

# Portland Bicycle Advisory Committee

*Working to Make Bicycling a Part of Daily Life in Portland*

1120 SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Room 800  
Portland OR 97204



June 28, 2016

Commissioner Steve Novick  
1221 SW 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 210  
Portland, OR 97204

Dear Commissioner Novick,

The City of Portland Bicycle Advisory Committee would like to offer our strong endorsement, with some recommendations for improvement, for the proposed Safe Accommodation for Pedestrians and Cyclists In and Around Work Zones resolution that is being considered by City Council. The City of Portland's proposed new work zone guidelines for safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle access is a significant achievement towards advancing the city's active transportation goals. For years, people who walk and bike have been subjected to detours around construction sites that were inconvenient, circuitous, hazardous, or in some cases, nonexistent.

Frequently, people who bike have had to merge into heavy traffic when construction zones forced the closure of existing bike lanes, or have been directed along indirect detours that often had inadequate or missing wayfinding signage. Some examples of circuitous or unsafe bicycle detours in recent years are shown below. These are only a fraction of examples of incidents in which work zones have forced people riding to merge with vehicle traffic, creating unsafe and uncomfortable conditions.

5000 Block SW Barbur Boulevard (*Photo: Seth Alford*)



SW Broadway and Madison (*Photo: @msfour*)



N Williams and Cook (Photo: Carl Larson)



Broadway Bridge (Photo: Aaron Brown)



Moreover, sidewalks have frequently been barricaded at work zones, forcing pedestrians to cross the street multiple times (sometimes within the same block), or to detour around the entire block. These closed sidewalks often have been used to store materials, trailers, or vehicles as part of the construction site, while all vehicular travel lanes remained open, and in some cases, even the curbside parking lane remained open. When the only detour is to walk across the street that leads to situations such as pedestrians walking in the adjacent bike lane.

In the last several months, we have already seen examples of improved work zone accommodations that have almost certainly been developed as a result of this draft policy, and so we know it is already having a tremendous positive impact on the quality-of-life for pedestrians and bicyclists. For example, this detour below at SE 21st and Belmont closed two parking lanes and a travel lane to allow people who walk and bike a safe space to travel along the south block face without having to cross the street.

SE 21st and Belmont (Photo: Michael Andersen)



Another example of a high-quality detour is located on N Willamette Blvd. Where a retaining wall construction project closed the southern half of the roadway and forced westbound auto traffic to detour, the work zone maintained the eastbound bicycle lane through the project, while permitting westbound riders to use the existing sidewalk.

N Willamette and Hurst



While this guidance is a welcome development, there are some areas of the ordinance that we feel can be improved to strengthen the requirements for providing continuous passage through work zones for bicycles. In general, there are numerous provisions that include the suggestive “should” language when using “shall”, which indicates a requirement, would go further to meet the goals of this ordinance and of our city’s Vision Zero policies.

#### **Section IV Administrative Rule: Safe accommodation requirements for cyclists:**

- *“Cyclists should be separated from motor vehicle traffic and pedestrians.”*

It is recommended that separation from motor vehicle traffic be required under the following circumstances:

- When a bicycle lane is functioning as a multi-use path with pedestrians at a work zone.

- Where a bicycle lane is provided in an existing travel lane, to reduce confusion among road users.

Separation should take the form of flexible bollards, plastic drums or safety barricades, depending on the speed and volume of automobile traffic.

- *“A cycle route should be free of obstructions and surface hazards.”*  
This provision does not use “shall” language, which may be in conflict with the previous requirement to provide an “ADA compliant” temporary route when the “work zone affects an accessible and ADA compliant pedestrian route.” If this provision is not made a requirement, we recommend that the city expand on this item to include situations where obstructions or surface hazards may be deemed acceptable by the City of Portland.
- “The method for providing safe accommodations for cyclists should be prioritized as follows...”

We strongly endorse this hierarchy as proposed and request that it be made a requirement at work zones. However, an additional provision (C) should be included, which states: “Provide a dedicated cycle lane in an existing traffic lane, and convert the the parking lane on the opposite side of the street (if available) to a travel lane.” This should be considered on one-way streets where curb extensions are not prevalent, but should also be considered on undivided two-way streets and would prioritize safely accommodating bicycles through work zones over storage of private vehicles on public right-of-way. This must be considered before considering merging bicyclists with general traffic.

In addition, there is a need to account for construction zones located along protected bicycle lanes located along the curb, if the bicycle lane needs to be closed or repurposed for pedestrian use. Along parking-protected bicycle lanes such as SW Broadway, it would be most appropriate to repurpose the adjacent parking lane for exclusive bicycle use. On streets where bicycle lanes are protected by movable planters such as NE Multnomah Street, bicycles should be given space to ride in what is currently the buffer area. These actions should be explored before merging cyclists and motor vehicle traffic into a shared lane.

NW Johnson and 13th



Where construction zones are located along city-designated Neighborhood Greenways with no dedicated cycle lanes, bicycle travel must be prioritized over automobile access. Where temporary street closures are necessary, all steps should be taken to maintain bicycle access on the street through the work zone, with a detour onto the sidewalk being the next best option and a detour along a parallel street as the last resort. A great example of this was provided at NW Johnson and 13th in the photo above, where auto access was closed but bicycle access was preserved.

### City of Portland Bureaus

- *“City Bureaus performing work constructing or maintaining city infrastructure should provide safe accommodation per this policy.”*

The “should” language should be revised to “shall” to strengthen this provision. The photo below left shows an example of a Portland Public Works construction site where bicycle riders on N Broadway in Lloyd District were forced to merge in a high-stress environment, without adequate accommodations through the work zone(s). The example below right of a Multnomah County worksite on Burnside Bridge where a travel lane was closed to provide a temporary bike lane is a good example of how public agencies should handle work zones that affect bike facilities.

N Broadway and 3rd



Burnside Bridge (Photo: Michael Andersen)



In conclusion, the Bicycle Advisory Committee applauds City of Portland staff for finally addressing the crucial issue of how to safely accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists around work zones. Aside from relatively minor caveats, we urge City Council to adopt this resolution. As Portland continues to grow and develop into a more urban and dense place, providing safe and accessible detours for pedestrians and bicyclists will help bolster our city's reputation as a city that embraces active transportation and recognizes the importance of prioritizing biking and walking above other modes if we are to make progress on our adopted mode split and climate action goals.

Sincerely,

  
Ian Stude, Chair  
Portland Bicycle Advisory Committee

cc: Mayor Charlie Hales  
Commissioner Nick Fish  
Commissioner Dan Saltzman  
Commissioner Amanda Fritz  
Transportation Director Leah Treat