

Evanston officials move forward with proposal to rework Dodge Avenue



Cyclists are pictured using a protected bike lane on Dodge Avenue in Evanston on July 28, 2016. (Kevin Tanaka / Pioneer Press file photo)

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Traffic configurations on Dodge Avenue will be tweaked once again after residents raised concerns about recently installed protected bike lanes on the street.

Evanston City Council members voted unanimously at their Oct. 24 meeting to move forward with a proposal aimed at increasing visibility and safety for all users of the thoroughfare. The plan includes adding 85-foot bus pull-off zones to Dodge Avenue between Howard and Lake streets and 60-foot visibility zones in each direction at intersections without bus stops.

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In September, the city reversed course by dismantling the recently installed protective barrier structures designed to separate the bike lanes from the roadway. While cyclists expressed satisfaction with the new arrangements, some Dodge Avenue residents said the roadway was actually less safe with the protected bike lanes.

According to a presentation by city staff, representatives from the city of Evanston will work with the [Chicago Transit Authority](#) to finalize bus stop locations. Currently, bus riders on Dodge flag down buses rather than wait at designated stops.

A parking study presented by city staff identified several areas where the inclusion of bus pull-offs and visibility zones may result in or exacerbate an existing lack of parking spaces. Several blocks, including Howard to Dobson, Seward to Cleveland, Cleveland to Monroe, Monroe to Madison, Lee to Greenleaf, and Dempster to Greenwood would have inadequate parking if visibility zones and bus pull-offs are installed, according to the study.

Work on the Dodge Avenue bike lanes dates back to 2012, when city officials first began discussing installing protected bike lanes versus the marked lanes that already existed on the street. Lara Biggs, engineering and capital planning bureau chief for the city, wrote in an email that the road was chosen as a bike route because it's "the primary north-south connector street in that portion of Evanston, and it is the only north-south street that goes all the way through from Emerson to the south end of town in that area."

During the Oct. 24 meeting, Ald. Ann Rainey, whose 8th Ward encompasses the southernmost section of the bike route, said the road is too narrow to accommodate protected bike lanes in either direction along with motor vehicle traffic.

"If you're parking on Dodge and you're opening your car door, you're concerned about bicyclists, but if you're opening your car door, you might hit a car going by. The street is too narrow," she said, adding that motorists may be encouraged for that reason to park slightly within the bike lanes, thereby negatively affecting the safety of cyclists.

She suggested reducing the number of protected bike lanes from one on either side of the road to just one lane on one side of the road.

Ald. Don Wilson, 4th, said just one bike lane "doesn't make sense."

City council members also voted in favor of directing city staff to find out whether Northwestern University could help the city construct computer models to test out the effects of adding bus pull-offs and visibility zones in addition to reducing the number of bike lanes from two to one.

The city received a \$480,000 Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program grant for the project in January 2013, according to Biggs. In fall 2014, city council members narrowly voted to maintain a design that placed bike lanes between parked cars and the curb rather than an alternative option which would have placed the bike lanes between parked cars and the roadway.

As part of the CMAQ grant, the city was required to cover 20 percent of the cost of the project, which amounted to roughly \$120,000, according to Biggs. Construction began in June and took about a month to complete. After fielding concerns from community members about the bike lanes, city staff were directed in September to complete an analysis regarding bus pull-offs and visibility. Staff also presented data to city council members highlighting a significant increase in the number of cyclists using the bike lanes since 2014.

Due to the impending winter, City Manager Wally Bobkiewicz said during the Oct. 24 meeting that the installation of the bus pull-offs and visibility zones on Dodge may need to wait for warmer weather unless the city is able to complete the work in the next month.

"If we can't, we'll wait until spring," he said.

Lee Gaines is a freelancer.

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