



DOT Overriding Community Boards on Bike Lanes

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Based on two recent cases in [Brooklyn](#) and [Queens](#), it seems the NYC Department of Transportation is overriding local community board opposition to bike lanes. Under DOT commissioner Iris Weinshall, the DOT has had a policy of only installing bike lanes following the approval of the local community board. However if you consider that bike lanes are an essential piece of traffic safety infrastructure, it would seem more appropriate to *consult* with community boards on how and where bike lanes should be installed, similar to other critical infrastructure. Indeed, an unreleased health department study of cyclist deaths, shows that only 1 of 200 cyclist deaths were on a street with a bike lane.

The short opinion piece about the Fort Greene, Brooklyn Community Board decision is something that should serve as a warning to other community boards opposing bike lanes in the future:

The objections expressed at the board's last meeting before its summer hiatus were, by and large, not about the details of the plan. And it wasn't that the board members were blessed with more local knowledge than the bureaucrats. Turns out, a majority of the board is against bike lanes on principle! Turns out these car-driving, subway-taking neighborhood leaders just flat out have a visceral dislike of bicyclists. They think the two-wheelers are rude and ornery and ill-behaved. Our question for Community Board 2 is: When was the last time you saw a group of four-wheelers or straphangers with cheerful smiles on their faces, obeying every minute detail of the law? A grim reality of life in New York City is that commuters of every variety tend to be stressed out and self-obsessed. In a big city, we don't solve these problems by punishing misbehavior at the expense of everyone's time and safety. No, we do our best to make everyone's difficult lives a little bit easier. Now we shouldn't even have to begin to discuss the merits of getting more people on bicycles. They are too numerous to go through - asthma, global warming, traffic calming, public health, etc. - and we know the good folks that call Fort Greene home and work for no pay on the community board are smart enough to know all that. Consider this editorial a not-so-subtle hint to them that they should think big and think civically, instead of having some knee-jerk gut-level reaction to a whole class of commuters. And again, we never thought we'd say this, but thank goodness for the unaccountable DOT. Let them do their worst! (This time.)

And from the Queens story, we see that Transportation Alternatives and the DOT are basically speaking the same language with quotes from TA and the DOT that I thought I would never see in the same article

Noah Budnick, of Transportation Alternatives, defended the DOT, saying the agency does rigorous studies before putting in a bike lane. "Bike lanes are like crosswalks; they are a necessary safety improvement," he said. Budnick also does not buy the argument that the boulevard is too narrow. **"I have worked with DOT and they count down to the inch the amount of space," he said. "Safety is at**

the top of their list and they wouldn't do it if they didn't think it could work." He noted that if communities are concerned, they can request a protected bike lane, which would put a barrier between bicyclists and traffic or between parked cars and the sidewalk. Kay Sarlin, spokeswoman for DOT, also disputed Hellenbrecht's charges. "DOT had several discussions with Community Board 13 members while planning for a Commonwealth Boulevard bike lane, a project which CB 13 had requested and initially supported," she said. Sarlin added that the need for a bike lane hadn't changed. **"Bicycle lanes help calm traffic, encourage cycling and most importantly, keep bikers safe and we intend to move forward with the installation of this one," she said.**

Considering the recent [rash of cyclist deaths](#), this new policy of the DOT installing bike lanes with advice from the community boards, but not necessarily consent (probably under direct orders from Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff), should be accelerated to complete the NYC Bike Master Plan, which is only 15% complete. Bike lanes are like crosswalks, a necessary feature of traffic safety that should not be considered optional. In addition, the NY City Council should enact legislation to allow cyclists to enter buildings and increase access at parking garages.

This would go a long way to increase cycling as a legitimate commuting options for many New Yorkers with commutes under 10 miles, decrease overcrowding on mass transit and calm automobile traffic.



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