

Taking the Fifth – Are Bike Lanes Making DC Streets Unsafe?

The last words in the final presentation of the **Columbia Road Bike Plan** expressed the belief that removing and narrowing traffic lanes reduces crashes. District Department of Transportation (DDOT) planner Kevin Harrison said in a virtual meeting last week that studies show that they reduce speeding and crashes. He didn't cite the study.

More important, we see with our own eyes, it is not true. The **Bike Plan on 5th Street, NW, near Grant Circle** shows traffic does not slow down and crashes go up. The plan for Grant Circle nearby would replace a traffic lane with a bike lane. Why would DDOT put a bike lane on traffic circles that are notoriously dangerous while side streets are available and safer?

The Advisory Neighborhood Commission representing Pennsylvania Ave., SE, on Capitol Hill where DDOT narrowed the street for bike lanes, recently endorsed bike lanes on Connecticut Ave., it said, because it is working on Pennsylvania Ave. They ignored the Commissioner who complained that the **Pennsylvania Ave. Bike Plan** forces vehicular traffic into side streets creating hazards.

By its own admission, regarding the **K St. NW Bike Plan**, east of Mt Vernon Square, where two traffic lanes

were removed to make room for bike lanes, DDOT found the road cannot accommodate rush hour traffic.

DDOT is preparing a plan for **South Dakota Ave.**, one of the most dangerous streets in the city – a plan to replace a traffic lane for a bike lane.

The first mission of DDOT must be to make sure that vehicular traffic can get through the city. If speeding is a problem, creating congestion cannot be the answer.

Bike lanes are unsafe on congested, commercial streets. Alternative bike routes are safer and available. If you want to see what's wrong with putting a bike lane on a congested commercial street, visit **17th St. in Dupont Circle**. It is the worst bike plan in the city where after four years, cargo is unloaded from trucks in the intersections. Laura McNeil, the DDOT planner who designed the route, says we have to share the street. No we don't. Not like this. Not every street needs a bike lane.

We applaud the decision to stop the bike lanes on Connecticut Avenue. It is a sound decision based on safety considerations, and we commend the Mayor and DDOT Director Sharon Kershbaum for their courage in the face of an intimidating bike lobby.

When I was growing up and wanted to ride my bike downtown, I would map my route in advance, deliberately avoiding dangerous intersections and

dangerous streets, so that I would get home safe. Today that is DDOT's job - to map routes on side streets and slow streets where biking can be safe. Instead DDOT is directing our most vulnerable populations to the most dangerous routes – endangering seniors, pedestrians, the disabled, and bikers. I know seniors who have ridden their bikes around the city for decades without a problem, so we know it can be done. It need not cost millions. Built dedicated space for biking is unwarranted, particularly when you cannot convince people to hop on a bike.

DC is ranked the fifth among bike-friendly cities in the country. Isn't that good enough? What is all this expense and turmoil for? Fourth place?

DC Safe Streets Coalition asks for two things – Town Halls and bike regulation. There is a bike faction in DC demanding the city make the most dangerous streets safe for biking. When there is competition for limited resources, what we need are regulations. DC cracked down on mopeds overnight. We need bike regulations. Certification, registration, licensing, insurance and helmets.

We see an overriding need to engage the community with Town Halls. People are not awakening to the dangers of bike lanes until they are installed.

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