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Our VIEW

Radical renovation

Tearing up Vine would make campus safer

It's good ASUN and the city have finally put their feet down and said students walking on campus should not get hit by cars.

It's even better that the city's Antelope Valley plan is roaring along, and a new six-lane boulevard could direct traffic north and south around campus, instead of right through it.

But ASUN President Curt Ruwe noticed that the plan would take 15 to 20 years to complete, and said he would fight for more immediate action. A new crosswalk or stoplight, perhaps. A few lower speed limits. Maybe some flashing warning lights.

Yet there's a problem here bigger than a few crosswalks or speed bumps.

It's simply too convenient for motorists to tool around campus when throngs of students madly dash across busy 14th and Vine streets to get to their classes.

Vine Street between 14th and 16th streets — where two serious vehicle/pedestrian accidents occurred last year — should not be so accessible to motorists during the day.

In fact, we don't think it should be accessible to motorists at all.

Based on accident statistics, the university would be a much safer place if the city plowed up the pavement on Vine Street, 14th to 16th Street, and replaced it with a student-friendly pedestrian mall or greenspace.

In addition to the pedestrian accidents, six vehicle accidents also occurred in the tiny, two-block strip. And the roadway contributes to traffic on 14th street, where three pedestrians were struck by cars and 10 vehicle accidents occurred.

But if a few hospitalized students can't convince you to give up the right to drive a ton of gas-guzzling metal anywhere, consider the following:

- That strip of roadway is ugly. Every inch of concrete could be surrendered to the university landscape crew lauded nationwide for their work transforming the UNL campuses in the past two decades.

- That strip of roadway is unnecessary. Every building that borders it can be accessed by another roadway.

This narrow section of Vine Street serves only as a temptation, screaming to motorists "drive another block into the heart of campus and endanger the lives of a few hard-working students."

After these small sections of Vine Street were filled in, it would be much more inconvenient to drive a car into the heart of a pedestrian campus.

So much more inconvenient that maybe motorists would stop two blocks to the east and not send another student to the hospital.

When so many students are injured by cars on campus, it's time for radical changes.

Waiting means the university and the city continue to gamble with students' lives.

Haney's VIEW



CLIFF HICKS is a junior news-editorial and English major as well as a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Balance paid

Sex offenders already served time

“ We released these people. They stood before a parole board, were judged and released They got out fair and square.”

Megan's Law is wrong. For those of you unfamiliar with the legislation known as Megan's Law, it is a series of laws designed to notify the community when people convicted of sexual crimes are released from prison. It was named after 7-year-old Megan Kanka, who was lured into a neighbor's house, raped and strangled to death by a repeat sex-offender who was on parole.

The brutality of all of this has clouded the issue for a lot of people. It was a 7-year-old, they think. She was raped, they think.

We let this man out of prison and he committed another crime, they think.

Any death is significant, but nothing gets the public as riled up as the death of a child. Look at the JonBenet Ramsey case.

When Megan's Law was introduced, it was intended to make sure that criminals such as these were unable to hide in the folds of society. People would know where they were, who they were. The idea was that these people would not have the luxury of committing this crime again.

As these offenders were released from prison, they were required to notify not only the authorities, but any local relevant institution as well as neighbors. What this meant for one man was that he was to notify 82 public and private educational institutions and all residences in a one block radius.

Think about this. You've been released from prison.

Maybe you've been rehabilitated, maybe you haven't.

Either way, you have to let everyone know about your crime. People will camp out outside your house. They will shout and yell and protest.

Don't bother getting a phone — it won't stop ringing.

Don't bother getting a car — it might, like one offender's, be fire-bombed.

Don't get comfortable — you won't have the chance.

We, as a society, like to think that

criminals are bad people. They are — I'm not going to argue that. The problem is that we released these people. They stood before a parole board, were judged and released. This isn't like they're sneaking over the wall before their time is done — they got out fair and square.

And we keep on punishing them. We said they're rehabilitated and still we don't care.

In one case, two men broke into the house of a registered sex offender in the middle of the night and proceeded to beat the living daylights of the man they found asleep on the couch — who turned out to be a house guest.

These types of things are not isolated incidents.

There have been arguments that sex offenders are more likely to commit crimes after being released from prison, but there are no facts to prove this. People have cited figures as high as 90 percent for relapses into this kind of behavior, but the National Institute of Justice, the only figure reporters have been able to find, reports a 52 percent rate. Other studies have reported this figure at around 20 percent, less than the recidivism of drunken drivers.

What it comes down to is that people treat children with another standard. Murderers aren't even subjected to this kind of treatment when they're released.

This is an issue about fear and paranoia. Rationality was thrown out the window the minute the public found out Megan's murderer had committed crimes like this before.

Since then, people who have notified the authorities and locals as per Megan's Law have only found themselves fired from jobs, attacked and assailed by the public, picketed and firebombed — even driven out of town.

Some newspapers have taken it upon themselves to print lists of these people up, not only making the public aware, but shoving it down their throats.

This is the new Western-style justice. This is posses and justice by

mob. What makes it new is, now the address of the would-be lynched is on some state's Web site. Others offer CD-ROMs of registered sex offenders.

We've watched this drama unfold dozens of times, and still we haven't learned.

Put a crowd of people together and they are dangerous, not because they are united, but because they are chaotic.

People have the right to assemble, but the police are often brought in to control groups. In this case, though, the police necessarily aren't always on the side of right. Neither is the media.

If we let these people out of jail, they are supposed to be rehabilitated. If they are committing new crimes, then we shouldn't have let them out in the first place.

Our parole system isn't as effective as we'd like to think if we're letting habitual criminals out onto the populace.

This is a problem that needs to be dealt with by authorities, not the public.

We don't need to turn this matter over to the groups of people who see the words "child molester" and lose all rationality.

We don't need to turn it over to the kind of people who would break into a house and beat someone senseless for a crime they've already paid for, to the kind of people who would firebomb a car, who would fire them from a job, who would treat these people in the lowest, most degrading way possible, for a crime for which they have already served their time.

We let them out. We said they were better, that they were safe amongst the rest of us. We can't hunt those who are rehabilitated just in case we missed one who isn't.

The line is "innocent until proven guilty," and while we proved these people guilty of one crime, that was then; this is now.

Now they are free because we said so. Start treating them as such.