

# Flow (Fun+Slow) Streets Proposal for Duluth

## *Increasing Downtown Duluth's access and desirability by converting First Street into a "Flow Street"*

*This document was created and edited by Vibrant Streets Duluth and At-Large City Councilor Azrin Awal*



Images 1 and 2: Slow Streets Program, San Francisco, California; Image 3: MIC Duluth-Superior Area Bicycle Transportation Plan

## Why Flow Streets: Promoting community and safety for everyone

**Flow Streets are safe, comfortable, low-vehicle-traffic routes** that prioritize community-building through active transportation. These shared streets are open to all forms of transportation, including vehicles accessing properties along the corridor. They emphasize slow and safe speeds to support a diverse mix of uses.

**Duluth is ideal for flow streets** because our grid street system allows streets to serve different functions. Slower speeds create parity between users, creating a safer route for walking, rolling, and cycling for people of all ages and abilities.

***"Streets are the lifeblood of our communities and the foundation of our urban economies<sup>1</sup>."***

Flow streets embody NACTO's key principles of street design:

- **Streets are Public Spaces.** Streets are our most vital yet underutilized public spaces in cities, and should be designed as public spaces as well as channels for movement.
- **Great streets are great for businesses.** Well-designed streets generate higher revenues for businesses and higher values for property owners.
- **Streets can be changed** into ones that work for all users. Transportation engineers can work flexibly and reuse the space for different purposes.
- **Design for Safety.** Traffic engineers can design streets where people walking, parking, shopping, bicycling, working, and driving can cross paths safely, whether they are 8 or 80 years old.
- **Act Now!** Cities are implementing low-cost projects quickly to demonstrate options. Interim materials are used in the short term and later replaced by permanent materials as funding is available and the designs are tested.

<sup>1</sup>NACTO: National Association of City Transportation Officials

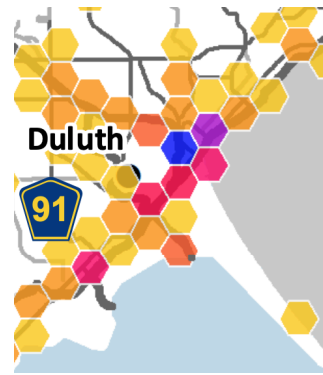
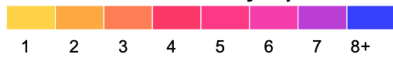
## Flow streets support Duluth's existing goals and plans

- **Duluth's Comprehensive Plan, "Imagine Duluth 2035,"** calls for a transportation system that connects all users in a way that promotes safety, health, and quality of life. Duluth's cycling network requires skill and comfort in bicycling with vehicles, which leaves out the **92%** of cyclists who do not identify as either "strong and fearless" or "enthused and confident". "Many more people could consider bicycling as a form of transportation, even if only for some of their daily travels, if the infrastructure was convenient and safe." ([Imagine Duluth 2035](#), page T-5)
- **The Duluth-Superior Area Bicycle Transportation Plan** calls for "an urban transportation system that is fully integrated and multimodal, where citizens of all ages and abilities have convenient and desirable options." ([Duluth-Superior Transportation Plan](#), page 1-2)
- **Duluth's Climate Emergency Declaration** and the **State's Climate Action Framework** call for a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from transportation sources by 80% by 2040, and a reduction in the vehicle miles traveled by 20% per capita by 2050. ([MN's Climate Action Framework](#), page 26)
- **ADA compliance:** Title II of the ADA emphasizes services and programs being offered in the "most integrated setting appropriate." Flow Streets promote community cohesion and access to recreation, transit, and services that would all be integrated in shared-use spaces. By enhancing walkability, social interaction, and access to local businesses, Flow Streets support ADA's goal of ensuring people with disabilities can fully participate in civic and social life.

## Duluth is falling way behind. We can do better!

- Duluth ranks number **62 in Minnesota for our bike score** and is number 2285 out of 2579 cities in the U.S. (11th percentile).
- **Duluth's overall bike score is a measly 9/100** ([Duluth Minnesota City Rating Page](#)).  
How to improve your score: "Lowering vehicular speeds is a proven strategy to improve safety for all road users. Safer speeds make more streets comfortable for people of all ages and abilities, helping create a cohesive network of low-stress streets to complement protected bike lanes on busier arterial corridors and off-road paths or trails."
- Our **walk score is 36/100**. "Duluth is a car-dependent city; most errands require a car" (<https://www.walkscore.com/MN/Duluth>).
- Duluth's crash rate per capita is higher than Bloomington, Rochester, St Cloud, Minneapolis, St Paul. There were 147 injury crashes and five fatal crashes in Duluth, just in the year 2024. Our goal should be to eliminate deaths and severe injuries related to transportation. ([Minnesota Toward Zero Deaths](#))

## Southern Saint Louis County Fatal and Serious Injury Crashes, 2018-2022



### Why First Street

We propose turning First Street into a Flow Street to create a downtown Flexibility corridor that is safe and accessible to everyone. The proposed route would be First Street between 21st Ave. E. and 6th Ave. W., where signage would direct users to the Cross-City Trail.



### A First Street Flow Street would:

- **Expand the use of a low-traffic street.** First Street already sees relatively low rates of thru traffic, which means slower speeds would have minimal impact on existing car users, while maximizing the draw to new non-motorized users. In some neighborhoods in Duluth, 20 to 40 percent do not own cars (census data).
- **Maintain existing parking and local traffic patterns.**
- **Contribute to downtown revitalization.** People-oriented streets are good for business! [Bicycling Benefits Business](#)
- **Connect Downtown and Lincoln Park.** First Street would become part of a city-wide safe transportation corridor, connecting east and west.
- **Offer flexibility for a wide variety of uses.** First Street offers residences, businesses, health care, memorials (CJM), the YMCA, and municipal offices. A Flow Street could adapt to meet the mix of needs, while achieving goals that support all these uses.
- **Provide a needed alternative to the Lakewalk.** Many people feel forced to use the Lakewalk as one of the few safe cycling areas in the city, which leads to congestion and unsafe experiences between users. First Street could draw commuters away from the Lakewalk, especially in the summer months when recreational use of the Lakewalk is highest.

- **Provide a safer alternative to Superior Street.** Superior Street from 6<sup>th</sup> Ave. W to 4<sup>th</sup> Ave. E is the region's top ranked corridor that needs safety improvements, requiring \$1 million, according to a MIC Action Plan. ([MIC Safety Action Plan](#), page 58)
- **Create urban beauty.** A secondary flow street phase should involve artists, and improvements like plantings, benches, shade, and removable chicanes.

## Lessons from other Slow Streets

U.S. Cities have shown that excellent infrastructure and parking that serve the micro-mobility community are engines for economic development. They are routinely featured in tourism/travel publications and online sites because of their excellent infrastructure. San Francisco has enough experience with their slow streets (<https://www.sfmta.com/projects/slow-streets-program>) to have collected data. They have found:

- **No increased congestion:** Overall, [SFMTA's 2021 assessment](#) showed that slow streets did not make traffic on nearby streets worse.
- **Safety improves:** The [SFMTA study showed](#) that slow streets improved safety. Generally, most of them reduced traffic to less than 1,500 cars per day, at speeds below 20 miles per hour, which SFMTA called an "ideal range." Collisions fell on average 36 percent. ([Studies](#) reinforce the link between speed and injury or death.)

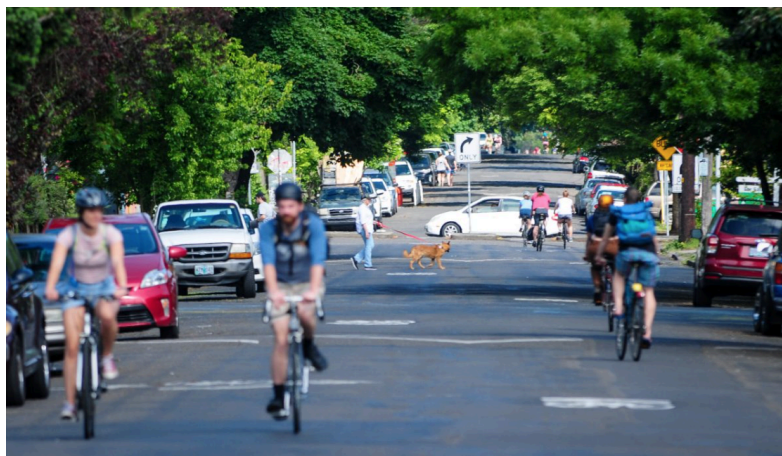


Image: [Bike Portland](#)

### Slow Street initiatives:

- Minneapolis Neighborhood Greenways: bicycle boulevards, [Mpls. bicycle boulevards](#), Bryant Ave. <https://streets.mn/2024/05/14/bryant-avenue-is-amazing/>
- Portland, OR, Going Street: [Going Street: Cars are guests](#)
- San Francisco Slow Streets Program: [Slow Streets Program](#), [Streets blog SF](#)
- Austin, TX, "Living Streets": <https://www.austintexas.gov/LivingStreets>
- Seattle, Healthy Streets: [Healthy Streets](#)
- Montreal, Slow Streets: <https://slowstreets.wordpress.com/>
- Richfield, MN, Sweet Streets: <https://www.richfieldsweetstreets.org/>



Building a Duluth where everyone can safely walk, bike, and take transit to the places they love

# FLOW STREETS

## Safe, Comfortable, Community-Building Routes

Proposed: First Street (21st Ave E to 6th Ave W)

### What Are Flow Streets?

**Flow Streets** are safe, comfortable, low-vehicle-traffic routes that prioritize community-building through active transportation. These shared streets are open to all forms of transportation, including vehicles accessing properties along the corridor.



An example of a Slow Street in San Francisco. Photo: SFMTA

### Why First Street?

- **Low through-traffic** already exists
- **Maintains all parking** and local access
- **Connects communities** east and west
- **Alternative to Lakewalk** for commuters
- **Safer than Superior Street** (#1 safety concern)

### Key Benefits

- Quick to implement with **low-cost materials**
- **ADA compliant** for full accessibility
- Serves the **92% of cyclists** who want safe routes
- **Good for business** increases foot traffic
- Supports **climate goals** and emissions reduction

### Proven Results from San Francisco

**No increased congestion** on nearby streets • **36% reduction in collisions** • Reduced traffic to less than 1,500 cars per day at speeds below 20 mph

### Supporting Duluth's Vision

*"Many more people could consider bicycling as a form of transportation, even if only for some of their daily travels, if the infrastructure was convenient and safe."*

— **Imagine Duluth 2035 Comprehensive Plan**

# First Street Serves Our Community

A corridor that connects people, businesses, and neighborhoods

## Flow Streets Follow National Best Practices

The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) represents major North American cities and develops design guidelines. Here's how Flow Streets benefit each part of our community:



### Community Hub

- ✓ **Streets as public spaces** for gathering and events
- ✓ **Safe access** for families and seniors
- ✓ **ADA compliant** for all abilities



### Local Businesses

- ✓ **Increased foot traffic** boosts sales
- ✓ **Quick implementation** with low cost
- ✓ **Flexible design** adapts to needs



### Residential Areas

- ✓ **Safer streets** for children playing
- ✓ **Neighborhood connection** and vitality
- ✓ **Accessible routes** for all residents

*Guidelines based on NACTO Urban Street Design Guide*

## Successful Examples Across North America

**Minneapolis** — Neighborhood Greenways • **Portland** — "Cars are guests" • **Seattle** — Healthy Streets • **Austin** — Living Streets • **Richfield, MN** — Sweet Streets • **Montreal** — Slow Streets Network

### Together, We Can Create Change

Flow Streets represent a proven, low-cost way to make our city safer and more accessible for everyone. From families with young children to seniors, from cyclists to pedestrians, Flow Streets create space where all Duluthians can thrive.

***First Street can be the beginning of a safer, more vibrant Duluth.***



**Join Us in Making Flow Streets a Reality**

[vibrantstreetsduluth.org/flow-streets](http://vibrantstreetsduluth.org/flow-streets) • [info@vibrantstreetsduluth.org](mailto:info@vibrantstreetsduluth.org)

Join our mailing list and help advocate for safer streets!

Vibrant Streets Duluth • A proud chapter of BikeMN  
Working together to make Duluth a better place for everyone to bike, walk, and roll

**Flow Downtown on First Street!**  
*“A step toward reimagining what Downtown is and could be.”<sup>1</sup>*  
— Jason Hale, North Shore Development Co.



(20 kph ~ 12 mph)

Flow Streets are safe, inviting, slow-vehicle-traffic routes that prioritize active transportation and community-building. Streets with more pedestrian and bicycle traffic lead to an increase in:

- Economic activity<sup>4,5</sup>
- Private sector investment<sup>2</sup>
- Adjacent property values<sup>2</sup>
- Visitors: “Walkability is a tourist magnet.”<sup>2</sup>

**A First St. Flow St. supports Imagine Downtown Duluth goals**

*First fix the streets, then the people and business will follow.*

— Dan Burden, Walkable Communities, Inc.<sup>2</sup>



**ENHANCE THE  
PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE**

Downtown has improved sidewalks and crossings beyond Superior Street; activation along ground floors and in the skywalk; as well as moments of interest and intrigue around every corner.

Shared streets put pedestrians first. Cars are allowed, but pedestrians have the right of way. Washington just passed the first “Shared Streets Law”<sup>3</sup>



**CONNECT TO CANAL PARK  
AND NEARBY NEIGHBORHOODS**

Downtown is connected to Canal Park, Lincoln Park, and other neighborhoods through multimodal infrastructure and cohesive development.

A Flow St. First St. would help to connect Downtown and Lincoln Park. A network of Flow Streets could connect all of Duluth.



**MAKE A DESTINATION  
FOR ALL DULUTHIANS**

Downtown is supported by local residents year-round because of its unique mix of local businesses, services, art, events, and programming that are uniquely of and for Duluth.

“If 1<sup>st</sup> St. were a Flow St. where cars and bikes have equal speeds of travel, I would go downtown much more often. Safety biking is my main barrier...”<sup>6</sup>



**CREATE A TRUE  
DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD**

Downtown has a diverse mix of housing along with high quality services and amenities to support residents living Downtown and nearby.

“[By] encouraging outdoor activity, social connection, and easier access to transit options, Flow Streets reduce isolation and expand opportunities for independent community living.”<sup>7</sup>

1. Jason Hale, North Shore Development Co., letter of support
2. <https://civicwell.org/civic-resources/the-economic-benefits-of-walkable-communities-2/>
3. <https://www.theurbanist.org/2025/05/19/governor-signs-washingtons-first-in-the-nation-shared-streets-law/>
4. <https://bikeleague.org/sites/default/files/Bicycling%20Benefits%20Business.pdf>
5. <https://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/dot-economic-benefits-of-sustainable-streets.pdf>
6. Kayde Moore, First Street resident, letter of support
7. Amanda Crosby, The Arc Northland, letter of support