**Why Do City Leaders Want to Build Bike Lanes That Reduce Safety?**

The Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) is planning to add dedicated bike lanes on both sides of 35th Ave NE in Northeast Seattle. It claims that the bike lanes will make 35th safer. **This is simply not true. And it means we’re diverting scarce funds from actions that truly would make 35th safer for all.**

 **Two key underlying facts**

* 35th Ave is a busy **arterial**. It is a major transit route for residents, transit, first responders, and commercial delivery trucks. It has **15,400** vehicle trips per day.
* The bike routes in the Seattle Bicycle Master Plan (BMP) – the real driver of the 35th bike lanes – are only lines on a map. The consultants who drew the map did not actually view streets such as 35th.

  **Arterials are not safe for bicyclists**

* According to SDOT, 74.5% of bicycle crashes happen on arterials.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* An NIH-funded study concluded that cycling on an arterial creates up to 8 times more risk than riding on a designated bike way on a side street.[[2]](#footnote-2)
* A 2016 study showed that cyclists inhale significantly more air pollution on high-traffic arterials than on routes with low-traffic.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* Most people do not want to ride bikes on vehicle-filled arterials.[[4]](#footnote-4)

  **Multiple intersections make 35th unsafe for bike lanes**

* According to SDOT, the majority of bicycle and pedestrian crashes happen at intersections. “Arterial street intersections… contribute to higher potential risk for all bicycle crash types.”[[5]](#footnote-5)
* The federally-funded Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center states, “Separated bike lanes are most effective in locations where there are fewer intersection and driveway conflicts as well as minimal loading/unloading activity.”[[6]](#footnote-6)
* On 35th, between 47th and 85th, there are 4 major intersections, 14 residential cross streets, and about 150 driveways. All these intersections not only create collision risks, but with so many, one wonders if special striping to alert turning drivers to the bike lanes will lose its impact.
* Commercial loading and unloading activity on 35th is widespread and frequent.

 **The 35th bike lanes themselves are risky for cyclists**

* There is little good data and much disagreement on whether bike lanes improve safety for cyclists or create a false sense of security.[[7]](#footnote-7) Some studies of protected lanes do show, however, that they result in statistically significant increases in collisions at intersections (+24%), between bikes and right-turning vehicles (+140%), and between bikes and left-turning vehicles (+48%).[[8]](#footnote-8)
* The minimum width of a protected bike lane is 5 feet; 7+ feet is preferable.[[9]](#footnote-9) The minimum buffer width between the lane and vehicles is 3 feet – to prevent cars dooring cyclists (hitting them when opening car doors).[[10]](#footnote-10) On 35th, the bike lanes will be the bare minimum, 5 feet wide, and the buffer between the protected lane and parked vehicles is only 2 feet wide. Dooring is inevitable.
* Experts say bike lanes should not be terminated in a place that leaves cyclists in a vulnerable situation.[[11]](#footnote-11) The south terminus of the 35th Ave bike lane requires cyclists coming or going to the Burke Gilman Trail to cross a dangerous intersection known to some as “dead man’s curve.”

 **35th will not be safer for pedestrians**

* Arterials are unsafe for pedestrians, particularly at intersections. According to SDOT, nearly 80% of pedestrian crashes happen on arterial streets.[[12]](#footnote-12)
* By eliminating 60% of the parking on 35th, moving it all to one side, the City is forcing a large increase in pedestrian crossings, forcing them into high-risk situations with vehicles and cyclists.
* The City’s plan also does little to make it safer for pedestrians to cross 35th: only two additional solar-lit crosswalks are provided. Much more is needed, but funds instead are used for bike lanes.

** The neighborhood will be less safe**

* With only one lane in each direction, travel on 35th will become much slower, especially during rush hours. Frustrated drivers will speed onto side streets, endangering both pedestrians and cyclists.
* Cars leaving driveways on the east side of 35th south of 65th Street will be unable to see cyclists in bicycle lanes as sight-lines are blocked by parked cars, increasing the risk of serious accidents.
* Lanes will be narrower than buses require, increasing the likelihood of bus accidents.

  **What the City could do to actually improve safety**

* There already is a safe alternative bikeway nearby: the 39th Avenue Bike Greenway, only four blocks away. It is safe and connects seamlessly to the Burke Gilman Trail.
* Greenways are superior to arterial bike lanes in many ways. As SDOT states, “Neighborhood greenways are safer, calmer residential streets for you, your family, and neighbors. We make people walking and biking the priority.[[13]](#footnote-13) Substantially more people are willing to bike on a greenway than on an arterial.[[14]](#footnote-14) To encourage safe cycling, the City can add more greenways and improve the one on 39th, e.g., with additional crosswalks.
* If the City truly wants a safer 35th, it can post 25 mph speed limit signs, install solar speed display monitors, and Increase blinking light crosswalks at many more locations. It can add left turn signals and a pedestrian “All Walk” signal at 75th. It can build more sidewalks. It has many options that do not include unsafe bike lanes that hurt business and the community.

1. SDOT Bicycle/Pedestrian Safety Analysis, September 2016, page 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22269506> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Breath Biomarkers to Measure Uptake of Volatile Organic Compounds by Bicyclists” https://pubs.acs.org/doi/abs/10.1021/acs.est.6b01159 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “Four Types of Cyclists,” Portland Office of Transp., www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/44597?a=237507 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. SDOT, fn. 1 at 6. See also “Vision Zero LA – Collision & Countermeasure Analysis: Literature Rev,” 3/16, page 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/planning/facilities\_bike\_cycletracks.cfm [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <http://pedbikeinfo.org/data/faq_details.cfm?id=971> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Vision Zero Los Angeles – Collision and Countermeasure Analysis: Literature Review,” 3/16, pp. 30-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. [www.pedbikeinfo.org](http://www.pedbikeinfo.org), Webinar, “Design Considerations for Separated Bike Lanes,” Slide 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. [www.pedbikeinfo.org/planning/facilities\_bike\_cycletracks.cfm](http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/planning/facilities_bike_cycletracks.cfm); [http://streetsillustrated.seattle.gov/design- standards/bicycle/protected-bike-lanes/](http://streetsillustrated.seattle.gov/design-%20standards/bicycle/protected-bike-lanes/) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. www.pedbikeinfo.org/planning/facilities\_bike\_bikelanes.cfm [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. SDOT fn. 1 at 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. [www.seattle.gov/transportation](http://www.seattle.gov/transportation)/projects-and-programs/programs/greenways-program [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. “Four Types of Cyclists,” Portland Office of Transp., www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/44597?a=237507 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)