



August 8, 2012

Mayor William W. Brien  
Vice Mayor John Mirisch  
Members of the City Council  
455 North Rexford Dr.  
Beverly Hills, CA 90210

Honorable Mayor Brien & Members of the City Council:

I always welcome the opportunity to address City Council and I look forward to revisiting the Bike Route Pilot program when it comes back to study session. I expect that this well-intentioned effort will benefit from the kind of in-depth - discussion we've seen about Roxbury Park and historic preservation. These are difficult problems with achievable outcomes. And we're all the richer for the detailed policy discussion that ensues.

As I mentioned in my last appearance in early July, the Pilot will benefit from reexamination because (as I've said) it [falls short as a planning process](#). When presented to Council in early July, the recommendations didn't fully acknowledge that cycling is no longer about only sport & recreation but instead is an everyday travel choice made by people who would simply rather not drive. And given our congestion, that is to be encouraged.

But safety is a key consideration. Beverly Hills residents who express an inclination immediately admit that they're afraid to ride our streets. In July I mentioned that cyclists bear the risk but I misspoke when citing the number of cycling fatalities. For the record I'd like to provide Council with the most recent tally to date this year: 44 cyclists have died on Southern California roads with fatalities peaking to three per week this summer. As Council looks ahead to discussing the Pilot in an upcoming study session, I hope that safety is as paramount a concern for policymakers as it is for each cyclist.

In the Pilot process, however, safety was literally an afterthought. Bike-involved collisions were not discussed until the May 9<sup>th</sup> commission meeting and even focused on summary collision reports only from 2009 and 2010. Moreover, deliberation referenced only *a summary table* of those summary reports. At [BetterBike.org](#) I [look more closely at the data](#) provided to the commission and found that four of the 25 collisions in 2010 were felony hit-and-run. In that year, seven minors received injuries sufficient to require filing a collision report. Yet despite commissioners' concern for pedestrian injury, only one bike-involved collision injured a pedestrian.

We have available collision data through mid-2012, of course, but it wasn't provided or analyzed for the commission. We should look at it to validate a police representative's recent observation that bike-involved collisions are trending upward.

**Better Bike**

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### **Shortcomings: A Roadmap for a Better Process**

I urge City Council to proceed deliberately. The Pilot revealed opportunities where we can pay closer attention to process fundamentals. For example, basic planning inputs weren't included. At no time did our Transportation division staffers, consultant Fehr & Peers, or our commissioners reference the existing Bicycle Master Plan or the General Plan's circulation element. Of course we have no actual bicycle counts around which to plan.

Complete Streets, too, was nowhere addressed in discussion or documents provided to the commission. California policy guidance is explicit about making our streets universally accessible to pedestrians, cyclists and motorists, yet neither the feasibility study nor staff presentations touched on it. It must be an elemental part of any transportation planning process.

And most critically, the Pilot failed to meet a minimum standard for effective public participation. Going by the spirit of the Brown Act, for example, the Pilot meeting notices routinely posted at 5 pm the day before each meeting hardly reflects an accessible process. Meeting agendas were also much too cursory. Not least, our collective community-side contributions over many meetings were distilled to fewer than ten short bullet points when provided to the commission.

And if one measure of effective participation is attendance, the fact that it declined so precipitously indicates that we *must* do better. In the end, only a small handful of local advocates remained around the table. Representatives from cycling organizations had long since stopped coming.

### **Next Steps**

From here, we in the Beverly Hills bicycle community are looking ahead. I respectfully suggest that Council direct Transportation staff to reframe this process as a true transportation planning initiative. That would mean referencing our city plans and best practice studies; and it would mean tapping into the work of relevant commissions like Planning, Recreation & Parks, and Public Works. We want our bike-related infrastructure, initiatives, and programs to move ahead in sync, off course.

Let me suggest several steps that I believe will make for a better planning process:

- We should collect baseline bicycle travel data to assess how streets are used by cyclists today and from which we can anticipate tomorrow how to accommodate a growing number of cyclists;

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- We could establish a city-citizen advisory body or City Council liaison committee to tap the knowledge of the cycling community just like West Hollywood did with their advisory Task Force; and most critically,
- We can begin to make improvements separate and apart from a broader bike planning process including bicycle racks and intersection improvements.

And with your patience let me expand on the last point. With Council support, the city *today* can begin to install standalone bicycle racks where we observe existing need. Staff prepared a PowerPoint presentation back in March but there is no further study needed. Let's just follow the examples of Los Angeles, Santa Monica, and West Hollywood. Each city has installed bicycle racks on an as-needed basis (and they've collectively installed thousands).

We can also install bicycle rack 'corrals.' These highly-visible six-to-eight bicycle rack arrays encourage trips by bike to local shopping districts. Our city's Small Business Task force identified the need for additional foot traffic yet recognized that *vehicular* traffic comes with local impacts. Just this week we heard the Southeast Task Force recommend bike accommodations to help attract patrons to local businesses. We agree.

For corrals the opportunity is clear: we have curb bulb-outs in the Triangle and along South Beverly that today are purposed for trash cans. Tomorrow they could be made available for bicycle parking. Again, little study is needed.

Where safety is concerned, we should and could improve problematic intersections. After reports came to me from cyclists concerning collisions at two intersections, I corresponded with Transportation staff and engineers about striping them for cyclist safety. Yet we passed up the opportunity when repaving South Beverly drive.

To facilitate safe cyclist transit through intersections, Caltrans and US DOT endorse the 'bicycle box.' This colored areas stretches across all car lanes to give cyclists a refuge at the head of the queue, from where they can proceed early across an intersection.

### **Let's Begin With Improvements that Matter**

I have saved the best for last. Let's focus on one key corridor and make it a demonstration project. Crescent Drive was considered for Pilot treatments but constraints imposed on the feasibility study precluded any real innovations there. (Instead something like a bike box was back-burnered for some indeterminate future time.) That is a shame: the garages on Crescent Drive introduce considerable ingress & egress traffic across the path of the cyclist to make it a high-conflict corridor.

Yet Crescent Drive is a great opportunity for a demonstration program. It connects our northern neighborhoods to the Southeast through the Civic Center and Triangle. This

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corridor is unique in that one side is entirely residential and the other relatively under-utilized retail (meaning fewer car trips). And it is sufficiently wide to accommodate buffered bike lanes if we reduce through traffic lanes. While reducing traffic lanes is always controversial, the buffered bicycle lane is the single most effective safety improvement that our city can make here for cyclists.

Low levels of traffic could trigger a traffic lane reduction. The corridor's average daily traffic (ADT) count is sufficiently low that it has not been measured (according to the data that I have) and evidently it accommodates much less vehicular traffic than does adjacent Canon Drive. There is no better place to try cyclist-friendly safety innovations.

The lesson I take from the Pilot process is that it was not well-regarded by many in the bicycle community because it simply didn't go far enough. Crescent offers an opportunity to stretch our imagination and employ good practices we see elsewhere. More broadly, the pilot presents an opportunity to rethink the bike planning process. In the meantime, let's identify and implement forward-looking improvements to make Beverly Hills safe for cyclists now.

I look forward to reintroducing some of the many of the good ideas that came from the community but were largely excised from the recommendations as we move forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Elliot". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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