

[print](#)

## One-way streets to remain in downtown Fairbanks

---

by Molly Rettig / [mrettig@newsminer.com](mailto:mrettig@newsminer.com)

12.17.10 - 11:15 am

**FAIRBANKS** — The city's urban planning committee this week formally laid to rest a four-year push to convert downtown to two-way traffic.

"The beauty is the uncertainty is over," said David van den Berg, executive director of the Fairbanks Downtown Association, the most vocal proponent of two-way streets. "Now we can start to move other projects forward."

The Fairbanks Metropolitan Area Transportation System committee, or FMATS, decided Wednesday to stop evaluating two-way traffic on Cushman and Barnette streets. The committee had approved an environmental study in June after a consulting firm recommended, and many local business owners lobbied for, two-way streets and two-way bridges for downtown. The study hadn't begun yet.

Two-way streets were a cornerstone of a project to revitalize downtown Fairbanks led by the Downtown Association. Proponents said two-way streets would improve the business climate downtown, but others argued it would create traffic, safety and snow-removal problems.

The two-way conversion also was snagged by a project to rebuild Illinois Street. The policy committee last summer said Cushman and Barnette streets must remain one-way or the Illinois Street project would be delayed for years and lose federal funding.

But one-way bridges wouldn't work with two-way streets, according to engineers and consultants.

"Technically it did not work out," city engineer Mike Schmetzer said.

Studies showed the combination of one-way bridges and two-way streets could back up bridge traffic all the way to Third Avenue. That would deter rather than invite vehicles to the downtown area.

"It was very unclear if Cushman would still function as the main street that Vision Fairbanks desired," Schmetzer said, referring to a downtown redevelopment plan. "It was a very expensive experiment."

The revitalization plan is still alive, van den Berg said. It now focuses on two main goals.

"We need to calm traffic to benefit pedestrians, so they feel safe and not like they're going to get squished by speeding traffic ... And we need to free up access to buildings and businesses with on-street parking," he said. "I think a one-way project can still do that."

The project, which has at least \$4.5 million in funding from the Alaska Legislature plus other state transportation dollars, could involve wider sidewalks,

planting trees and moving or eliminating traffic lights to slow down cars.

City Mayor Jerry Cleworth, who has consistently opposed two-way streets, may support other changes, such as replacing the light at Fifth Avenue and Cushman Street with a four-way stop.

“We’re wondering if we need five lights on Cushman,” he said. “If the whole idea is to get people to move slower, you can do that through street design and signalization,” he said.

He would also consider parking on Cushman.

“If it remains one-way, it would be more conducive to parking on the west side, on a few blocks that are wider,” he said.

The decision to cancel the two-way study was unanimously approved by the policy committee. It was approved by all but one member of the technical committee, an advisory panel of transportation, engineering and planning experts.

The Fairbanks North Star Borough’s plan for downtown calls for two-way streets, said Bernardo Hernandez, director of community planning.

But two-way traffic is just one piece of the puzzle, he said.

“It includes pedestrian facilities. It includes the river. It includes open space, traffic, maybe a plaza,” he said. “All of these things work together to try to create a vibrant downtown. It’s important we keep the plan together so we can realize that.”

*Contact staff writer Molly Rettig at 459-7590.*

---

© newsminer.com 2010