Date: February 13, 2016

To: Honorable Mayor Helene Schneider

Members of City Council

From: John Day and Ann Marie Konn

Subject: Comments on Bicycle Master Plan for

City Council Hearing on February 23, 2016

Dear Mayor Schneider and City Council Members:

We are writing in opposition to the proposed Micheltorena Street project, one of many projects outlined in the February 2016 Draft Bicycle Master Plan (BMP). One of us (Ann Marie) is a Marriage and Family Counsellor. She maintains an office for her practice at 22 West Micheltorena St., and has worked at that location for 23 years.

We believe the proposed Micheltorena Street project is ill-conceived and would result in unnecessary adverse impacts to bicyclists and the Micheltorena Street community.

Please consider the following points in your deliberation on whether to approve the BMP as proposed, or to exclude the Micheltorena Street project, pending further study and analysis of alternative solutions that would better balance bicycle transportation needs with other community interests.

1. *Draft BMP does not adequately balance impacts to residents and businesses.*

City Council gave clear direction to Staff in the July 2015 hearing that parking removal on Micheltorena should be avoided in the BMP because of adverse impacts to residents and businesses. The draft plan that Staff brings to Council for approval includes the Micheltorena route, which entails removal of approximately 85 parking spaces. Staff apparently focused on the efficiency of moving vehicles, which is their area of professional expertise, but did not appreciate or give appropriate weight to other concerns that were evident to City Council. Although a Micheltorena thoroughfare may appear to be a desirable project from a transportation engineering perspective, it does not properly balance community interests.

The Micheltorena project recommended in the draft BMP overlooks or underplays several important facts and considerations, as outlined below. Significant, relevant information was not brought out during the Planning Commission hearing that led them to recommend this draft.

1. *Impacts to businesses from loss of street parking.*

There are approximately 18 parking spaces in the first block of Micheltorena west of State Street. One is a 15-minute space (adjacent to the South Coast Deli) and the rest are in 90-minute zones. In numerous observations during working hours, I have usually found zero or one empty spaces, sometimes two, or infrequently three. A reasonable estimate is 85-90% utilization. Given the 90-minute limit, this translates to on the order of 120-130 parking opportunities per day in the 90-minute spaces, and many quick stops in the 15-minute space. (The number of parking opportunities could be appreciably higher, as many cars park in this block for appointments that last an hour or less.)

Dozens of long-established businesses are located in this block, including doctors, therapists, and other professionals (approximately 25 professionals at 22 West Micheltorena alone). Most of the offices in this block do not have any off-street parking available for clients and patients, but rely on street parking. Temporary parking is needed for curbside drop-off of elderly or disabled clients, and for various services (e.g., cleaners, repair contractors, package delivery). As appointments at these offices generally last for an hour or less, the 90-minute limit is fitting. However, street parking in the area is very tight. Ann Marie’s clients sometimes complain about the inconvenience. The nearest City parking lot is over two blocks south, and it is often full or nearly so. Removal of parking along Micheltorena will increase demand for parking spaces for several blocks north and south. The loss of parking in the first block of Micheltorena west of State Street will be a major hardship for the professionals located there and for their patients and clients. It will certainly result in loss of business, make this location less desirable for business, and likely force some professionals to relocate.

The parking impact analysis provided by Staff at the December 10, 2015, Planning Commission hearing was cursory and last-minute. The analysis was based on spot observations during brief periods on 3 days early last December, and the sample size is much too small to provide a representative and meaningful picture of the daily parking situation on Micheltorena. We seriously doubt that the loss of parking spaces in the first block of West Micheltorena can be compensated for by existing parking opportunities within a two-block radius.

If Staff provides a more thorough and thoughtful parking analysis for the City Council hearing on February 23, 2016, we request that Council defer approval of the Micheltorena Street project to allow the public reasonable time to review and verify the data and analysis.

1. *Traffic impacts.*

Traffic impacts are not well evaluated in the BMP. The Traffic Safety and Impact Analysis (Appendix C) reflects the computational output of an off-the-shelf, level-of-service (LOS) transportation model that has limited value, i.e.,

“*The travel model can only evaluate certain roadway changes, such as the number of travel lanes or the direction of travel on a street (e.g., two-way to one-way conversions). Therefore, projects like bike-friendly streets, enhancement to Class II bike lanes, shared lanes, parking removals, etc. that do not alter the configuration of a street were not included and will not have auto travel impacts.*” (Appendix C, p.2)

Appendix C evaluates large-scale impacts (some of them adverse) of proposed BMP projects on traffic for some major roadways and intersections. The analysis does not provide any insight into potential local traffic problems that could result from most of the proposed projects. In particular, it does not consider or analyze traffic impacts from “circling” or “cruising” to snag a parking space in the Micheltorena neighborhood. The large-scale LOS analysis provided in Appendix C is irrelevant for analyzing traffic impacts that would result from elimination of parking on West Micheltorena Street.

1. *General Plan Policies support on-street parking for vitality of Downtown businesses.*

BMP Appendix D includes a list of Santa Barbara General Plan Goals and Policies consulted during plan development. No policy consistency analysis is provided. The policy list is selective; it includes alternative transportation and bicycle-related policies, but excludes several key Circulation Element Goals and Policies that encourage and accommodate on-street parking to support economic vitality in the Downtown area. The following are examples Goals and Policies that are included in the Circulation Element but do not appear in the list of Goals and Policies considered by Staff.

**Example 1:** Circulation Element Goal 8 states:

*INCREASE PARKING AVAILABILITY AND ACCESS FOR DOWNTOWN CUSTOMERS*

*Increase parking availability and access for Downtown customers and reduce the need for downtown employee parking by making alternative modes of transportation convenient for Downtown employees and the public through methods such as:*

* *improving pedestrian and transit access,*
* *increasing bicycle parking,*
* *providing incentives for employees to use alternative transportation and park in peripheral lots,*
* *discouraging the employee shuffle, and*
* *managing parking resources and/or adding new parking spaces, where necessary.*

The last 2 bullets (emphasis added) are included in Circulation Element Goal 8, but are omitted from the BMP Appendix D list of Goals and Policies consulted.

**Example 2:** Policy 8.1 states:

8.1 *The City shall continue to manage the Downtown public parking supply to support the economic vitality of the Downtown business district while sustaining or enhancing its historical and livable qualities.*

This policy is included in the Circulation Element, but is omitted from the BMP Appendix D list of Goals and Policies consulted.

Policy 8.1.3 is included in the list of Goals and Policies consulted:

8.1.3 *Consider reducing or eliminating the parking requirements for small businesses and small additions (as defined in the Santa Barbara Municipal Code), when adequate alternatives are operational.*

However, the related Policies 8.1.1, 8.1.2 and 8.1.4 are omitted from the list. Some of these policies should certainly be considered in the decision to remove Micheltorena parking, to wit:

8.1.1 *Operate and manage the Downtown public parking program in partnership with the Downtown community to reduce the need for employee parking and to increase available parking for customers and clients.*

8.1.4 *Operate and manage the Downtown public parking program in partnership with the Downtown community to meet existing public parking needs.*

**Example 3:** The followingPolicies 8.3 et seq. are entirely omitted from the BMP Appendix D list of Goals and Policies consulted.

**INCREASED PUBLIC PARKING SUPPLY**

8.3 The City shall increase the public parking available Downtown to address existing needs.

8.3.1 Identify possible areas for expanding Downtown parking that will decrease the existing parking deficit north of Carrillo Street.

8.3.2 Maintain the current supply and explore new opportunities for on-street parking Downtown.

8.3.3 Identify possible areas for expanding parking that enhance the park once concept.

8.3.4 Expand the use and supply of commuter and peripheral parking.

8.3.5 Increase the use of underutilized public parking lots through marketing, improved signage, and other incentives.

We understand that it is ultimately the responsibility of City Council to interpret the City’s General Plan Goals and Policies and to balance conflicting community interests. However, it is incumbent on the City to review and consider applicable policies when deliberating approval of proposed projects. We would have expected these policies to be brought up by Staff in the Planning Commission hearings to inform their decision on recommending the proposed Micheltorena project.

1. *Bicycle safety concerns for proposed Micheltorena route.*

The Micheltorena cross-town route may seem an obvious or even elegant solution from a traffic management perspective. It may be the most direct, simplest and possibly cheapest option. However, we think it is a dangerous route for bicycles, especially if bicycle traffic increases and includes more riders with less experience, a group that the BMP aims to attract. Micheltorena sustains much heavier motor vehicle traffic than other route options like Sola Street, because it connects west to east over the freeway overpass. A lot of Micheltorena traffic turns left or right on the cross streets between the freeway and State Street. The combination of heavy traffic and vehicles turning makes the route potentially dangerous for bikes, even if there are clearly marked green bike lanes. Routing additional bike traffic on the same street with heavy motor vehicle traffic is a bad idea.

Although the BMP strongly emphasizes an overarching concern for safety (i.e., in relation to goals, project design, education and enforcement), the BMP lacks any actual safety analysis for any of the projects. In particular, the BMP presents no evidence that the Micheltorena Street project is as safe or safer than alternative routes. The *Traffic Safety and Impact Analysis (*Appendix C), does not even once mention the Micheltorena Street project, let alone compare it to alternative east-west crossing routes in terms of safety. Appendix C states that “…*implementation of the SBBMP would potentially reduce a significant number of all collisions and fatalities involving pedestrians or bicyclists and improve safety for all road users in the City of Santa Barbara*.” However, there is no evidence or analysis in the BMP or its Appendices to back this up.

1. *Sola Street alternative – safety, cost, and need for signalization.*

Sola offers options for a cross-town bike route that would likely be safer than Micheltorena and would have less adverse impacts on parking and business viability. Sola is wider and less traveled than Micheltorena. There are fewer businesses on Sola that rely on street parking, and because the street is wider, it should be possible design the bike lanes so as to retain parking on one side of the street, and possibly both sides.

Staff expressed in the hearings a willingness to consider Sola Street route or other options for a cross-town route. The main reason Sola Street was not recommended appears to be the cost of signal lights at the intersections of Sola and Chapala and Sola and De La Vina. According to Staff’s preliminary estimates,[[1]](#footnote-1) the signals would increase project costs from approximately $350,000 (for the Micheltorena route) to approximately $750,000 (for the Sola route). We believe the increased safety of the Sola route warrants the additional expense. (How many bicycle injuries or fatalities add up to $400,000?) In addition, the loss of revenue and health of the Micheltorena businesses should be factored in. It is difficult to believe that the City cannot find $400,000 in the budget, even if it takes a couple of years, to fund a better solution that is both safer for bicyclists and preserves on-street parking that is important for the vitality of businesses on Micheltorena, consistent with City Goals and Policies.

Furthermore, it should be realized that these two intersections (Sola at Chapala and De La Vina) are dangerous for existing motor vehicle traffic, due to poor visibility up and down the cross streets. The intersections should be signalized for public safety, regardless of the bicycle route. Traffic on Sola Street attempting to cross either Chapala or De La Vina has to move very fast to avoid being struck by cars travelling 30+ mph along these signal-synchronized streets. For example, if you are driving eastbound on Sola and are stopped at the stop sign at De La Vina, from the instant you first see a vehicle coming from the left on De la Vina (in the right lane) you have only about 3 seconds to drive through the intersection before the approaching vehicle reaches the intersection. (This assumes you have first crept out over the crosswalk to watch for traffic coming down the street.) When a large vehicle is parked on the right side of De La Vina (north of Sola) and a small car is approaching in the right lane on De La Vina, visibility to the left is even more restricted, so you have as little as 2 seconds to clear the intersection. That is not enough time for safe crossing (even in a Maserati) and nowhere near enough time to watch out for pedestrians, cyclists, skateboarders, etc. that may suddenly appear, while your attention is focused on finding a moment to cross safely. The City accident database lists 27 collisions at these two intersections over 10 years (2004-2013), most of which are broadside collisions attributed to “auto right-of-way.” My point is that these intersections are dangerous and should be signalized, with signals synchronized with the existing system. The costs should not be allocated to the BMP. The signals would not affect traffic flow on the already-signalized Chapala and De La Vina streets, and would protect cross traffic from accidents that are waiting to happen. With signals at these intersections, bicycle traffic along Sola Street should be safe.

1. These estimates were given by Staff in the December 2015 Planning Commission hearing and were confirmed by Peter Brown by email on Dec. 21, 2015. Mr. Brown said that they are “preliminary” in that they have not gone through a thorough “engineering” estimate. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)