

From: [Jonathan Mertzig](#)
To: [Transportation Commission](#)
Cc: [Tishler, Bill](#)
Subject: 9/14/22 TC Meeting Comment-File #73519: Whitney Way & Odana Safety Improvements
Date: Saturday, September 10, 2022 2:46:59 PM

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[cc: District 11 alder Bill Tishler]

Dear members of the Transportation Commission,

I am writing in regard to an item on the September 14th, 2022 agenda in respect to executing an agreement with WisDOT for design and construction of safety improvements at S. Whitney Way & Odana Rd. (Legistar item #73519).

While I am excited to see funding and activity regarding improvements to this intersection, I am concerned as to whether plans for this intersection will truly meet the mark for addressing the safety concerns faced by pedestrians and cyclists at this intersection.

I cross this intersection as a pedestrian on a daily basis as part of my commute to catch buses on Whitney Way, and often cross either by foot or on a bike while running errands in the neighborhood. In its current state, this area is an absolute nightmare of hostile design mixed with aggressive driver behavior. I fear that upcoming changes to Metro routes that align more service on Whitney Way will only force more people in the neighborhood to have to deal with this toxic car sewer of an intersection. Thus, the prospect of safety improvements here is certainly welcome.

My concern is that seeing the vague details provided with this agenda item, combined with WisDOT's mediocre reputation for failing to provide actual state-of-the-art pedestrian + bike safety designs, is that this agreement may leave us with a situation not substantially better than the status quo. The description of planned changes does not appear to address several key concerns with this intersection:

Aggressive driver behavior threatening pedestrians in crosswalks

Currently pedestrians are faced with frequent incursions into the crosswalks during walk phases, caused by drivers aggressively turning while pedestrians should have the right of way. This is something I face nearly every day, and I often fear for my safety because of it. Any reconstruction of this intersection must address this problem with measures such as ample Leading Pedestrian Intervals at the signal so that pedestrians can cross without being threatened by turning drivers.

Hazards caused by the NB Whitney slip lane

The slip lane on northbound Whitney Way to turn eastbound onto Odana presents a number of safety issues. It creates an additional point of conflict for pedestrians trying to cross the street, which is particularly exacerbated by poor visibility at the curb due to a hedgerow along Whitney Way.

The slip lane also allows drivers—many of whom have exited from the Beltline nearby at

relatively high speed—to continue at inappropriate speeds onto Odana and even sometimes continue at speed in turns onto Segoe, presenting a safety issue for pedestrians and cyclists trying to cross at other nearby intersections. Removal of the slip lane should be a major priority in improving safety in the stretch between Whitney and Segoe.

Poor bike network continuity through the intersection

Currently decent on-street bike lane facilities exist further north on Whitney and on either side of Odana, and nearby there is a relatively good (albeit convoluted) lower-stress connection between Odana and the Beltline path, however, this intersection is a massive failing point in the local bike network causing discontinuity between these routes.

All bike lanes seem to end in utter chaos here—I frequently watch cyclists struggle to navigate this intersection safely, with many finding creative (and often risky) maneuvers necessary to make turns, or I see cyclists resorting to using sidewalks or weaving through parking lots to avoid riding through the intersection. Only the bravest “vehicular cyclists” ride through with traffic amid this intersection’s total lack of bike facilities.

It should be imperative that any redesign of this intersection include high quality, high safety bike facilities that connect the existing on-street lanes on Whitney and Odana and also facilitate access to the Beltline Path.

In light of the above concerns, I would encourage the members of this committee to carefully consider whether this agreement with WisDOT will truly provide the level of safety improvements we need and deserve, and I hope you will hold all stakeholders accountable in delivering a quality outcome that will truly meet the needs of the community.

Thank You,
Jonathan Mertzig

5302 Odana Rd #201
Madison, WI 53711
jmmertzig@uwalumni.com