



August 3, 2011

Chairman Jeff Levine
Members of the Traffic & Parking Commission
455 North Rexford Dr.
Beverly Hills, CA 90210

Dear Chairman Levine and Commissioners:

You'll recall that I've appeared before your commission since mid-2010 to advocate for routes and racks, plans and programs. Our objective at Better Bike is to make cycling more safe, convenient, and enjoyable, and to that end I've suggested numerous low-dollar, high-value facilities, including racks and lane markings, that should provide an outsized return on a relatively modest traffic and parking investment.

From a broader planning perspective, I've suggested the installation of bike lanes on Santa Monica Boulevard - a signature Better Bike objective - and a network of bike-friendly routes to make getting about town by bike a sensible transportation choice. An update to our current 1977 bike plan (appendix) is key to realizing a broader, non-auto transportation strategy. The SM Blvd. lanes in particular is the #1 expressed priority of cyclists and bike advocates, whether their travel originates in Beverly Hills or beyond. And it would be the single greatest contribution our city can make to regional non-motor connectivity.

The perception has evolved among we in the cycling community that the city does not care about our needs. And in the absence of any significant improvements since the city provided racks to the Golden Triangle, I must agree. *Our city has utterly failed cyclists by doing nothing to make our roads safer.* It appears that Transportation hasn't even considered (much less implemented) the kind of facilities or programs that we see in other cities and that would make cycling attractive to would-be cyclists here in Beverly Hills.

We have to ask why this is the case now, a full year after your Commission created an Ad-Hoc Bike Plan Update Committee and more than six months after formalizing a task list. The Ad-Hoc Bike Plan Update Committee has heard our concerns. In June we met with the Commissioners and staff to communicate directly our concerns and our feelings as second-class road users in Beverly Hills. We suggested to the Ad-Hoc Committee that the city should at least provide needed facilities such as:

- Bike racks where cyclists need them - near employment centers, cultural centers, public buildings, etc.;
- Bike route network in our city to guide cyclists (suggested routes included Charleyville and Rexford)
- Share-the-road markings such as sharrows with appropriate signage; and,
- Roundabouts or traffic circles to eliminate some 4-way stops that impede movement.

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In the program arena we suggested the need for:

- Racks-by-request for racks installed at public expense in the right-of-way where needed near small businesses;
- City support for a merchant discount-to-cyclists program to boost cyclist participation in local commerce;
- Safety & education classes to ensure that everyone is riding safely (our single class was a positive first step); and,
- Chamber of Commerce and the Visitors Bureau support for promoting cycling to visitors.

These are all appropriate suggestions from our community that appear to have gone nowhere with Transportation – or the Ad-Hoc Committee.

Perhaps the problem is city-side communication? We have repeatedly reached out to staff to make our concerns known and to suggest appropriate solutions at modest costs. Yet we've never been contacted for follow-up, and have to push, push, push to get any updates at all. What's more, the staff contact that we requested for bike issues has not materialized - nor has the formal work plan that we requested of the Ad-Hoc Committee in June.. (The meeting minutes are not a formal work plan.) Why not contact our community? The lack of outreach comports with city practice to reach out in a pro-forma way, long after key decisions are taken. It also reminds our community that

At the June meeting, one commissioner noted that the city had originally started with bike racks in the Golden Triangle to build momentum, but if that's the case, then momentum has clearly stalled. To date it appears the only progress made on that task list is the application of decals to racks and the development of a bike rack map.

As for what we have – the map – it's not usable. Map dots are too out-of-scale to meaningfully indicate the actual location of racks. Moreover, several bike racks indicated are not to be found in the locations indicated. Several more (at Civic Center and 3rd/Foothill for example) aren't noted. And to my knowledge, though, that map has not been posted online (per the task list). Beverly Hills alone among cities in the region makes zero mention of cycling as a form of recreation, fitness, or transportation. No safety tips, no maps, no nothing.

Better Bike has produced our own rack map, however, on our own time and on our own dime. We searched out the racks and plotted them with a pushpin in order to more accurately (and intuitively) denote locations. We did it as a service to our cycling community. And last, because our non-standard racks are difficult to spot in the first place, the decal is not helpful to locating a rack either. To my knowledge, nobody in the cycling community asked for decals.

The city's new budget (FY 2011-12) identifies 550 hours of staff time for the bike plan update, and we will be anxiously awaiting word of forward progress. Real progress; substantive progress. Anything less at this point is not only unsatisfactory, it is cynical and cynicism-inspiring.

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At bottom, communication seems to be the lowest hanging fruit that is ripe for city picking. We seem not to be working together, and we haven't even begun to encounter the turbulence experienced in other bike plan update processes.

Perhaps this owes to how we frame the process. In June Commissioner Levine identified an overarching objective for the city: To get the community and those in charge to play well with cyclists. With all due respect, we cyclists *are* the Beverly Hills community. We cycle for leisure and recreation, for fitness and transportation. We are fathers, mothers, kids and workers. If you take at face value a remark I hear very often in City Hall, we are even city officials too.

To frame it as opposing parties, or to view the larger community as sub-communities locked in a zero-sum struggle for road or park or any other resource, in my opinion, obscures the relationships that need to exist if we are to move forward. We in the cycling community don't want to feel cynical about those who work on our behalf, and we don't need to battle other stakeholders when safer roads for cyclists are better for everyone – including motorists.

I'll close with a personal anecdote. This past Tuesday evening I was traveling Eastbound on Wilshire approaching Beverly Drive on my bike. I'm a transportation cyclist primarily, and on this gentle downhill slope I was keeping pace with auto traffic as usual, traveling approximately 25-30 mph. Now I am allowed under state law to take the full right lane in that case, or indeed any lane as long as I'm not obstructing traffic. But instead I chose to ride to the right as a courtesy – to share the road.

That was the wrong decision because a pavement mogul caught my front wheel and nearly threw me from the bike. As an experienced cyclist I recovered and kept upright, but the impact fractured my U-lock frame mount and sent my lock skating across Wilshire, where I did stop traffic to retrieve it.

In this case, to whom at Transportation am I to turn when I want to communicate my concerns about the dearth of dedicated bike facilities or signage? With whom in city government should I campaign for a safety awareness program for cyclists and motorists so that motorists aren't right on my rear wheel on Wilshire? Who in the city will protect my safety on our hazardous roads?

Commissioners, I congratulate the Ad-Hoc Committee on its first year in existence, but to whom do we turn as second-class road users when we have lost all faith that Transportation, the Ad-Hoc Committee, or the Traffic & Parking Commissioners will take even a single substantive step forward toward much-needed bike improvements?

Sincerely,

