

Why convert 2nd Street to two-way traffic?

The intended outcome for the conversion of 2nd Street to two-way traffic is to create a more welcoming, walkable, safer downtown that helps to continue economic growth and development, that will utilize downtown to its full potential and continue the revitalization of the City of Chillicothe.

History of the traffic patterns in downtown Chillicothe

In the 1960's, 2nd Street, 4th Street and 5th Street were all two-way streets. Circa 1968, the city closed Paint Street in front of the Courthouse to create a pedestrian mall. At the time, the city made 2nd, 4th and 5th streets one way to help "quickly" move traffic out of the downtown. This conversion occurred at a time when communities all over the US were experiencing the surge of urban sprawl into suburbs. Traffic engineers at this time rationalized that people who worked in downtown districts but lived in suburbs would be best served by one-way streets that would quickly move them out of the congested downtown districts.

When the pedestrian mall concept in Chillicothe failed circa 1969-70, the city reopened Paint Street in front of the courthouse but never converted the other streets back to two-way. In 1989, City Council approved changing the route to two-way, but rescinded the measure a few months after a few business owners signed a position opposing the change.

Most recently, Council has discussed the matter off and on, and began the current discussion in 2015. In the past four years, Council – through the engineering and finance committees – has discussed the change with favorable comments coming from both councilmembers and business owners. In fact, in 2017, Council backed the idea assuming the money could be found to fund the project. [In 2018](#), the Engineering Committee backed the change.

In addition, the Chillicothe Downtown Development Commission has advocated for the change, as has the Chillicothe Ross Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Chillicothe.

Creating a safer downtown

The conversion of 2nd Street to two-way traffic will result in improved pedestrian and vehicular safety. Research shows that motorists drive slower on two-way streets than one-way streets because they are required to judge oncoming traffic which forces them to drive slower. Slower traffic creates the perception of increased pedestrian safety and comfort and promotes "walkable" communities. After all, in the 1970's traffic engineers were trying to speed up the flow of vehicles by implementing one-way traffic – not slow it down. Four-way stops also promote walkable communities. Wrong-way traffic is currently a major concern on 2nd Street. It's not uncommon to observe motorists drive the wrong direction on 2nd Street multiple times a day which makes it unsafe for pedestrians to cross the road without looking both ways. On a separate note, Fire Chief Jeff Creed has stated he has no concern about the width of 2nd Street and the ability for fire trucks to navigate the road regardless if it's one or two-way.

In New Albany, Indiana, a July 2019 report found the police chief saying accidents involving pedestrians were down, speeding is reduced, motor vehicle crashes – especially injury crashes – were down compared to previous years. New Albany switched four miles of city streets to two-way traffic in 2017.

Continuing the forward momentum

Two-way traffic on 2nd Street will aid in economic development for the community. During the 2017 visit to Chillicothe by the Town Builders Association, and Washington D.C. based urban planner and Chillicothe native Michael Watkins, they noted that a business on a two-way vs one-way road will produce four times the revenue largely due to increased consumer exposure and access to their storefront. Their observation is supported by multiple published reports. The increased exposure will result in increased sales for current businesses, which will likely require those businesses to employ more people. Increased employment will result in increased payroll tax receipts for the city, and increased sales will result in increased sales tax collected for the county. Currently there are 11 vacant store fronts on 2nd Street – more than any other street in downtown Chillicothe. Two-way traffic will help to stimulate the recruitment of new business along 2nd Street. We already know of one business who located a new shop to Mulberry Street because of the lack of two-way traffic on 2nd Street. This increase in physical space demand will likely cause building owners to invest in building improvements to make their space more attractive to tenants. These building improvements will result in increased property tax base which will support all of Ross County. A byproduct of increased space utilization on 2nd Street will lead to increased foot traffic on the surrounding streets. Businesses on surrounding streets will reap the benefit of increased exposure for their business with an increase in foot traffic. The overarching impact of increased economic activity on 2nd Street will extend across the entire community.

Creating a friendly, accessible downtown

One-way roads often lead to frustration and confusion as a result of needless wayfinding. This way finding frustration is not isolated to activity along 2nd Street. It negatively affects activity on the surrounding areas and forces motorists into alleys or unintended areas to detour or reroute to their destination. One-way roads are very confusing, especially for out of town visitors. This is noteworthy given the pending influx of out of town, and possibly foreign, visitors soon with pending World Heritage designation. Additionally, needless driving due to wayfinding confusion creates additional carbon emissions from vehicles that is unnecessarily polluting our environment.

The experts speak

Urban planners and other experts in community revitalization efforts have visited Chillicothe over the past few years and all suggested the conversion of 2nd Street to two-way as another tactic for the community to employ to support the continued revitalization effort. Respected businessman, philanthropist and community revitalization expert Quint Studer visited Chillicothe this week. As part of his visit, he provided consulting services to community leaders and stakeholders on how to continue the revitalization of Chillicothe. Studer authored a book titled "[Building a Vibrant Community](#)" where he specifically addresses the one-way vs. two-way streets issue in a downtown and its impact on community revitalization.

“Change one-way to two-way streets. This is another point we learned from Ray Gindroz. In fact, Palafox, which was named one of the “Ten Great Streets in America” by the American Planning Association, used to be one-way. Ray told us that you don’t want to speed traffic up; you want to slow it down. A traffic jam isn’t the worst thing. People will pull over and they will get used to it. It’s much worse for a downtown to have no traffic.” (Studer, page 90)

Cities all over America are re-evaluating their downtown traffic and converting one-way to two-way streets because they understand the many benefits that come with conversion like slowing down traffic and making the streets more pedestrian friendly. Some examples include Louisville, Austin, Cincinnati, Seattle, Tampa and Chattanooga. Smaller cities either changing or considering the change are New Albany, Ind. (pop 36,000), Frankfort, Ky. (27,885), and [Mitchell, SD](#) (15,729). According to the [Richland Source](#), Mansfield, OH is currently working on converting Diamond Street this year in their downtown to two-way after seeing success in converting Mulberry Street to two-way in 2019. City officials cite improving access to downtown visitors and friendly traffic patterns that will support ongoing downtown Mansfield revitalization as key reasons for the conversion.

Addressing the concerns

Understandably there are going to be concerns and pushback regarding change. These concerns are valid and should be considered. Some concerns that have been expressed include delivery vehicles impeding traffic flow on 2nd Street, pedestrian safety at the intersection of Paint and 2nd streets and the cost of conversion as a burden to taxpayers.

Street	Total Street Width	Combined Traffic Lane Width
Paint St. @ Green Tree	60' 3"	26' 3"
2 nd St @ Tecumseh	41' 6"	25' 11"

Paint Street is almost 20" wider than 2nd Street. This additional width allows for front in, versus parallel parking on 2nd Street. However, it's important to note that combined traffic lane width on Paint Street is only 4" wider than combined traffic lane width on 2nd Street. Currently, businesses along Paint Street receive deliveries via Paint Street and not the alley. This is completed without any known or voiced issues by residents or businesses despite trucks periodically impeding the traffic flow through the alleys and not utilizing designated delivery parking zones already in place on Paint Street. Two-way traffic on 2nd Street would best flow with the inclusion of designated delivery parking zones in each block and creating a culture where alleys are primarily used for delivery traffic as much as possible. Additionally, delivery zone parking enforcement as well as not permitting vehicles to double park anywhere in the downtown district will enable better traffic flow overall.



Delivery to R Kitchen & Simultaneous Delivery to Green Tree



Delivery to Green Tree

Traffic flow and pedestrian safety at the intersection of Paint and 2nd streets as well as the financial burden carried by taxpayers to fund the conversion are valid concerns. It's important to note that the initial funding of the change is a one-time cost and one that the city could recoup through

These concerns were addressed in a study on the conversion of 2nd Street conducted by the Chillicothe Engineering Department in October 2018. Currently, the intersection at Paint and 2nd streets is a three way stop managed by a traffic light. The question addressing the installation of a four-way stop at the intersection of Paint and 2nd streets. and its impact on drivers and pedestrians was considered. The study compared a similar downtown intersection at Water and Mulberry streets which is a four-way stop managed by stop signs. Traffic counts concluded the intersection at Water and Mulberry supported by a four-way stop, carried 4,278 more vehicles during the study compared to the intersection of Paint and 2nd Street. Overall, the study analyzed vehicle counts, pedestrian counts and factored traffic control considerations outlined in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. In the report, Mr. Carroll concluded the data does not require the intersection of Paint and 2nd streets to be managed by a traffic light. In his report, Mr. Carroll also noted the city possesses temporary flashing stop signs that could be installed at a no new cost to the taxpayers. Conversely, the addition of a fourth traffic light would come at an additional cost to the taxpayer. He also noted that if 2nd Streets is converted to two-way it will result in a “substantial” amount of painting to be removed or altered and recommends this conversion to take place during “milling and filling”. The reports states, “The street is due for “milling and filling” and has been postponed for several years as a result of this potential conversion project” (City Council has been considering this conversion for multiple years). As part of the 2020 City Budget, City Council designated funds from the 2015 Street and Alley Levy to be used to “convert 2nd Street to two-way without modification of signalization, milling and filling” (Ordinance # 219-000-7918). Based on the City Engineer’s report, the conversion to two-way traffic and the installation of a four-way stop at Paint and 2nd streets will ensure pedestrian and driver safety and will result in nearly no new financial burden to taxpayers.

Summary

Now is the time to convert the traffic pattern on 2nd Street from one-way to two-way! Detailed research and careful consideration on the conversion have occurred over the past three years. Professional input from experts like The Town Builders, Michael Watkins, Quint Studer, countless published articles, and input from residents, property owners and businesses in the area around 2nd Street and Chillicothe have all been registered. The facts are clear. If the intent is to create a more welcoming, walkable, safer downtown that helps to continue economic growth and development, that will utilize downtown to its full potential and fuel the next phase of revitalization of the City of Chillicothe, then the conversion of 2nd Street to two-way must happen now.

Sources

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