

Two-Way Traffic On Palafox Place Returns

Sometime late this month or early in November, two-way traffic should finally again return to the entire length of Palafox Street. This includes the section of roadway south of Garden Street and north of Government Street commonly referred to as Palafox Place. This section of street along with the next two blocks of S. Palafox Street (between Government and Main Streets) was converted to a one-way thoroughfare over thirty years ago in an effort to get people (and their vehicles) through and out of downtown more quickly. For the first time in over three decades, a majority of public decision-makers and stakeholders recognized the unintended negative consequences on local commerce that such an action initiated and committed to start rectifying the unacceptable situation.

Beginning this past August, the first two blocks of S. Palafox Street between Main Street and Government Street was returned to two-way traffic. This action has been well received by almost all of the businesses along that section of street as well as the general public. If all goes as planned, the remaining three blocks (of S. Palafox) should once again legally allow both north and south bound traffic – at the same time – by early November. To facilitate the smooth transition of this second round of traffic changes, the DIB acting as the Downtown Parking Management District has designated five new Commercial Loading Zones on each of the east-west streets intersecting Palafox Place as well as one on the first block of S. Jefferson Street and two time-restricted and shared spaces in the first block of S. Palafox Place itself. Parking or stopping (except for a traffic signal) in either of the traffic lanes for any reason along Palafox between Garden and Main Streets will be prohibited when the street returns to two-way traffic.

Additionally, the other companion one-way pair to S. Palafox, S. Baylen Street, should also be converted back to two-way traffic by the end of calendar year 2008. When these streets are completely restored to their intended dual directions, the visibility for the businesses along these streets will increase by 100% overnight. Likewise, access to businesses and attractions located on these streets will become infinitely more easy because of the slower pace of the traffic, the addition of three new four-way stops, the increased pedestrian feel of the streets, and most importantly, the ability to turn-around and go back (at the next intersection) to an address or business that one may have missed while driving by the first time.

Changing the orientation of S. Palafox also makes it easier and more likely that the millions of tourists traveling through downtown on Main Street each year will find their way north into the heart of downtown via a two-way Palafox Street. Heretofore, all we could do was hope that the tourists visiting our beautiful beaches or our magnificent Naval Aviation Museum would somehow turn onto other local unsignalized streets and figure out on their own how to reach the retail core of downtown. With the conversion back to two-way traffic, the connection will be much more direct and the invitation and traffic prompts will be encouraging and recognizable to folks not from here.

All of this enhanced access and visibility should also translate into increases in sales of products and services by the existing businesses along these streets. According to some of the national retail consultants recently engaged by the DIB, existing businesses should on average expect to see a 20% increase in annual sales beginning after the first full year of the restored two-way traffic patterns due to the increased access and visibility for the stores. It will also put some national retailers whose location policies shun one-way street locations, back in the mix of possibilities for a Palafox Place location.

Change is always hard. But in this case, change is good for Downtown Pensacola and its businesses.

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