

RE: Bike Path Safety Meeting

Transportation and Policy Planning Board:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on bike path safety in Madison. The issue with safety on the bike paths isn't so much a 'bike' issue as it is a 'conflict of interest' issue. I have biked on the Madison bike paths for years and I also have as a Civil Engineer extensive experience designing bike paths. I would like to make several observations and comments about this issue below:

- As a frequent bike path commuter, I have seen an uptick in the amount of bike congestion on the bike paths recently as the result of increased gasoline prices.
- At least one bike path in Madison, the Southwest Commuter Path, was developed using WI Department of Transportation (DOT) road funding. The intent was to create a commuter corridor for bikes and as you have pointed out in your power point presentation, WI State Stat, Sec. 340.01(22), defines bike paths as 'roads'. For this reason, bike paths should be treated more like roads and not sidewalks. An educational component is needed to inform folks that bike paths are **NOT** the same as sidewalks. Would you take a walk down the center of University Avenue or Monroe Street with a baby stroller or walking your dog?
- The current safety issues being discussed are caused not so much by bikers but by the 'other users' on the paths. It's common to see masses of these other users. They include: people walking/jogging sometimes 2-4 abreast in groups; folks that think it's great to walk right down the center of the bike path with no regard to staying close to the path edge; parents pushing baby strollers and jog along strollers, many of them double-wide; dog walkers alone or in groups and often with someone pushing a stroller; the West Track Team using the bike path as their training track after school running in packs of 20-40 people; other running groups using the path as if it's a practice track (they are now painting distance hash marks on the path); wheelchairs; other wide vehicles like recumbent bikes; skate boarders; roller bladers; roller skiers with push poles; hikers; kids playing; and masses of people walking down the path on UW football Saturdays. Many non-bike users are totally oblivious of bike traffic on the path since they are wearing head phones or ear buds listening to music.
- Bike paths within the city need to be wide enough to accommodate intended uses safely. I noticed the recent resurfacing of the Southwest Commuter Path (Fall 2021) between Glenway Street and Commonwealth Avenue actually narrowed the path approximately 2-feet from its' original width. If anything, bike paths should be wider, not narrower if they are to accommodate large numbers of multiple uses safely.

- I see from the power point presentation that some of the ideas being floated include placing speed limits and speed bumps on the bike paths. These ideas are not practical. Very few bikers have speedometers and speed bumps create their own safety problems especially if the pavement is wet or snow or ice covered. As a frequent bicycle commuter, I'm trying to get from point 'A' to point 'B' in an efficient amount of time and speed limits and bumps are only impediments to efficient travel. My bicycle is my primary mode of transportation and I'm not simply out joy riding at a snail's pace.

In summary, it's not necessarily bikes that are causing problems on the bike paths, it's the other users. The City should either restrict or prohibit other uses on the bike paths (there are a lot of sidewalks in Madison intended for pedestrian only use) or at least require non-bicyclists to use the paths in a single file manor and to stay on the right shoulders of the path. Restricting dog walking, and baby strollers would also increase path safety immensely.

Respectfully,

John Olson,
Civil Engineer