What didn't fit in my Aspen Daily News guest commentary

3/25/26: "Lauder: 'Preferred alternative' is not preferable" by Gary Lauder

The worst problem of the Preferred Alternative (PA), is the back-up from the new traffic light at 7th & Main from the traffic that wishes to turn left there. That back up may extend very far and will obstruct people coming from Cemetery Lane from getting to the hospital, schools, airport, etc. To alleviate that, The City of Aspen is considering adding a connector from Cemetery Lane to the roundabout that would be one lane westbound. They would also restrict left turns made onto it by people who take Hallam across the Castle Creek Bridge, but they don't have a way to restrict people from making a U-turn further up Cemetery Lane. Nor would they be able to prevent people from continuing to take Powerplant Road to accomplish the same objective, so traffic in the West End would likely continue.

During the morning commute, in the absence of increasing the throughput of the intersection of 7th & Main (I can't imagine how that could be done), some of the drivers coming down Cemetery Lane who are eastbound and heading for Aspen will inevitably choose to turn right on this connector and loop around the roundabout to get into town more quickly that way. Since those drivers would enter the roundabout ahead of the traffic entering the roundabout from the west on 82, they would preempt and slow that traffic, which is precisely why Jacobs (the engineering firm) found that the split shot (not the modified or improved split shot (ISS)) did not perform as well in their traffic simulation. They would be creating the same problem that they already had, although the traffic volume would be split between the 2 ways to enter town—or 3 if you include Power Plant Rd.

Adding this connector back to the roundabout would be an improvement, but it's also one more deviation from the PA, which could trigger a full EIS, which they're so hell-bent on avoiding that they are not properly considering the ISS, which would actually fix the problems. That connector would be a step in the right direction (which is towards the ISS). In the ISS scenario, there would be two lanes connecting that intersection to the roundabout instead of one. As outlined in my ADN guest commentary, the ISS would also have one other minor modification: a tiny turn-around between Cemetery Lane and the roundabout to enable eastbound traffic to get onto eastbound 82 without having to enter the roundabout.

Something that could be done in addition to that, or instead of that, is to create an underpass for Cemetery Lane traffic that wishes to get under the Cemetery Lane intersection to directly access the eastbound 82 into town. If that were done, I would also recommend a little left turn connector road for westbound traffic that just crossed the Castle Creek bridge to enable them to turn left onto that to get into town. This would be an easier way for some people in the West End to get downtown than to make a left onto Main.

At one point, Jacob's engineering expressed concern about the potential danger of Cemetery Lane traffic crossing over two lanes of westbound traffic to turn left at the connector just before getting to the roundabout. There are several rebuttals to that:

1) I'm glad they're making a safety argument. The safety decrement of that should be weighed against the safety decrement of having the traffic light at 7th & Main. That is orders of magnitude more risky to life and limb.
2) The distance from Cemetery Lane to the roundabout is 1,250'. The turn-around could be about 250' before the roundabout, so the distance could be about 1,000' w/o moving CL. According to published standards[1], For a 35 MPH zone, the weaving length can be 600' per lane. For 45 MPH, it can be 800'. I therefore infer that if the speed limit were 30, there could be sufficient distance to safely cross 2 lanes of traffic in 1,000'
3) If the Cemetery Lane intersection were moved about 250' to the east, it would result in 1,500' distance, so no speed reduction would be warranted.
4) During the AM peak when most of the EB traffic would be coming in, the WB traffic is faster, but much lighter. During the PM peak, the traffic is dense, but slow. If one did not make it all the way to the left lane before the roundabout, and therefore had to circle the roundabout during PM, there would not be much inbound traffic slowed by that, so inconsequential.
5) If the second lane were reserved for busses and HOV's, then the traffic in that lane would be even lighter, and therefore easier to cross.
6) If all of the above is not sufficient to allay that concern, an underpass could be implemented. I actually think both would be optimal.

The weaving concern is a safety argument. It's great that safety is being considered. I hope that each scenario will be quantitatively evaluated on a safety basis since safety often gets neglected, especially when it comes to introducing traffic lights. The most important take-away from the book "Traffic" by Tom Vanderbilt, was that the things that make us **feel** less safe actually make us safer. It's counterintuitive, but he makes an irrefutable case for that. When weighing safety, it's important to consider not just the rate of collisions, but their severity. The accidents that happen during weaving are typically side-swipes and rarely result in injury or death. Conversely, traffic lights result in T-bones and head-on collisions, which do. If the avoidance of weaving results in another design that requires a traffic light, the safety trade-off should be evaluated. I repeated this point due to its importance.

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[1] Weaving in the Vicinity of an Approach:
https://www.oregon.gov/odot/Engineering/Doc_TechnicalGuidance/AM13-09b.pdf
One-Sided Weaving Analysis on One-Way Frontage Roads
https://library.ctr.utexas.edu/hostedpdfs/tti/1393-1.pdf

While I have criticized the presence of the traffic light at 7th & Main for regulating traffic under the PA scenario, it would be a benefit for a different reason in the ISS scenario. If traffic is free-flowing in the ISS scenario, then cars will be equally-spaced and there would be very little break in traffic for cars wishing to turn left onto 7th from westbound Main Street to go up 7th on the southern side of Main (towards Ajax). It could also be useful as a pedestrian crossing. When used in these modes, the light would be continuously green for the main traffic movements, and therefore the adverse accident statistics of normal traffic light-controlled intersections would not apply.

There are other relevant points made in the other memos posted to my website: https://lauderpartners.com/aspen/ , but don't want to repeat those here lest I bore the people who took the time to read those.

Thanks for your interest in this important topic!

-Gary