

- 10. **“Couplets require out-of-direction travel!”** This is an extremely minor issue when couplets are separated by only a block or two, but becomes more of an issue the wider the separation becomes. Reduced congestion will result in lower emissions than a block-longer trip.
- 9. **“Unfamiliar drivers will make mistakes!”** Couplets require some getting used to, but eventually mistakes will be rare. Goods and lower speed limits can allow drivers to correct mistakes without incident. Accident statistics tend to show couplets are better. But potential for mistakes is an obvious drawback, and a fair criticism.
- 8. **“Couplets encourage speeding!”** A couplet can have a high speed-limit, but it doesn’t have to. Some older couplets were designed exclusively for cars at higher speeds, but it is also easy to use traffic calming techniques and modern Complete Street design principles that require you to drive slower without reducing capacity. Because couplets have perfect signal synchronization, it is actually easier to get people to obey speed limits, as they quickly discover there is no advantage to speeding. And because you’re not wasting time stopped at signals, you actually travel faster, even when speed limits are lower. So set speeds at 25! You’ll still move more traffic faster.

- 7. **“Couplets create blight!”** With some older couplets, land uses and multi-modal features were completely ignored, just as with ugly two-way streets. If people are familiar with ugly couplets, they mistakenly blame the wrong thing.

Good examples from Palm Springs, Boulder, Portland and a myriad of other locations can help, as will 3-D models showing what the proposal could be like.



- 6. **“Couplets cut traffic counts in half, which is bad for business!”** Couplets never cut traffic in half, as it’s the sum of both, divided by 2. And if there is latent demand, volume could soon be just as high in one direction as it was before in two. If traffic does drop initially, there is some evidence that convenience businesses such as gas stations and fast-food restaurants that depend on high counts at their front door may see a slight reduction. But because couplets can support higher densities, traffic volumes will eventually be higher than they were before, and still with less congestion. Since couplets can serve more people, both in vehicles and by other modes, destination businesses usually do fine with couplet conversions, especially if speeds are reduced, as they depend on *people knowing where they are* – not how many times the same person passes by at 45 mph in a day. Road diets and bypasses divert people out of your Center. Low-speed couplets are a great way to allow people (in cars) to get to, then walk through, your walkable Activity Center!
- 5. **“The new trend is away from couplets!”** Couplets are often perceived to be inherently high-speed and auto-oriented, so in a quest to entice walkable uses back into languishing Activity Centers, couplets can top the list of things to go. It’s true that engineers implemented couplets to accommodate more vehicles back when these centers were popular. It’s also true most older couplets were high-speed and auto-oriented, as were all “stroads.” But couplets can be designed



Addressing Ten Arguments Against One-Way Couplets

for low-speed, pedestrian environments with even better results for business and livability than two-way streets. Some cities eliminated couplets and business improved! But conversions have often included Complete Street beautification and traffic calming, which has nothing to do with couplets. Ironically, two-way streets eventually impede sustainable development, because walkable, transit-oriented places still depend heavily on access by rubber-tired vehicles.

4. **“Converting to couplets is political suicide!”** Couplet proposals are always controversial and initial response is generally negative, as people prefer the congestion-devil they know over the uncertainty-devil they don’t. But good 3D simulations of two-way vs. one-way, along with streetscape renderings to show the amenities that are possible with narrower pavement, can go a long way toward changing public opinion. Other materials showing research on the effects to businesses can help as well, depending on the nature of the affected businesses (number of convenience vs. destination-oriented businesses).
3. **“Couplets increase traffic near homes!”** Couplets usually increase traffic on at least one of the two streets. This can be good if the intent is to expand a Town Center to that street, but controversial if it is mostly owner-occupied single-family homes. But even in residential areas, more traffic can seem like less traffic. It is easier to get out of the driveway, since you need a gap in just one direction. Most likely you can make due with 2-lanes in one direction rather than 1-lane in both, plus a center-turn lane, so the pavement is narrower. It is also easier to get people to obey speed limits. Traffic calming strategies can help, [as can new innovative, alternative intersections.](#)
2. **“Couplets have twice as much pavement to maintain”** Say scenario A has 5-lanes owned by the State on the primary street, and 3-lanes owned locally on the couplet street, for a total of 8-lanes. In a couplet scenario, traffic may move well with 3-each direction, or a total of 6-lanes, but it is all owned by the State. There is less to maintain, but more for the *state* to maintain.
1. **“Couplets increase the number of signals & violate access management guidelines”** Couplets can result in more signals than the two candidate streets have already. But each signal will have fewer “arrow phases” and thus will work better. Couplets actually move traffic better with more signals, even at low speeds, because it is easier to hold platoons together and synchronize signals. Frequent signals create more crossing opportunities for pedestrians. It is often possible to demonstrate within highly accurate simulation software that even with more signals and less stringent access management rules, the overall amount of system delay will be significantly less with a couplet system than with a large two-way arterial system.

This paper addresses common concerns regarding one-way couplets. Also see our companion list of positive arguments in favor of couplets: [“Top 10 Advantages of One-Way Couplets.”](#)

Metro Analytics develops and analyzes multi-modal circulation solutions for mixed use, high-density environments, helping stakeholders measure the pros and cons of potential solutions. In cases where mixed-use development is desired and eminent, couplets can play an important role in Place-Making, while also handling higher traffic volumes such places often generate, or must accommodate.

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