



April 3, 2017

Mayor Jackie Biskupski
Salt Lake City Corporation
451 S. State Street, Room 306
P.O. Box 145474
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-5474

Jerry Benson, CEO
Utah Transit Authority
669 West 200 South
Salt Lake City, Utah 84101

RE: Closure of midblock crosswalk at 200 South and Rio Grande Street and installation of fencing along 200 South

Dear Mayor Biskupski and CEO Benson,

We are surprised and alarmed to hear about apparently imminent plans by the City and UTA to close the midblock crosswalk at 200 South and Rio Grande Street and install fences along both sides of the light rail tracks on 200 South between 400 West and 500 West.

While what may appear to be the mundane closure of a crosswalk is an administrative issue, we strongly believe it is one that clearly affects public policy and City residents' ability to freely use the public right-of-way.

This proposal seems to conflict with long-established policies and practices memorialized in planning and policy documents adopted over the years by the City Council. Our expectation, therefore, is that the City Administration and UTA provide the Council – and the public – with a comprehensive explanation about the proposal and the situation it is meant to address, before any preparation or construction work begins. We may also wish to schedule a Council briefing on the subject if needed.

Council Member Derek Kitchen, who represents this area of downtown, first learned about this proposal from news reports on Friday afternoon, March 17. He then immediately drafted and sent an email to the Mayor seeking more information and listing several concerns. This letter serves to incorporate Council Member Kitchen's concerns and questions with others raised by other Council Members. Additional questions or concerns about the proposal may be forthcoming as discussion continues.

STAN PENFOLD | DISTRICT 3 | COUNCIL CHAIR || CHARLIE LUKE | DISTRICT 6 | COUNCIL VICE CHAIR ||
JAMES ROGERS | DISTRICT 1 || ANDREW JOHNSTON | DISTRICT 2 || DEREK KITCHEN | DISTRICT 4 ||
ERIN MENDENHALL | DISTRICT 5 || LISA R. ADAMS | DISTRICT 7

Public policy concerns

A principal role of municipal government is to adopt land use plans and regulations that address multiple community needs – safety and security among them – following robust involvement and engagement of City residents and other stakeholders. Council Members take this role very seriously and are concerned that actions such as the 200 South proposal contradict established City policy, which is enacted by the Council and implemented by the Administration.

Given that, we'd like to understand if the Administration believes that this proposal is consistent with policies established in various City plans – including the Downtown Plan, Gateway Specific Master Plan and Depot District Plan – and with long-established City practice.

Creating and maintaining midblock crosswalks, for example, has been City policy for decades to improve pedestrian mobility and accessibility in a downtown with exceptionally long block faces. In fact, the City, particularly the Redevelopment Agency, has spent millions of dollars over the years to build midblock crosswalks and new midblock streets, and has encouraged developers to do the same, including the extension of Rio Grande Street through The Gateway. Closing an established midblock crossing is an action that must be done with care, with clear and defensible reasoning, and with proactive public engagement.

The people and leaders of Salt Lake City have long sought to remove barriers in our community. We don't want to unwittingly build one that doesn't serve a clear public purpose.

Purpose of the proposal

Media reports quote City and UTA spokespeople as saying the purpose is to increase pedestrian safety, given the large number of people in the area and the fact that 200 South is corridor for TRAX and bus service. No data were cited to back up that claim, however, which raises many questions:

- Have the City and UTA conducted a detailed technical analysis of this proposal, with input from City and UTA departments, and prepared a summary of the findings?
- Does the City and/or UTA collect statistics that document accidents and incidents between pedestrians, cyclists, vehicles, and trains and buses, particularly along transit lines?
- If statistics are collected, what is incident rate on 200 South between 400 West and 500 West compared to other downtown locations along TRAX lines?
- What are the City's and UTA's policies and procedures for addressing pedestrian safety concerns along transit lines? Are there thresholds beyond which remedial action is taken? How are these determined?
- Given that TRAX and bus lines crisscross the downtown area, why is this one block of 200 South being singled out for this action? Is this the most-dangerous area for pedestrians in the downtown area?
- Why aren't other downtown areas with significant concentrations of pedestrians – for example, Main Street, South Temple, 400 South and 400 West – also subject to closure of midblock crossings and installation of fencing? (While there are short sections of fencing in some of these locations to deter pedestrians, they are not analogous to the 200 South proposal, which involves fencing along an entire block. In addition, other locations downtown feature less-obtrusive barriers with fence posts about three feet high connected with covered cable. The 200 South fence is proposed to be five feet tall and made of black vinyl-coated chain link – significantly more obtrusive than other barriers.)
- Why does the proposed fence need to extend the entire length of 200 South between 400 West and 500 West? Barriers in other locations extend a quarter of a block or so.

- Were any alternatives to this proposal considered to address the 200 South situation? If so, what are they and why were they not selected? For example, why isn't possible to install barriers to prevent jaywalking while still keeping the midblock crossing open?

Process regarding proposal

Making changes to our road network, including pedestrian crossings, has both technical concerns and community concerns. Members of the public expect and deserve to understand and comment on changes that may affect them.

- Media reports indicate that owners of The Gateway shopping center made the request to close the crosswalk and prevent jaywalking on 200 South. What are the City's and UTA's policies and procedures for responding to requests like this to change the public right-of-way?
- Have other property owners, businesses, residents or others made similar requests to close this crosswalk and/or deter jaywalking?
- What public engagement, if any, was conducted to assess opinions about the closure and fencing proposal from area property owners, businesses, residents and members of the public? If not, is public engagement planned before construction? If not, why not?

Design and appearance issues

According to media reports, the proposal includes closing the midblock crosswalk at 200 South and Rio Grande Street, removing crosswalk striping and installing a fence on either side of the light rail tracks the entire length of 200 South between 400 West and 500 West. Media reports say the fence will be made of chain link covered by black vinyl. This raises a number of questions:

- Why is this proposed fence so much more substantial and obtrusive than barriers to deter pedestrians at other locations on the TRAX system in the downtown area, such as at the Library, Arena and City Center stations?
- Pedestrian barriers in other downtown locations consist of fence posts that are about three-feet tall connected by a single cable. Why was a taller fence of a different material selected for 200 South?
- Why was black chosen as the color of the fence? Even if it's chain link and perforated with a grid of small openings, a black fence on both sides of the tracks may appear to be a "wall" separating "north of 200 South" from "south of 200 South." This could create a perceptual division in our City, as well as a physical one.
- Have the City or UTA developed visual renderings of what the fence will look like? Council Members are concerned that the visual impact may be greater than expected.

Mayor Biskupski and Mr. Benson, we hope that you share our concerns that an issue like this, even if well-intended, must also be well-considered. We trust that you have already considered and weighed the questions we have raised and can quickly provide us with the information we seek. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,



*Stan Penfold, Chair
Salt Lake City Council Member, District Three*



*Charlie Luke, Vice Chair
Salt Lake City Council Member, District Six*



James Rogers
Salt Lake City Council Member, District One



Andrew Johnston
Salt Lake City Council Member, District Two



Derek Kitchen
Salt Lake City Council Member, District Four



Erin Mendenhall
Salt Lake City Council Member, District Five



Lisa Adams
Salt Lake City Council Member, District Seven