

June 10, 2014

Darrell B. Mobley, Director
Department of Public Works and Transportation
Inglewood Center III, Suite 300
9400 Peppercorn Place
Landover, MD 20785

Dear Mr. Mobley:

In the last week or so, we were very happy to see the first set of signs stating that “Bicycles May Use Full Lane” (R4-11) which your November 12, 2013 letter to Shane Farthing promised for portions of Good Luck, Sheriff, and Adelphia Roads. Thank you. It is a step forward.

Now that the R4-11 signs on those roads are posted, we would like to respond to the portion of the letter that declined to post those signs on three other stretches of roadway:

- Paint Branch Parkway from US-1 to MD-201
- Good Luck Road east of Trexler Road from 100th Ave to MD-193
- National Harbor Boulevard from Wilson Bridge Trail spur to Waterfront Street.

To keep our inquiry relatively simple, we will focus here on Paint Branch Parkway.

As you may know, your letter takes a very different approach toward these signs and cycling on major roads than the guidance adopted by State Highway Administration under your leadership. MDOT moved forward with its “complete streets” philosophy when you were in charge, with a strong message: bicycles are recognized users of public roads, so the state has a duty to accommodate them on all roads other than expressways, where they are prohibited by law. By contrast, your letter states that the Department does not want people to ride bicycles on streets with heavy traffic, so you do not wish to erect signs to enhance the safety of those who do so. That approach is consistent with the philosophy that Haithum Hijazi had previously communicated to us, but we thought that perhaps DPW&T might adopt the MDOT/SHA approach to bicycle safety, given your long experience there.

We hasten to add, that if someone is just riding around for fun with no particular destination, we agree that roads with heavy traffic are not desirable. But we are not asking for a set of recreational bike route signs. Rather we are asking for safety signs people who do take this road. People ride bikes to the College Park Metro Bike-and-Ride to catch a train to work, and expecting them to add 10–15 minutes to their commute each way is unrealistic.

The research on R4-11 signs does not suggest that these signs induce people to ride on roads with heavy traffic, if that is your concern. Nor do the signs induce cyclists to unsafely ride farther to the left. The only significant effect of these signs is to induce more drivers to change into the left lane to pass, rather than attempt to squeeze between the cyclist and the lane marker. This is most important on roads with heavy traffic.

The original safety studies upon which FHWA and the MUTCD committees relied in approving the R4-11 signs were conducted in Austin Texas, along a road with a 35 mph speed limit and typical traffic volumes of 1300 vph in the AM peak and 1800 vph in the PM peak.

We hope the County will come around to seeing the importance of protecting cyclists on roads with heavy traffic, as SHA did under your leadership. But even if the County rejects the “complete street” approach, we do not see how one can characterize Paint Branch Parkway (or Good Luck Road) as having “heavy traffic”. The traffic on these roads rarely (if ever) is great enough to require both lanes in a given direction.

Yours truly,

James G. Titus, Board of Directors
6718 Glenn Dale Rd.
Glenn Dale, MD. 20769

Notes and References