

VAIL HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION, INC.



Public parking and pedestrian usage of the Frontage Road is increasing along with the risks of tragic accidents.

Vail's Frontage Roads - Public Safety At Risk

July 14, 2016

The Vail Town Council has finally recognized that serious public safety issues are being caused by Frontage Road parking. The Council voted recently to install flashing pedestrian crossing caution signs and designated crosswalks at a few points along the Frontage Road. Putting aside the aesthetics of such signs, an issue raised by some, the question remains, will these steps be effective or cause more traffic congestion?

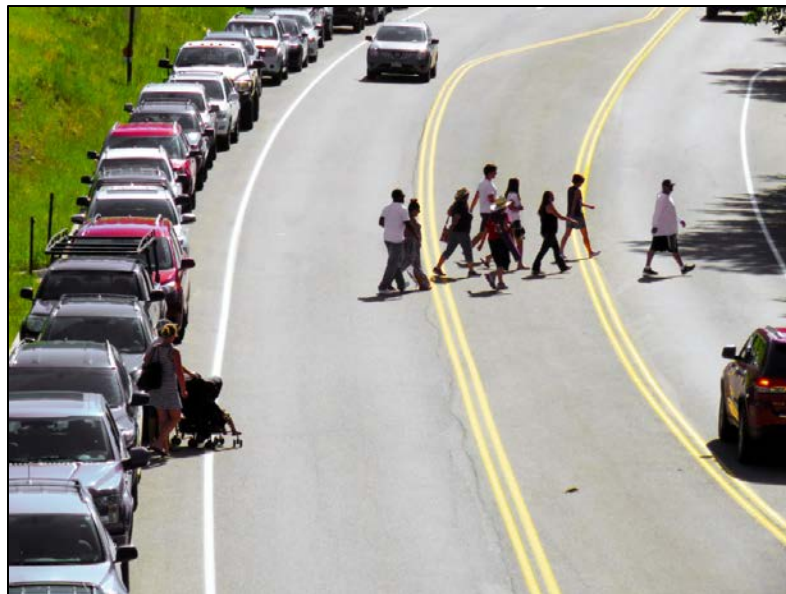
The biggest drawback to crosswalks is, if there are too many, they could obstruct traffic on the community's main thoroughfare and result in backups and rear end collisions as motorists brake for crossing pedestrians, especially along the Frontage Roads which were never designed nor intended to accommodate on-street parking or large numbers of pedestrians randomly crossing from one side of the road to the other. Experience teaches that when crosswalks are the most direct route, pedestrians will use them, otherwise, they will not. How pedestrians have been getting to and from their cars when parked on the Frontage Road illustrates the ineffectiveness of crosswalks in these circumstances. And it's highly questionable whether more crosswalks would solve the problem.



Can random pedestrian crossing of the Frontage Roads be stopped?

Even worse could be the effect of signalized pedestrian crosswalks at roundabouts. Roundabouts are intended to maintain the continuous flow of traffic. Halting that traffic for pedestrian cross over's will snarl traffic. This is especially so when the roundabouts reach carrying capacity, which seems to be happening with greater frequency at the main Vail roundabout. Building those kinds of crosswalks would be a costly undertaking, and there is no reason to believe they would be any more effective in reducing or eliminating the public safety hazards that on-street parking causes.

Some have proposed reducing speed limits on overflow parking days or providing safety personnel to help assist guests cross the road. Putting aside the intergovernmental issues involved in creating the infrastructure to support variable speed limits, especially if it were to involve flashing signs as some have suggested, that too would be a costly undertaking as would assembling safety patrols. Even then, covering the entire length of South Frontage Road would be a huge challenge.



The only effective way to eliminate the danger of haphazard pedestrian crossings is by eliminating parking on the Frontage Roads. According to the recent Town survey, that is a step that would be favored by many since Frontage Road parking is the least favored form of parking. But to do so requires more public parking facilities.

One thing that is clear is that the demand for public parking is increasing, in both the winter and summer, causing more overflows onto the Frontage Roads. Already this summer, as of July 4th, there have been 7 days of Frontage Road parking, and one of those days saw one of the highest numbers of cars on Frontage Road in Vail's entire history.



Pedestrians navigate a dangerous gauntlet of vehicular traffic when parking on the Vail's Frontage Roads.

There are some stop gap steps that could be taken to free up more parking. On most days this summer, the Lionshead structure has been full by mid-morning. That particular overload has been attributed to construction in Lionshead and at the Vail Valley Medical Center (VVMC) campus. In effect, Vail is subsidizing these projects with free parking for the workers. That raises the question of whether Vail should be doing so? After all, manning the collection booths of the structures could eliminate most forms of parking abuse, but that would require the will to do so. But regardless, the demand for parking often far outstrips the available facilities, and that demand is only going to grow as the summer on-mountain facilities increase in popularity.



Visitors intent on having fun often take risks or are oblivious to hazards of Frontage Road traffic.



The Vail Homeowners Association has long urged that Vail needs more public parking facilities. It is not a matter of lack of alternatives. The Lionshead structure could be expanded or the municipal site could be utilized. What is needed is for the Council to stop kicking this can down the road and take action on one of Vail's most pressing priorities.



The Town of Vail reports that one of the highest frequency of Frontage Road accidents involves bicyclists. When Frontage Road bicycle lanes are converted to parking to handle over-flow needs, it forces bicyclists into heavily travelled traffic lanes. The likelihood of accidents increase when parked cars, pedestrian, bicyclist and passing vehicles are crowded into the same space.



Among the community's biggest public safety fears is a family with small children or an access impaired elderly person parking on the Frontage Road and being struck while crossing it. On-street parking is not allowed anywhere else in the community.