

Hall, Renee

From: Iddo Friedberg <idoerg@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, June 28, 2024 12:06 PM
To: City Council and Mayor
Subject: Bicycle safety

[External Email]

Dear City Mayor and Council,

I have read with interest the letter from Jode Edwards claiming that sharing the road is safer for cyclists than protected bike facilities.

Unfortunately, the Forbes article attached to Edwards's email, cited as evidence that shared streets are safer than separated bike lanes, is misleading in many ways.

The article opens with a tragic story of a biker who was killed riding in a bike lane (it did not say whether it was a separate or painted bike lane), citing that it "demonstrates" that bike lanes are unsafe. While tragic, that would be akin to stating that pedestrian crossings are unsafe, citing an accident where a pedestrian was hit by a vehicle at a crossing. The opening story, by itself, does not provide evidence one way or the other on the safety of bike lanes.

Next, the article provides an increase in overall bike death statistics as implied evidence that bicycle lanes are unsafe, without actually talking about bike lanes at all or without even normalizing the increase in pedestrian or other traffic-related deaths. Again, there is no evidence that this increase has anything to do with bike lanes, or even biking.

To make its point, the Forbes article relies almost exclusively on a non peer-reviewed master's thesis by a student at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, which shows an increase in crashes in physically separate bicycle tracks but fails to mention that the authors supported the further construction of physical tracks but with proper planning in intersections, which are the failure points of separate lanes. (One has to wonder how that study was procured by the author of the Forbes article, given that master's theses tend to be hard to identify, as opposed to the mass of easily findable peer-reviewed studies on bike lane safety showing the contrary.) The study also notes that the traffic count is not properly normalized and that the separate bike lanes were constructed in those areas that were originally high traffic, rendering the study without a proper control arm.

https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/arch_crp_theses/57/?utm_source=digitalcommons.unl.edu%2Farch_crp_theses%2F57&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages

Therefore, even the single cherry-picked study provided by the Forbes article's author does not support its conclusions that separate lanes must be eliminated. At the end of the study, it is shown (Fig. 7.1) that most crashes in protected bicycled lanes are at intersections and that the problem is not with separate bicycle lanes but with intersection design. Remedies to that in the form of safe intersection planning are suggested.

Back to the Forbes article: it ends with a recommendation that instead of constructing separate lanes, cities should invest in apps (!) to avoid crashes. There is no mention of how these panaceal "apps" might help. After reading this conclusion, I couldn't help but shake my head at how such a flawed article made it to Forbes.

There is a huge body of evidence from peer-reviewed articles showing that separate bicycle lanes increase safety, not the least of which a study that analyzes traffic crash data over a 13-year period in areas with separated bike lanes on city streets, researchers estimated that having a protected bike facility in a city would result in 44 percent fewer deaths and 50 percent fewer serious injuries than an average city. This does not include the observations from countries such as Denmark and The Netherlands, where traffic planning a-priori includes separate bike lanes, with much lower fatality rates.

A summary of the 13-year, multi-city peer-reviewed study is available [here](#), as well as a link to the full study:

<https://usa.streetsblog.org/2019/05/29/protect-yourself-separated-bike-lanes-means-safer-streets-study-says>

As for our fair city, Ames has few physically separate bike lanes parallel to its roads, and many bike lanes are paint-ons or sharrows. As a non-ideal replacement, Ames allows biking on sidewalks on most streets. While not ideal, I support this over mandating sharing the roads, especially on the arterial roads, as traffic volume and speed prohibit their use by cyclists. Absent an infrastructure that includes separate lanes across our arterial roads (with well-planned intersections), the current situation in Ames is better than the alternative of sharing the roads, even more so when our younger and older cyclists are involved.

Respectfully,

Iddo Friedberg
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Iddo Friedberg

[illegible]