

WINSTON DOWNS

Community Association

February 27, 2020

Eulois Cleckley, Executive Director
Denver Department of Transportation and Infrastructure/DOTI
201 W. Colfax Ave. Department 608
Denver, CO 80202

Re: Proposed bike path/bike lane to be installed on E. Virginia Avenue from S. Jersey St. to S. Quebec. Bike path would connect Cherry Creek Bike Path to Highline Canal Bike Path.

Dear Mr. Cleckley:

This letter summarizes concerns expressed by attendees of the Virginia Bike Lane “listening session” that DOTI held with members of the Winston Downs and South Hilltop communities on January 21, 2020. It also outlines action items identified at that meeting by the members and board of the Winston Downs Community Association (WDCA), South Hilltop Neighborhood Association rep, DOTI staff and Denver City Councilwoman Amanda Sawyer that must be addressed prior to moving to the implementation phase of the project.

First, WDCA members do not have a blanket objection to expanding access to safe bike lanes. Many of our residents, as a matter of fact, are avid cyclists, some of whom attended the meeting and expressed serious concerns about the bike lane route and design.

Secondly, ***a clear outcome of the meeting was neither the project design nor the proposed route on E. Virginia Ave. meet the interests and needs of the local community.***

Thirdly, it is not apparent that the project as currently envisioned will improve safety for cyclists, pedestrians and school children. There are alternative design and bike lane route options that could better enhance safety and bike lane connectivity for a larger number of users.

Our concerns are grouped into four main categories:

1. Lack of transparency and community input
2. Safety
3. Bike lane connectivity and use
4. Parking access and homeowner values

1. Lack of Transparency and Lack of Community Input

The Virginia corridor was a recommended bike lane location from a plan last updated in Denver Moves five years ago. That high-level plan did not include design details and was not based on current information. Neither the Winston Downs nor the South Hilltop community was engaged in the design process for this project prior to this presentation. In short, both communities were blindsided.

Many Winston Downs residents support buildout of a safe and effective bicycle infrastructure in Denver; however, we want to see the City make a real effort to learn from our knowledge and concerns in the process. Design tradeoffs for a project like this need to consider the concerns of the homeowners who

live in the affected neighborhoods, the families who attend our schools and the cycling community the project is supposed to serve.

- DOTI did not provide any room for input into changes to their preferred alternative, instead they presented it as something that was going to be implemented regardless of our input.
- DOTI developed alternative designs, as indicated by drawings that identify the proposed design as a preferred alternative. The respective communities were not privy to these alternatives.
- It is unclear whether the input of Fairmount Cemetery has been sought, as this route would significantly impact bike traffic in their privately owned cemetery.
- We requested copies of attendance sheets and meeting notes from DOTI staff at the meeting. We received only incomplete meeting notes and no attendance sheets as requested. We expect the City to act with full transparency in this matter and be fully responsive to our requests.

2. Safety

In April 2019, the WDCA Board hosted Dana Hoffman of the Denver Department of Public Works (now DOTI) to discuss our community concerns about traffic and road safety. One option WDCA proposed was using road striping to better delineate traffic lanes and reduce road speeds. DOTI rejected this option on the grounds it risks having the opposite effect. It seems quite odd that a bike lane project that relies on road striping is now being proposed as a possible traffic calming measure for our neighborhood.

Specific concerns:

- Removing vehicle parking on Virginia Avenue would eliminate the main obstacle that currently slows traffic speeds and manages risks for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Both the Denver Green School (DGS) and George Washington High School (GWHS) had minimal input in the design process. The current design does not address relocation of the DGS and GWHS student dropoff/pickup areas that would be eliminated, nor does it consider additional limitations on parking access for DGS faculty and staff. Moving DGS parking to side streets would force higher volumes of traffic onto those streets, exacerbating the already unsafe and congested traffic during dropoff and pickup windows. Additionally, increasing the number of vehicle turns by stressed parents and school staff with limited visibility poses a serious risk to school children and families.
- ***Placing the bike lane on Virginia with all of the above mentioned risks does not consider one obvious alternative:*** To incorporate the well-used, shared-use sidewalk on Alameda that is already maintained by the City and provides a sheltered path for cyclists that does not expose them to motor vehicle traffic along its length.

3. Bike Lane Connectivity and Use

The designation of Virginia Avenue as a recommended bike lane appears to be based on its ability to provide linkages to S. Quebec St. and Alameda routes to the east and, ultimately, the Cherry Creek bike trail on the west; however, our homeowners are being asked to sacrifice safety, value and convenience without any real information on whether this is the most effective way to make these connections.

- No information on current or projected bicycle use on Virginia Ave. or nearby connecting routes was made available. Any assessment of design tradeoffs that involve safety and parking issues needs to consider how many people would be impacted, both positively and negatively, and what alternatives may exist to maximize the benefits and mitigate risk.

- Areas that demonstrate a lack of understanding by DOTI
 - Where E. Virginia Ave empties unsafely onto S. Quebec
 - That Fairmount Cemetery is private land that may not be open or willing to accommodate mass bike traffic
 - That Alameda (2 blocks north) already has wide multi-use sidewalks in place and has crossing lights in place at Alameda at S. Quebec
 - About whether or not the S. Quebec sidewalk is multi-use or shared-use and who is responsible for snow removal and vegetation maintenance
- Maps presented at the listening session identified S. Quebec St. as a “shared use sidewalk” but this is contrary to Denver bike maps published by Denver as recently as 2019 that identify S. Quebec St. as a “shared lane” bike route.

4. Parking Access and Homeowner Values.

It appears to many in this neighborhood that there were few, if any, considerations given to existing parking needs.

Concerns we have:

- The methods to collect parking use data used to justify the project were flawed because they relied on data collected during evenings (7:00pm – 9:00pm) and weekends, which does not capture the actual traffic and parking issues found along this corridor. (See **Safety**)
- Traffic speed data presented is not valid. For the portion of the bike lane extending from S. Quebec St. to S. Oneida Way, vehicle speeds are restricted due to posted 25MPH speed limits and stormwater-related dips in the road.
- Calculation methods used to summarize the data presented to the communities were not transparent, and the results do not reflect the relevant parking issues. In particular, stating that 95% of the parking spaces along this route are unused does not acknowledge, Denver Green School’s traffic patterns, the extent that the bike lane will actually be used, or the existence of less restrictive alternatives. Nor does it acknowledge bus dropoff/pickup at GWHS.
- One homeowner who is an appraiser, noted that installation of this bike lane would have an immediate and significant downward impact on home values along the route relative to other comparable homes in the two neighborhoods. The magnitude of the impact on these homeowners must be balanced against the perceived potential benefit associated with a potentially small increase in the number of cyclists using the route.

Next Steps Agreed to At the Meeting

In light of the clearly stated opposition from the Winston Downs and South Hilltop residents represented at the meeting and the lack of appropriate data that formed the design basis for the route, DOTI and our City Councilwoman agreed that the following actions are needed in order to guide any future design efforts and decision-making for the proposed bike lane project.

1. Collect relevant parking and speed data that reflect peak parking times and differences in traffic speeds along the route, so that the design does not reflect a “one-size fits all” approach
2. Provide information on existing design alternatives that DOTI has already considered
3. Evaluate other design alternatives (e.g., rerouting to Alameda shared-use sidewalk, design options that consider traffic speed and other differences along the route) that have a minimal impact on on-street parking and better meet objectives
4. Share the results of the additional data and design efforts with the community **and then hold another community information session** to review the results and solicit feedback prior to making final design and implementation decisions for the bike lane.

5. Meet with DGS and GWHS leadership again to discuss the design and route
6. Ensure that Fairmount Cemetery is informed about planning
7. Determine the status of S. Quebec St. sidewalks from Alameda to Leetsdale
8. Continue paving as planned in 2020 without striping or bike lane painting
9. Communicate the results of the decision-making with WDCA, Councilwoman Sawyer and Councilman Kashmann

One general principle I have gained in my professional career regarding stakeholder engagement is to engage early, and engage often. This helps avoid unnecessary opposition and project delays and increases the likelihood of successful outcomes.

Denver has an ambitious plan to build 125 miles of bike lanes by 2023. Meeting this timeline, and more importantly, meeting the objectives of the initiative, will require a more significant community engagement effort than has been evident in DOTI's efforts.

Our respective neighborhoods look forward to a transparent and productive discussion with DOTI regarding modifications of the proposed Virginia Avenue bike lane that better meet our collective needs and help improve the outcomes of future efforts to expand transportation alternatives for our residents.

Sincerely,



Tim Rooney, President
Winston Downs Community Association
info@winstondowns.com

Cc: Amanda Sawyer, Denver City Councilwoman District 5
Paul Kashmann, Denver City Councilman District 6
Dana Hoffman, DOTI liaison District 5
Office of Mayor Michael Hancock
South Hilltop Neighborhood Association
Frank Coyne, Lead Partner, Denver Green School
Dr. Kristin Waters, Principal, George Washington High School