

Evanston Aldermen Vote to Keep the Dodge Ave. Protected Lanes

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Update Tuesday 4/24/18 8:30 AM: *The Daily Northwestern reports that Alderman Ann Rainey's proposal to downgrade a portion of the Dodge Avenue bike lane was defeated in committee by a vote of 4-1.*

Crash numbers prove that protected bike lanes on Dodge Avenue in Evanston have significantly reduced crashes and injuries along the corridor. Nonetheless aldermen may vote this evening to downgrade part of the bikeway, bowing to demands from drivers for more convenient parking.

The bike lanes were installed in June 2016 on Dodge (which coincides with California Avenue in Chicago) between Howard Avenue and Lake Street. According to a memo from city staff, the number of traffic collisions on the this stretch dropped by about 18 percent between 2015 and 2017, from 140 to 115.

Moreover, the number of crash injuries along the street were reduced by a whopping 59 percent after the lanes were installed, from 27 to 11. Bike injuries plummeted a full 70 percent, from ten in 2015 to only three in 2017. It's clear that, in conjunction with the speed limit on Dodge being lowered from 30 to 25 in late 2016, the protected lanes are doing their job to calm traffic, shelter cyclists, and make all road users safer.

However, issue with the project was a gap in the protected bike lanes on the block of Dodge south of Oakton Street by Dawes Elementary School. 8th Ward alderman Ann Rainey, who originally opposed the protected lanes, changed her position and called that unprotected section "unfortunate" and "terrifying" at a July 2016 City Council meeting.

However, Rainey has flipped again and is now catering to motorists in her ward by leading a push to downgrade the half-mile stretch of curbside, parking-protected bike lanes, on Dodge between Oaktown and Howard to non-protected lanes, located on the left side of the parking lane. Ironically, this would be the same layout as lanes by the elementary school, which she previously said were so frightening to ride in.

According to a report from Evanston Now's Bill Smith, Rainey has said her call for downgrading the bike lanes is largely in response to complaints from drivers who dislike parking to the left of the bike lane. (Shortly after installation, motorists also argued that the lanes obstructed sight lines for turning drivers, and made it more difficult to get out of the way of emergency vehicles – in response the city modified the lanes near intersections.)

The memo from city staff, sent to members of City Council in advance of tonight's meeting, noted that downgrading the bike lanes on this segment of Dodge would cost an estimated \$150,000. The memo also noted that Evanston would probably have to pay back some or all of a \$292,000 federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement grant that was used to build the \$455,186 bikeway. Moreover, the memo stated, returning that money could jeopardize future grant awards to Evanston.

Hopefully other aldermen will do the right thing tonight by voting down Rainey's proposal, which would make Evanstonians less safe and waste taxpayer money.