fewer entry points than from the west, and the closure of E. Washington, the major route to/from 90/94.

Similar event routes in other cities are not a loop, so that even if a main street is closed down, the event does not encircle and choke off an area.

Examples: Chicago’s Bike the Drive (above) or NYC Summer Streets route

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/summerstreets/html/route/route.shtml>

- **Signage** – More detour/wayfinding signage on major roads into and through downtown.

Examples: For the June 2011 event there was detour signage before 1st street on inbound E. Washington Ave, but I did not see any additional signage between 1st and Paterson. While Butler was opened up for South Capital Square access, I did not see any signage on Gorham or Johnson (detour routes) letting people know they could use Butler.