

Improving the Pedestrian Environment on Windward Avenue Between Speedway and Windward Circle¹

Purpose:

Plans to pedestrianize Windward Avenue between Speedway and Pacific Avenue have been around since the 1990 Draft Waterfront Restoration Plan. The 2001 Venice Land Use Plan, certified by the Coastal Commission, noted it as a policy objective. It foresaw creating “an enhanced pedestrian area from Speedway to Pacific Avenue, and establish pedestrian connections along Windward Avenue to Main Street at Windward Circle.”² Besides creating a formal plaza between Speedway and Ocean Front Walk, not enough has been done since to make this larger objective happen.

The purpose of this report is to initiate steps to finally reconfigure Windward Avenue into an enhanced pedestrian environment along Windward Avenue between Pacific Avenue and Windward Circle.³

Summary:

The study team initially prepared a set of graphics and an analysis of possible reconfigurations to increase the pedestrian areas of both blocks of Windward Avenue to Windward Circle. For each there was a partial and a full pedestrianization scheme. However, in meetings with some of the business owners on Windward, it was decided to focus on the full pedestrianization options and to present just those two (one for each Winward block) in the survey.

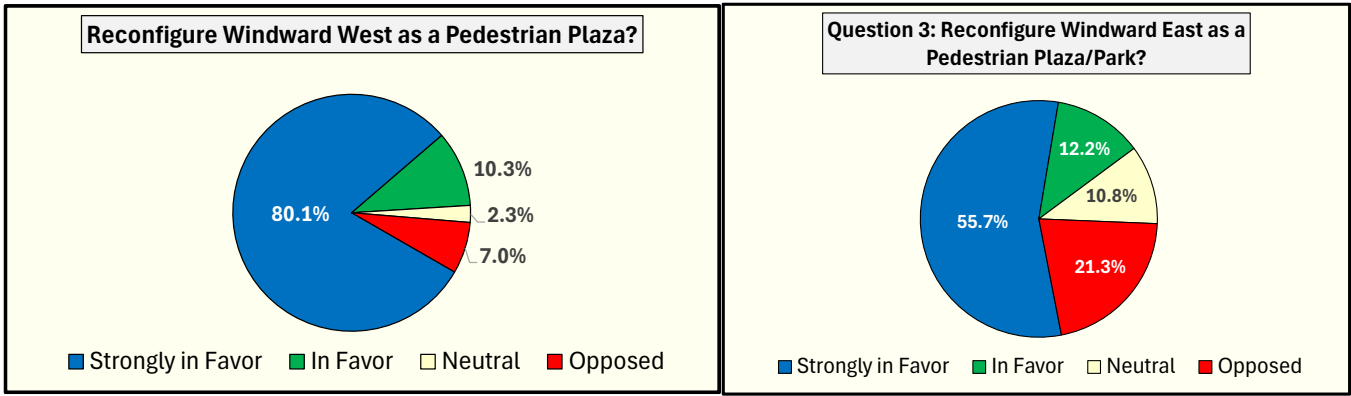
A total of 515 survey responses were received in the one-month period the survey was opened (March 21 – April 20). This report is often divided into two sections: a Speedway-Pacific (“Windward West”) section and a Pacific-Windward Circle (“Windward East”) section.

¹ This Report was prepared by the VNC’s Parking, Transportation, and Infrastructure Committee for consideration by the full Board. The Committee’s study team members were Richard Stanger and David Wolf.

² **Policy III. B. 1. 1990 Waterfront Restoration Plan and 1995 Venice Beach Ocean Front Walk Refurbishment Plan. (Page V-6)**

Windward Avenue and Circle: *In response to community support to create a pedestrian oriented environment in the area of Windward Avenue and Circle, the 1990 Draft Waterfront Restoration Plan proposes several conceptual designs. This would involve providing better linkage between the Ocean Front Walk and Pavilion area on the beach, and Windward Avenue from Speedway to Windward Circle. The Draft Plan would create a formal plaza between Speedway and Ocean Front Walk, create an enhanced pedestrian area from Speedway to Pacific Avenue, and establish pedestrian connections along Windward Avenue to Main Street at Windward Circle. The improvements to the Circle would establish it as a central focus for pedestrians and vehicles.*

³ To shorten the verbiage, the word “Avenue” is not used after Windward, Pacific, and other streets.



Windward West:

A Windward pedestrian plaza between Speedway and Pacific is extremely popular. Over 90% of respondents were supportive, 80% strongly supportive. Only 7% were opposed. Many thought this change was long overdue and that it would greatly increase Windward visits and business.

Windward East:

A Windward pedestrian plaza/park was supported by 68% of responders, 56% strongly in favor. Considering the boldness of such a reconfiguration of the street, this responses is considered very positive. However, one in five responders opposed the idea for reasons of perceived traffic and parking impacts, and concerns over homeless encampments.

Study Process:

The initial phase of the study was to envision an enhanced pedestrian design for the two blocks of Windward and then to obtain business and public feedback. From that feedback, the process could go in one of three directions: 1) abandon the effort because there was little interest, 2) incorporate major changes to the initial concepts if there was interest but some concern, or 3) proceed to the next phase because of strong interest.

The next phase of the process would be to seek input from CD 11 and affected agencies: LADOT, LAFD, LAPD, The Bureau of Engineering, and the Department of Parks & Recreation. The California Coastal Commission must approve any changes to Windward so it will be contacted. We felt that before these agencies became involved, we would need to have an concepts that we knew the public would be behind. Alternately, if there was no business or public interest, there was no reason to seek agency input.

The third phase of the process would be to seek necessary political approvals and funding sources to prepare more detailed plans and cost estimates. Ideally, the enhancements would be built before the Olympic Games in 2028.

Present Conditions:

Overview

Figure 1 shows the Windward Avenue area. The two proposed pedestrian plazas/parks are shaded yellow. Windward Circle traffic would not be affected. Access to area parking would still be provided. Speedway would remain a one-way, southbound traffic lane. Emergency vehicle access would be provided on Windward. The next two sections look more closely at the two Windward blocks.

Figure 1: Windward Area Overview



Windward West

At present, Windward between Speedway and Pacific is almost entirely vehicle-dominated. There is al fresco dining on the south side of Windward West, but otherwise the street is only for vehicle traffic and its 19 parking spaces. These parking spaces are priced at \$2/hour with some enforcement, while private parking lots in the immediate area charge up to \$15/hour. Turnover of the 19 public spaces is probably below what is intended with 38% of cars parking longer than 4 hours.⁴

The sidewalk on the south side of Windward West is crowded not only with people walking and shopping, but also with al fresco-related waiters going across the pedestrian flow. At its eastern end, where people wait to cross Pacific, the south sidewalk width is less than six feet. The northern sidewalk is less busy because it is far less interesting having no al fresco dining, few businesses, and only parking spaces. In short, hundreds of pedestrians are crammed onto a constricted south sidewalk while light traffic volumes control the street space.

Windward East

Windward East presently is of very little interest to pedestrians except those using the three bus transit routes. Each transit route has its own bus stops scattered around the Windward Circle area. The eastbound and westbound stops of two of the routes are located at opposite ends of the large Windward Circle area, which is confusing.

The rest of Windward East is street space, a vast amount of asphalt 60 feet wide at its western end 130 feet wide at its eastern end entering Windward Circle. There are only two travel lanes

⁴ *Parking Utilization and Transportation Management Strategies Report – Venice Coastal Zone* by Fehr & Peers, Table 12.

and traffic volumes are typically light-to-modest. Too much of this block - arguably the center of Venice Beach - is wasted space.

The Proposed Pedestrian Concepts:

Initially, two pedestrian concepts were developed for each of the two Windward blocks: a partial pedestrian configuration and a full pedestrian concept. However, talking to some of the businesses on Windward West and faced with trying to explain too many variations in the planned survey, we opted to focus on the one concept within each block that maximized the pedestrian use of the street. Furthermore, to help the public visualize what a pedestrian plaza might look like we used A.I. to imagine an ideal pedestrian use for each block.

Windward West

Windward West is envisioned to be entirely reconfigured for pedestrian use except for a short driveway in the northwest corner to allow access to the parking business there (Figure 2 and Image 2). A plaza-level emergency vehicle lane has been added based on comments received. The associated image is imagined. In actual use, for example, there could be access for trucks to deliver supplies to the businesses before 10:00 a.m. These details are important to work out as the process goes on.

Figure 2: Windward Avenue West Proposed Pedestrian Plaza Area from Above

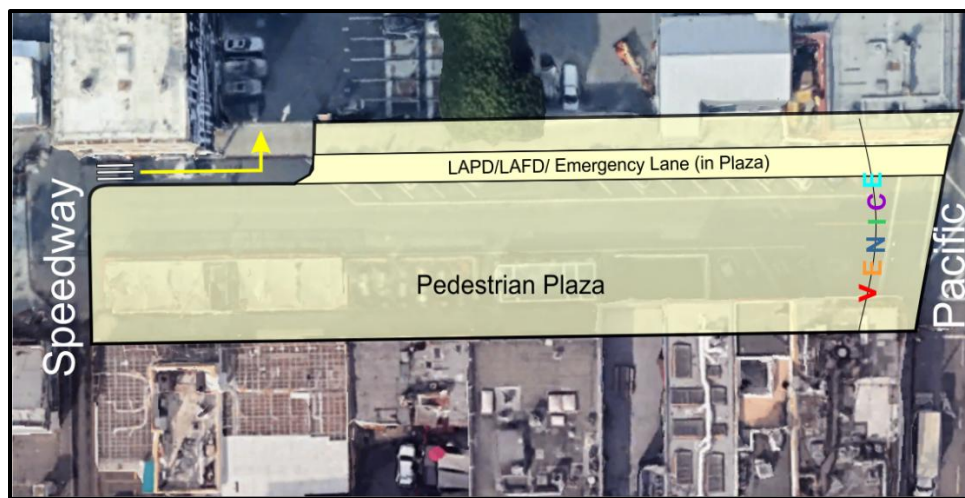


Image 2: Windward Avenue West Idealized Pedestrian Plaza Area



Windward East

Visualizing what Windward East could be is more difficult. The potential is there for a livelier, inviting pedestrian space. Venice Fest is one recent example of this potential. This space could be used for a Farmer's Market should Lot 701 be repurposed, or for Taco Tuesday-type food events. Another important need is to use part of the space as a bus transit hub. Bus stops, now scattered, could be relocated to the Windward Circle end of the block with bus shelters and real-time route information. (See Figure 3 and Image 3.)

Figure 3: Windward Avenue East Proposed Pedestrian Plaza Area from Above



Image 3: Windward Avenue East Idealized Pedestrian Plaza Area

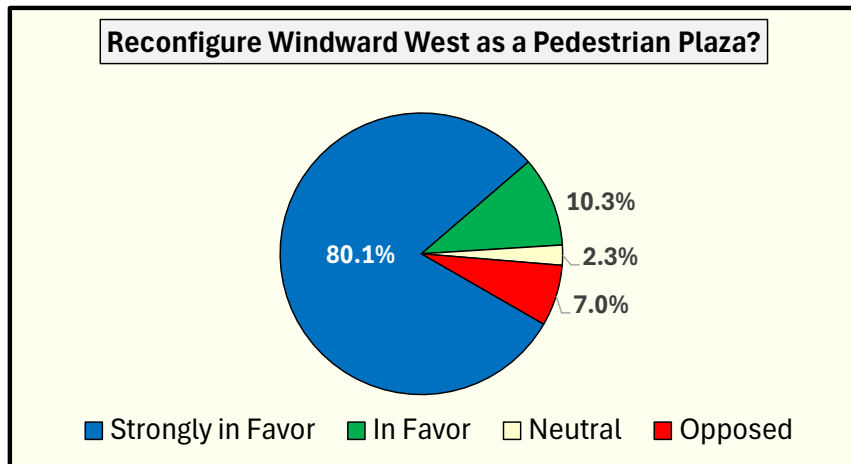


Windward Avenue Pedestrian Enhancement Survey:

A survey to solicit public input was an integral part of Phase 1. The survey asked the responders their opinions of each block’s proposed reconfiguration (Strongly in favor, in favor, neutral, and opposed) and asked for comments on each. The survey also asked how the responders traveled to Windward now, and whether they would visit Windward more often if the pedestrian areas were built. Finally, the survey asked whether the responder lived in Venice or elsewhere.

The Survey was released March 22 and continued until April 20. One could find the survey in the March 22nd VNC Newsletter, in a VNC email blast on April 4th, on the VNC’s website, and on Instagram. A total of 500 people filled out the survey.

Question: Would You Favor Reconfiguring Windward West as a Pedestrian Plaza?



Over 90% of responders were either strongly in favor (80%) or in favor (10%) of fully pedestrianizing Windward West. Just 2% were neutral, and 7% opposed the idea. Of 511 responses to this question, only 36 thought closing this block of Windward was a bad idea. **This is an extremely positive response!** It shows that Venetians definitely want this change

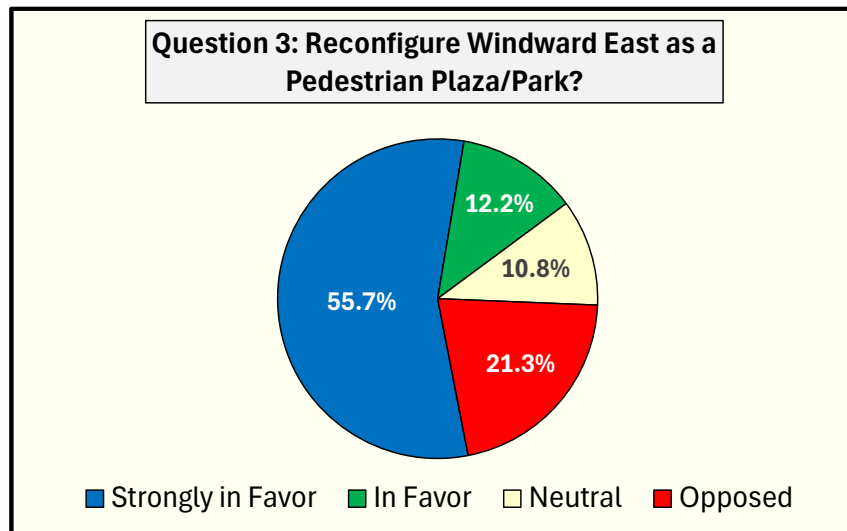
to happen. In analyzing all the hundreds of comments received on this block, Copilot summarized them as follows:

"The comments are overwhelmingly supportive of converting this Venice Beach block/plaza area into a pedestrian-first public space. Many people describe it as long overdue and say it would make the area safer, more walkable, and more welcoming, while strengthening Venice's identity as a place designed for people rather than cars. Supporters also expect positive spillovers for local businesses through increased foot traffic and a better visitor experience, often referencing successful pedestrian spaces elsewhere. Alongside the enthusiasm, commenters commonly note implementation details that would help the concept succeed—especially design features (seating, trees/greenery, amenities), clear rules for how the space is used, and practical access considerations (bikes, emergency access, and circulation). The 5 main points being made are:

- 1. Strong enthusiasm for pedestrianizing the block** to create a safer, calmer, people-centered destination.
- 2. Community and economic upside:** more foot traffic, better gathering space, and a boost for local businesses; "long overdue" sentiment is common.
- 3. Design ideas to make it a true public plaza:** seating (not just restaurant seating), landscaping/trees/native plants, lighting, tables (e.g., chess/picnic), and flexible space for events.
- 4. Connectivity and access done right:** include bike connections to the Marvin Braude trail, maintain workable circulation/reroutes (e.g., Speedway), and ensure emergency (LAFD) access.
- 5. Clear operations and stewardship:** commenters want the space actively managed so it stays comfortable and usable (rules/enforcement, cleanliness, and preventing misuse), as part of making the plaza successful long-term."

The main concern of those opposing the concept was homeless encampments.

Question: Would You Favor Reconfiguring Windward East as a Pedestrian Plaza?



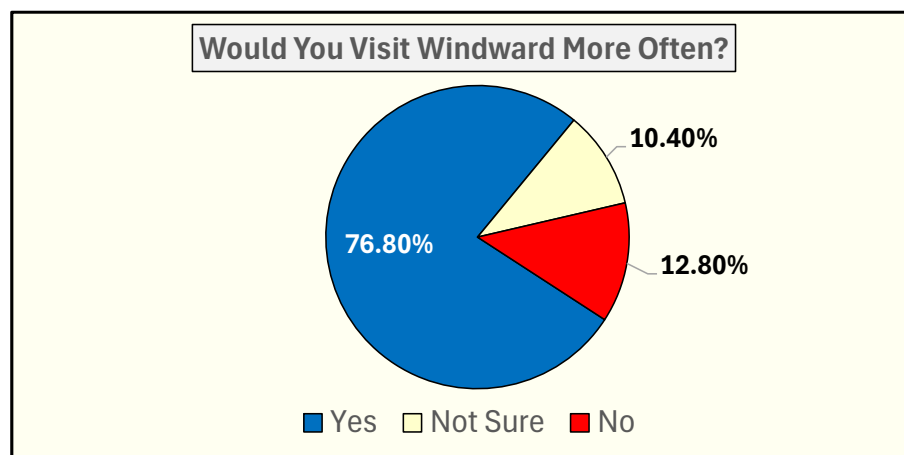
Over two-thirds (58%) of responders were either strongly in favor or in favor of reconfiguring most of Windward East as a pedestrian plaza and bus hub. Eleven percent were neutral and one-in-five responders opposed the idea. The result can be considered somewhat surprising as it takes a leap of imagination to envision this vast area as an attractive pedestrian area.

Copilot summarized the many comments on this block as follows:

The overall tone is notably supportive: many respondents describe the concept as a strong step toward a safer, more walkable Venice, with better crossings, a calmer street environment, and a more inviting place to gather—sometimes comparing it to successful pedestrian districts elsewhere and anticipating benefits for nearby businesses and community life. Even commenters who raise reservations often frame them as implementation details rather than opposition, emphasizing the importance of getting the design and operations right (bike and bus routing, deliveries/loading, and clear resident parking protections). Concerns remain about potential congestion, spillover onto residential streets, and the loss of limited parking or vehicle access, with several people requesting a traffic impact study and strong ongoing maintenance/enforcement. The five main points being made are:

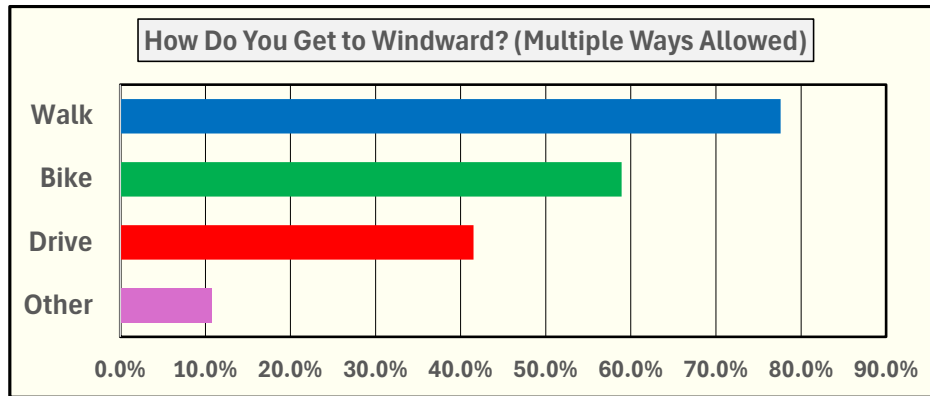
1. **Pedestrian safety and walkability improvements are primary arguments in favor** (safer crossings, fewer conflicts with cars, more comfortable public space).
2. **Community placemaking and economic vitality** are cited benefits (more inviting gathering space and potential boost for nearby businesses).
3. **A workable design should accommodate bikes and transit** (continuous bike connections to the beach path, and bus routing that avoids pushing buses onto residential streets).
4. **Success depends on operations, maintenance and enforcement** (cleanliness, lighting/landscaping, and preventing the space from being overwhelmed by encampments).
5. **The biggest concerns are tradeoffs for drivers:** traffic congestion/spillover onto neighborhood streets and loss of parking/access for residents, deliveries, and pick-up/drop-off.

Question: Would You Visit Windward Avenue More If These Pedestrian Concepts Were Implemented?



This question did not differentiate between Windward West and Windward East. A large majority of responders said that they were more likely to visit Windward if these improvements were implemented. This indicates that investment in the reconfiguration of Windward would be used, not wasted. Besides being a boon to local businesses there, additional visitors tend to attract even more visitors.

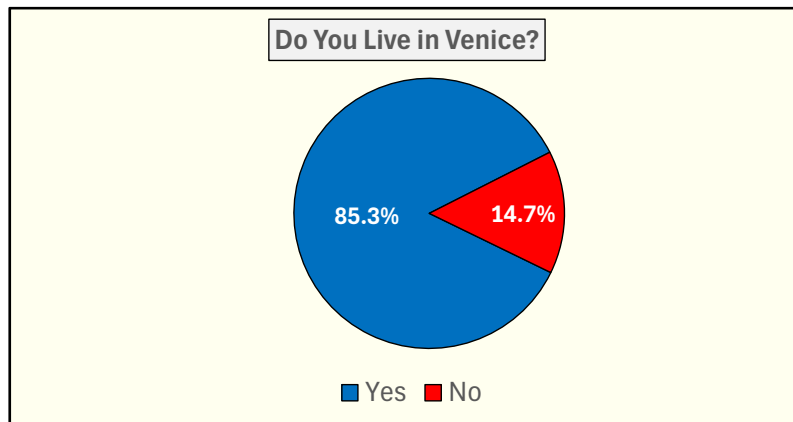
Question: When You Travel To Windward Avenue, What Travel Modes Do You Use To Get There?



This question also did not differentiate between Windward West and Windward East. For this question, responders could check multiple boxes, and there were many “Other” answers besides the top four: walk, bike, drive, and bus. No “Other” mode had more than 2% (bus).

Since 85% of responses are by people who live in Venice (see below), non-driving modes were expected to be relatively high, but the percentage of people who walk or bike to Windward is surprisingly high. This means that roadway features that increase pedestrian safety on streets approaching Windward, especially at busy intersections, should be provided. Bike routes also should be better protected on these approach streets. Providing secure bicycle parking spaces must also be a priority.

Question: Do You Live In Venice?



This survey was mainly noticed through the Venice Neighborhood Council’s email list, website, and its social media channels. It was picked up by social media beyond Venice, but the focus was intended to be on Venice. Therefore, it is not surprising that 5 of 6 responders live in Venice.

Question: Would You Like to Comment on Windward West?

There were relatively few concerns mentioned with regard to the full pedestrianization of Windward West. Of the 290 comments received, the six most mentioned concerns were (number mentioning this concern):

1. Homeless encampments or loitering (18)
2. Parking loss (14)
3. Traffic impacts and congestion (10)
4. Safety & security (9)
5. Bike connections and safety (7)
6. Cleanliness & trash (7)

The concern about homeless encampments is one that faces Venice in general and is somewhat valid with regard to Windward West. Recently, enforcement has lessened this concern, but enforcement would certainly need to be continued should Windward West be pedestrianized. Making this block more pedestrian will increase pedestrian traffic, based on the responses to this survey. The more people, in general, the fewer homeless encampments we would expect.

Half the parking spaces on Windward West were lost to al fresco dining five years ago. There are 19 remaining spaces left. Access to private lots will still be available. While private lots are \$10+/hour, the Windward spaces charge \$2.00/hour and enforcement is unclear; hence, there may be space hogging. The loss of parking is something the Coastal Commission, in particular, will be concerned with. However, there is a Commission-certified policy to enhance the pedestrian environment on Windward Avenue between Speedway and Windward Circle. Should replacement parking be required, there is the possibility of providing 23 spaces on Windward Avenue on the Post Office side of that block, discussed below.

Traffic flow within this block is modest and mainly oriented to parking lots in the vicinity. Traffic will have to be handled differently and a possible alternative is discussed in the next section of the report.

Safety & security is a related and valid concern. Police presence would tend to lower this concern as it does on Ocean Front Walk.

Bicycles on a pedestrian plaza is another stated concern. Since there is no direct connection with the Marvin Braude Bike Path from Windward Plaza and Ocean Front Walk cycling on Windward West should not be allowed. That would include powered scooters and e-bikes.

Cleanliness & trash is now handled by the Venice Beach Business Improvement District. It should be willing to do so with Windward West closed to traffic.

Question: Would You Like to Comment on Windward East?

The six most-mentioned concerns (and how many responses mention them) are:

1. Traffic impacts and congestion (27)
2. Homeless encampments & loitering (12)
3. Parking loss (8)
4. Bus operations (6)
5. Bike infrastructure, parking and theft (6)
6. Safety & security (6)

These concerns generally reflect those for Windward West but with traffic impacts at the top of the list. Traffic using Windward East is modest with most turning onto Pacific rather than proceeding into the Windward West block. These movements should be able to be handled using Venice Way with redesigned signalization. One possible alternative is discussed in a later

section of the report. Obviously LADOT will have a major interest in the traffic impacts and will do the necessary studies.

Again, homeless encampments is an on-going concern anywhere in Venice and the proposed plaza/park will clearly be no exception. However, it would be a shame if that concern overrides any civic improvement here or anywhere else in Venice.

Parking space loss should not be a concern on Windward East as there are at most only five parking spaces available on this block.

The bus concerns raised are to make sure that bus turning movements are properly considered. One of the reasons for the reconfiguration of Windward East is to consolidate bus access and enhance bus operations and passenger convenience. Bus layover space will need to be addressed if the project moves forward.

The Venice Bikeway Survey indicated that a major concern of cyclists is having safe places to secure a bicycle. This concern is reflected in this survey. Bike lanes may be provided to Pacific but because that arterial road is not recommended for bicycles, and because Windward West should not allow cycling, it is debatable whether bike lanes should be provided.

Safety & security, again, is an on-going and valid concern everywhere in Venice and perhaps more so should Windward East become a pedestrian area. How it is used and enforced will be important.

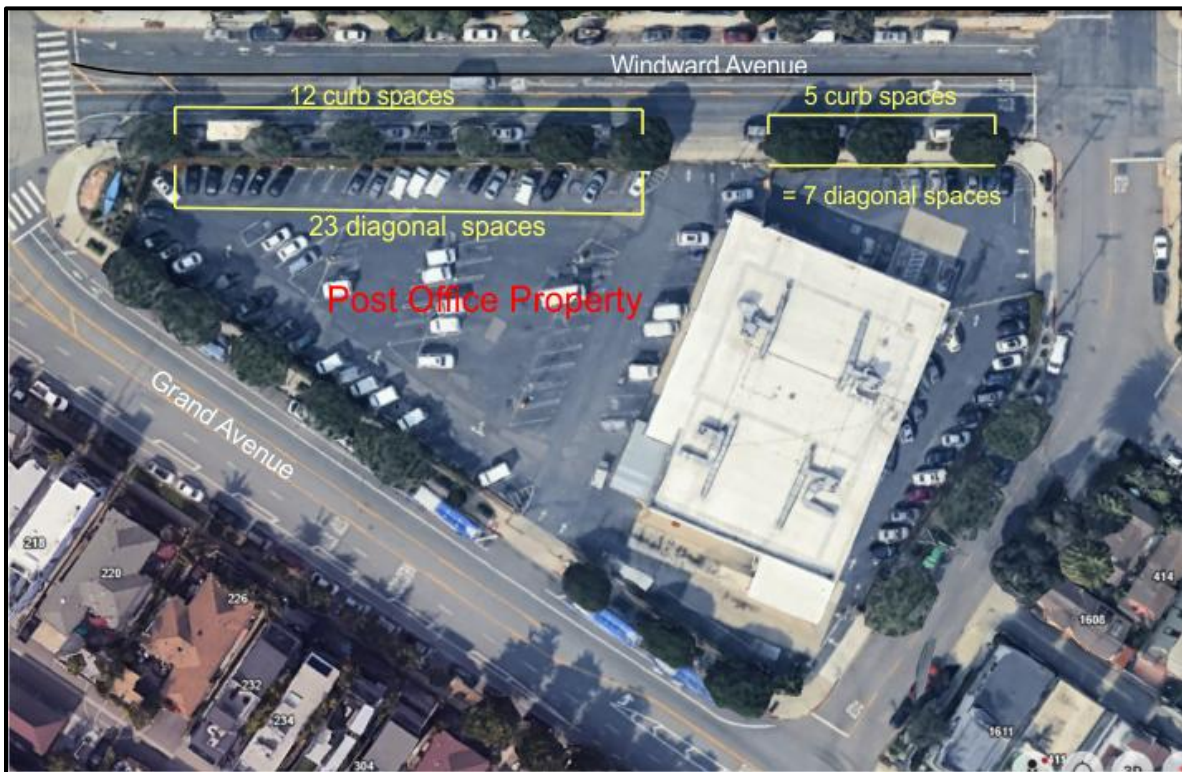
Response to Certain Concerns Raised

Loss of Parking:

One of the concerns raised in the comment sections of the survey was the loss of parking. There are presently 19 public parking spaces available on Windward West, and 5 public parking spaces on Windward East – a total of 23 parking spaces lost. One could argue that the public benefit of enhanced pedestrian spaces more than balances the loss of 23 parking spaces.

However, should these need to be replaced, one possibility would be to modify the block of Windward Avenue between Windward Circle and Riviera Avenue (the Post Office block) as shown in Figure 4. It restripes the block, eliminates the unused middle lane, and puts in metered diagonal parking. In essence, it mirrors what the Post Office parking lot does on the street's side. Parking on these spaces would be metered and not allowed overnight.

Figure 4: Possible Relocation of Windward Avenue Parking Spaces - to Windward Avenue between Windward Circle and Riviera Avenue



Traffic Impact:

Another stated concern of closing Windward to vehicle traffic is where the traffic would go? Although no vehicle counts have been made, both blocks serve at most modest traffic volumes. Windward West traffic seems primarily going to-and-from parking lots, either public or private. Except for one parking lot on Windward West itself, Windward West may not be the best way to get to any private lots located on Speedway. 17th Avenue, for example, is a more direct route to several of them.

More cars use Windward East, the majority of them turning onto or from Pacific. These movements can be made using Venice Way as shown in Figure 5. This proposed redesign of the signalization along this section of Pacific has not yet been reviewed by LADOT engineers; that will happen should the project move forward. However, it does show a possible alternative approach to traffic flows. A benefit of such a scheme is that it may allow more "green" time for Pacific Avenue through traffic. More "rat running" of vehicles through neighboring streets, while a fear, is not likely east of Pacific.

Figure 5: Alternative Approach to Traffic Flows with Windward Avenue Closed

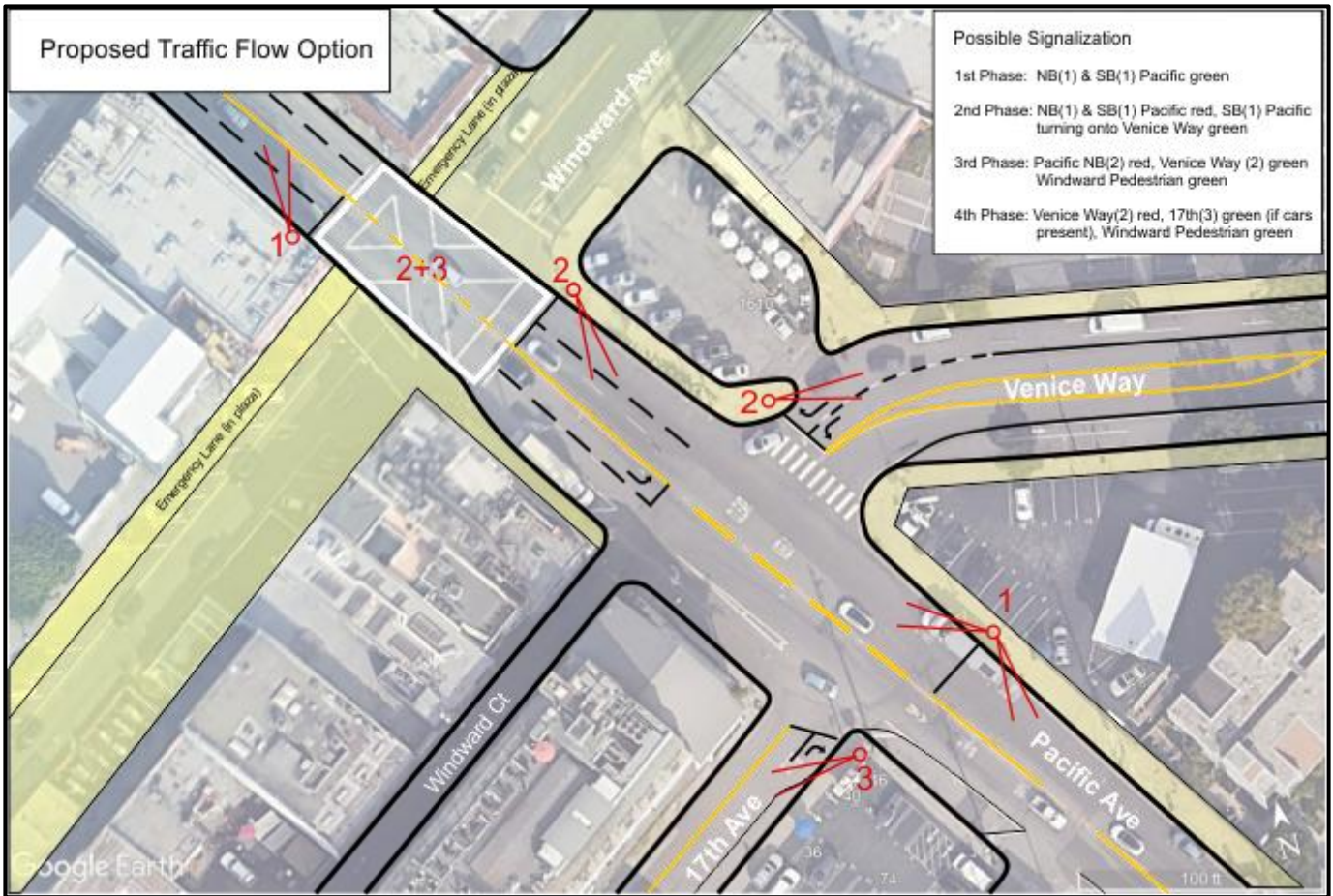


Image 5: 17th Ave Looking West from Pacific (L) and East from Speedway (R)



Conclusion

The case for fully closing Windward West to traffic (emergency vehicles, of course, excepted) is and has been obvious for decades. This survey shows that it has the overwhelming support of the Venice community. It must be done correctly and attractively as the true Gateway onto Venice Beach that it is. It then must be properly maintained and secured. Both can be done.

The case for fully closing Windward East to traffic is less obvious but could be just as impactful. It too has strong support also from the Venice Community. Events in the recent

past like Venice Love Fest, shows its potential as an event space, a future farmers market location, and mobile food court. Most important is the ability to have a transit hub at the Windward Circle end where

Initial concerns about lost parking, traffic impacts, and encampments are valid but have solutions. What is gained will be much more than what is lost.

A final note: It will be tempting to reconfigure Windward West first with Windward East to follow at some time in the future. That would be a mistake because Windward East pedestrianization will then almost certainly never happen. Now is the time to reconfigure both blocks of Windward, and with the opportunity of the Olympic Games in 2028 raising awareness, this may be the only time to catch this wave – whether it can be built in time or not!