

Provide Ashland Citizens with 4th Street Railroad Crossing

First off, I thank you and the City for installing sidewalks at the Oak St. railroad crossing. It is really nice to no longer have to walk into this busy street to avoid having to climb over the tracks, especially after dark. Those with mobility issues or strollers must especially appreciate these new sidewalks.

We are still badly in need of another pedestrian railroad crossing in the area just north of A St., however. The tracks between Oak Street and N. Mountain Avenue run for $\frac{3}{4}$ mile without a crossing. This is by far the longest distance between railroad crossings in the City—and being adjacent to the city center, we are talking about a prime location for pedestrians and bikers. Using myself as an example, a 4th Street crossing would reduce my roundtrip walk to 4th and A Streets from north of the tracks by nine blocks. We need to open up this $\frac{3}{4}$ mile barrier.

This is not a new issue. In 2001, 14 years ago, the City developed a plan using “Smart Development” principles for the area just north of the tracks called the *Ashland Railroad Property Master Plan*. The plan provided for a 4th Street crossing of the tracks. In addition, in December 2010, a petition calling for a crossing in the area, signed by 91 area businesses, residents, and employees along with testimony from many of them, was presented to the Transportation Commission.

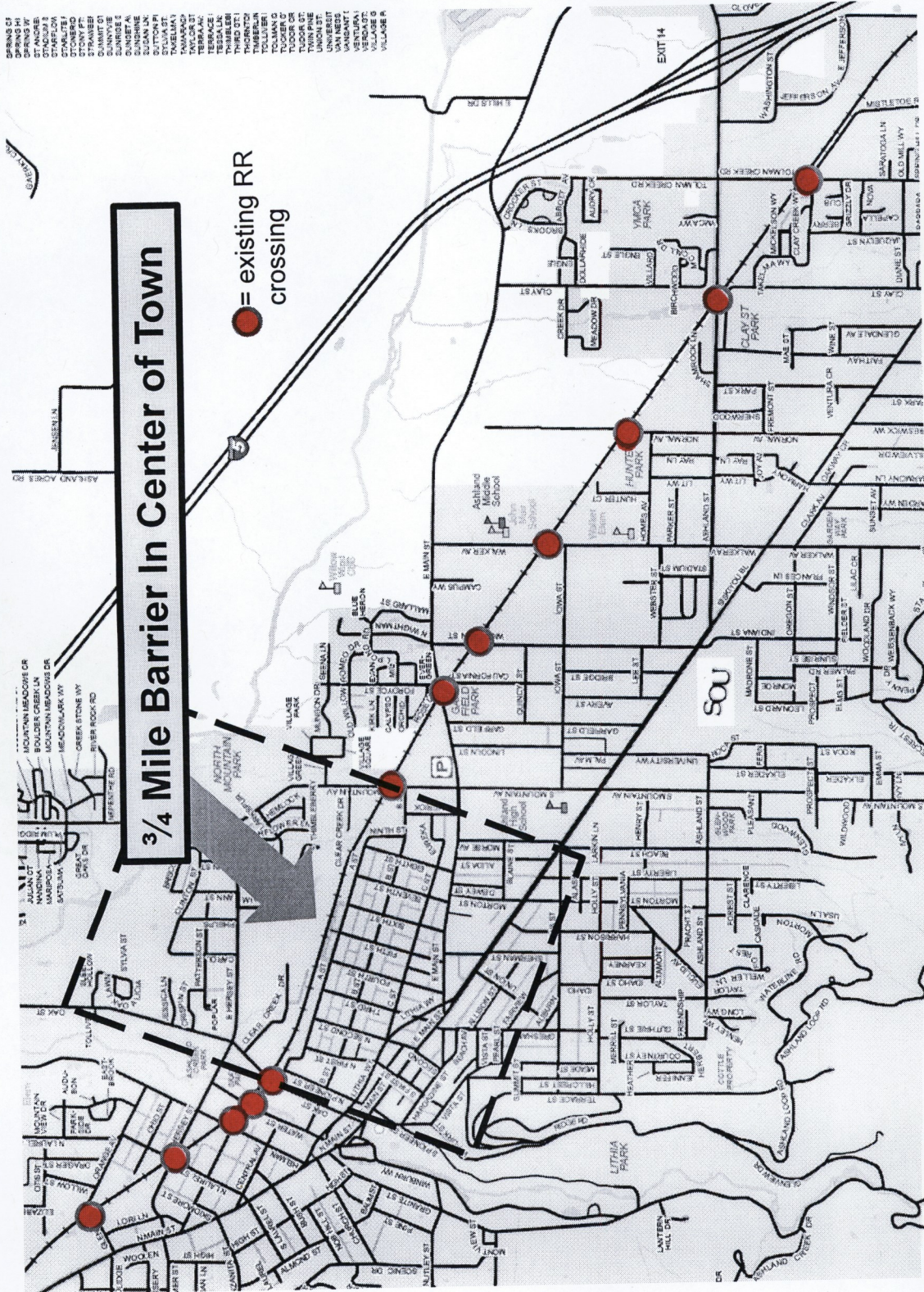
The fact that the lots adjacent to the proposed 4th Street crossing have not yet been developed should not prevent the City from providing Ashland’s citizens reasonable access to their city center. After all, there is precedent just north of the tracks for requiring a pathway in an area still to be developed, as well as for landscaping on lots that still have no buildings. Working with ODOT, the City can make this happen.

I invite all of you to visit the area in question, should you not have done so recently. Here is an area with a master plan in place ripe for development—no annexation, no retrofitting, no tear-downs necessary. This area could be a model of mixed-use, high density new construction meeting high energy conservation standards; of new approaches to landscaping and water use; of needed affordable housing—and provide great walking and biking within the City center. Isn’t this what we all want? A railroad crossing here is likely a necessary prerequisite, however.

For years the railroad and the city have turned a blind eye to the dozens if not hundreds of daily trespass crossings over the tracks between Oak Street and N. Mountain Avenue by pedestrians and cyclists. Now that trains have resumed travel through town, the local papers tell us citizens face fines of over \$6000 and/or a year in jail for what has been going on for years without penalty. More fencing is being installed along the tracks and we are told trespassing enforcement will be ramped up.

Surely Ashland can do better. Don’t Ashland citizens deserve a badly needed pedestrian crossing rather than threats of jail time and steep fines? Now that the trains have returned, please make a pedestrian crossing here a priority. Please don’t make Ashland citizens wait any longer.

Divided Ashland



Public Town
Barbara Comes