

April 12, 2017

To: Menlo Park City Council

Subject: Bike Project Field Trial Must Test Bike Safety Claims

A few weeks ago, a collision between my road bike and a white pick-up truck on Woodside Road reminded me that even well marked bike lanes afford little safety and no protection. Seeing a narrow gap in the flow of vehicle traffic, the driver shot across the two-lane highway from a service station driveway on his way to the Pioneer Inn and did not spot me riding in a well-marked bike lane until it was too late. He braked hard but ended up straddling my lane less than 10 feet in front of my front wheel and our collision was unavoidable. If the truck had arrived a few seconds later, I might have ended up underneath. My bike was badly damaged, but fortunately, I was not seriously injured. Since this incident occurred as the Menlo Park prepares a plan for a one-year, field trial of the Oak Grove – Crane – University (“Oak Grove”) bike project, my accident caused me to reexamine the primary rationale for this city investment and the trial metrics that city staff has proposed to gauge potential benefits and negative impacts. So far, the City Council has accepted the bike commission’s claim that this bike project will greatly improve bike safety - especially for students who must cross El Camino to reach their schools. But how does anyone really know? This important claim remains unexamined, and the current field trial plan does not adequately address bike and motorist safety issues. Instead, the Council, bike commission and many residents have incorrectly accepted as an “article of faith” the belief that new bike lanes always create a much safer bike riding environment. While the Council in a March review instructed city staff to better understand the impact of lost street parking, it should also require that more attention be paid to understanding the safety attributes of the project design and NOT approve a final field trial plan before safety receives greater attention both before and during the field trial.

Experienced bicyclists and bike network design professionals will readily acknowledge that other factors play a much more important role in safety than bike lanes Why? Because most bike accidents occur at places where cars and bikes cross paths - at intersections, busy commercial driveways and parking lots - rather than on the sections of streets between them. Bike lanes appeal to bicyclists not because they make a bike route safer but primarily because the separation of bikes and vehicles increases their comfort and creates the *perception* of greater safety. Bike lanes also have the same positive effect on motorists, as they prefer not to share lanes with bikes.

Here are a few recommendations that would help the Council acquire an excellent understanding of the bike safety benefits that this bike project might provide and ensure that the best safety measures are employed.

1. Require the consultant who designed the bike lanes and bike routes for this project also perform a safety analysis on its design. It needs to identify potential trouble spots, assess risks for different types of bike riders and recommend potential ways to reduce risk exposure. Bike network designers use five different categories for bicyclists when evaluating the suitability of bike routes and bike lanes for different types of riders on particular streets. This analysis should be performed before the trial starts.
2. The current field trial metrics submitted by city staff only requires the collection of *reported collision data*, an inadequate proxy for bike safety because most bike accidents do not involve collisions and bike accidents are rarely reported. For example, no one reported my Woodside collision because I did not experience a medical emergency. The safety metrics should be expanded beyond reported collisions and all potential trouble spots carefully monitored, perhaps with cameras.

Here are a number of locations that warrant close attention. (see 3-4 pages for street and aerial views)

1. The eastbound bike lane on **Oak Grove** will pass parked vehicles, and while there will be an eighteen inch wide buffer, motorists will still need to cross bike lanes whenever they enter or exit a street parking space.
2. Bicyclists will still share vehicle lanes on the two narrow and busy sections of **Crane** between Menlo Avenue and Oak Grove, and Crane is usually lined with parked cars. Many bicyclists do not understand that the street markings (“sharrows”) are installed primarily to encourage them to ride in the middle of the lane ride where they can avoid opening doors. Unfortunately, many motorists and bicyclists do not understand this fact and bicyclists generally do not like to “take the lane” and impede faster vehicles.
3. Three public parking plazas and six busy entrances and exits exist on **Crane** between Santa Cruz and Oak Grove. Vehicles will frequently cross paths with bicyclists and visibility is poor. How will bike-vehicle conflicts be minimized?
4. The dramatic redesign of the **Crane-Santa Cruz-Crane intersections** will create a challenging environment for both motorists and bicyclists, especially given the number of distractions at this location and the likely impatience of motorist who will need to stop at two new additional stop signs on Santa Cruz. Also, the California legislature is now considering [A.B. 1103](#), which in its current form would authorize “a person operating a bicycle approaching a stop sign, after slowing to a reasonable speed and yielding the right-of-way, to cautiously make a turn or proceed through the intersection without stopping, unless safety considerations require

otherwise.” While this might make a great deal of sense in “quiet” neighborhood settings with little vehicle traffic it likely does not at this location, *especially for elementary and middle school students*. If this legislation passes what additional safety measures will be needed?

5. The creation of the **Garwood Way** extension at Station 1300 means there will be four busy intersections in a short section of Oak Grove (at El Camino, Merrill, Garwood Way and Alma) where bikes and vehicles will constantly cross paths. Are new bike and/or vehicle traffic controls needed? Where?
6. **Station 1300** will generate an estimated 700 more daily vehicle trips on this section of Oak Grove, increasing the total to 10000 in 2019. How will the trial plan account for this change when this commercial development will not be completed until after the trial is over?
7. The bike route crossing at Crane might encourage more students to ride on **Santa Cruz** between University and El Camino. This is not safe behavior bicyclists will likely weave in and out of busy traffic, there is active parking, and the lanes were recently narrowed by the installation of outdoor street dining areas.
8. Some final thoughts: the actual crossings of El Camino at Oak Grove and Valparaiso will be similar, e.g., four-way traffic control lights, bike lanes separated from right turn lanes, pedestrian crosswalks and pedestrian light controls. The city spent more than \$450,000 on pedestrian and bike safety improvements on Valparaiso and Glenwood in 2016. Were these not sufficient for bicyclists who cross El Camino north of downtown? The continuous bike lanes on these streets connect to those on Laurel and Ravenswood east of Laurel, and there is no lane sharing; no complex intersections; no parking plazas. There is no lane sharing; no complex intersections and no parking plazas. Why is the proposed project viewed as safer than existing bike facilities? I recommend the Council ensure it fully understands this important bike safety issue and has a trustworthy trial plan before approving any final field trial plan.

I look forward to hearing how our City Council intends to address this important matter.

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Publisher & Editor

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