ROAD DIET FAQS

1) What is a Road Diet?

A typical road diet technique is to reduce the number of lanes on a roadway cross-section. One of the most common applications of a road diet is to improve safety in the context of two-way streets with 4-lane sections. In this case, two travel lanes in each direction are converted into a 3-lane section with one travel lane in each direction, optional bicycle lanes, and a two-way turn lane in the middle. The two-way turn lane can be transitioned into dedicated left turn lanes at intersections. The additional space that is freed up by removing a vehicular travel lane can be converted into bicycle lanes on either side of the roadway.
Road diets are usually successful on roads carrying fewer than 20,000 vehicles per day (VPD). If properly designed, traffic does not divert to other streets after a road diet has been installed. In fact road diets have been found to maintain (and enhance) traffic flow while reducing crashes. Road diets have even been successfully implemented on streets carrying up to 25,000 VPD, but careful evaluation is required at these traffic levels. North Main Street carries between 17,000 and 26,000 VPD placing it at the upper limits of road diet feasibility.

2) Why are we considering road diets?

Vehicular speeding is a major concern on North Main Street. Speed observations revealed that traffic routinely exceeds 45 miles per hour (MPH), even in front of the American School for the Deaf which is posted at 25MPH. In the past five years, crash records indicate that over 80 crashes per year occur along North Main Street between West Hartford Center and Bishop's Corner.

3) How can a road with fewer lanes carry the same amount of traffic?

When a car stops in a moving traffic lane to turn left it causes congestion, blind spots, unsafe lane changes, and changes in vehicle speeds. In a three-lane system there is always one lane for driving, and one lane for turning making driving safer and more reliable, with fewer crashes and frustrations. For these reasons, a 3-lane road can handle the same amount of traffic as a 4-lane road (and in some cases it can handle more traffic).

4) How will Emergency Vehicles get down North Main Street when there are just two travel lanes?

Currently, emergency vehicles must navigate through four lanes worth of traffic to travel on North Main Street. If the road diet were implemented, emergency vehicles can use the two way left turn lane in the

center of the road to bypass vehicles in the travel lanes as as other vehicles pull over. The road diet can potentially result in better response times for emergency vehicles.

5) How do busses operate on a road with a road diet?

On a road with a road diet, busses have room to stop in the shoulder areas of the road, and the two way left turn lane allows other vehicles to pull around a stopped bus at a low speed.

6) How does a road diet make driving safer?

As mentioned above, road diets provide a center turn lane so that left turns are simpler. A driver crosses only one lane of traffic at a time resulting in fewer blind spots. With an undivided four lane road, a driver must find a gap in two or three lanes of traffic at once to make a left turn.

7) How does a road diet make walking safer?

First, pedestrians only have to cross three lanes of traffic, not four. Second there are fewer blind spots as there is one lane in each direction, thus there is less sight blockage by cars. Third top vehicle speeds in a three lane system are lower.
Also, with the addition of bike lanes to the roads there will be less bike traffic on the sidewalks (which is already illegal, but still common, and can make sidewalks less safe for pedestrians).

8) How does a road diet make biking safer?

For the same reasons listed above for pedestrian safety. Also, with the addition of bike lanes (or shoulders) to the roads there will be less bike traffic on the sidewalks (which is legal, except in the Center, and can make sidewalks less safe for pedestrians). On North Main Street today a cyclist is at risk of being 'mirrored' by a motor vehicle passing by within a foot or two.

9) Will the road diet push traffic onto other streets?

A road diet on North Main Street should not push a considerable number of cars onto surrounding streets. Minimizing and measuring impact on surrounding streets is one of the studies objectives. It is possible that some traffic, mainly in the PM peak hour (highest hour of the day), could divert to Trout Brook Avenue. This will be further evaluated in the upcoming weeks.

10) What if it doesn't work?

Some members of the community fear that the road diet will push traffic onto surrounding neighborhood streets, a valid concern and one that we will do our best to measure and mitigate. If the road diet trial is deemed unsuccessful due to a negative impact on a neighborhood, the road could be returned to its current configuration and other options for improving safety explored.