



Supporting a bike lane for Houston Street

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Today, Peakguy, Super G and I attended a [rally-slash-PR event](#) intended to call attention to the need for a bike lane on Houston St. Houston St. is currently being redeveloped, but there are no plans to make the street safer and more accessible for cyclists. While Greenwich Village and Community Board 2 had a significant amount of input regarding the redesign, their initial focus was on pedestrian safety, and cycling issues fell by the wayside. Since the original plan for the redesign was approved, however, [three cyclists have died on Houston Street](#), providing the impetus for the community to ask the DOT to reconsider the plan and add a bike lane. This measure is supported by just about all Manhattan luminaries short of the mayor himself: Borough President Scott Stringer, Assemblyperson Deborah Glick, Councilman Alan Gerson, Senator Tom Duane, even

Speaker Christine Quinn.

As a cyclist, this seems like a no-brainer to me. But the issue of bike lanes is actually a contentious one. Drivers, of course, think they're the only thing that matters, and often feel like cyclists are nothing more than a nuisance. The DOT doesn't want the hassle of putting a lane in, because it may take precious space away from cars.

But are bike lanes even useful? Are they safe for cyclists? Well, there are [pros and cons](#) to the issue.

At [bikexpert.com](#), Alan Wachtel points out some of the issues on both sides of the coin. Some of the positive aspects of the lanes is that more space between the cyclist and the driver makes everyone feel comfortable and bike lanes remind drivers that bicycles are vehicles just as they are. However, there are also drawbacks. For example, Wachtel cites the AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities (1999):it would be easy

"Bike lanes sometimes complicate bicycle and motor vehicle turning movements at intersections. Because they encourage bicyclists to keep to the right and motorists to keep to the left, both operators are somewhat discouraged from merging in advance of turns. Thus, some bicyclists may begin left turns from the right-side bike lane and some motorists may begin right turns from the left of the bike lane. Both maneuvers are contrary to established rules of the road and may result in conflicts..."

Wachtel goes on to list a few more drawbacks, but on the whole, it seems like there are more pros than cons. The [city of Cambridge, MA](#), for example, lists the following pros based on studies of the impact of bike lanes:

- support and encourage bicycling as a means of transportation;
- help define road space;
- promote a more orderly flow of traffic;
- encourage bicyclists to ride in the correct direction, with the flow of traffic;
- give bicyclists a clear place to be so they are not tempted to ride on the sidewalk;
- remind motorists to look for cyclists when turning or opening car doors;
- signal motorists that cyclists have a right to the road;
- reduce the chance that motorists will stray into cyclists' path of travel;
- make it less likely that passing motorists swerve toward opposing traffic;
- decrease the stress level of bicyclists riding in traffic.

I am the first one to agree that cyclists need to use the street as safely and with as much courtesy as drivers and pedestrians. It drives me crazy when deliverymen (or anyone else) bike the wrong way down the sidewalk or the street, since it tarnishes the reputation of all cyclists. But I've also noticed that when the bike lane is there, even the deliverymen will use it. At the very least, the lanes won't make that situation worse. With proper signage and perhaps a PR campaign, both cyclists and drivers could be made more aware of their behavior.

After the rally tonight, NY1 had a segment about the Houston St. bike lane on their show "The Call". It is telling that just about [all of the people who wrote in to the show](#) are in support of more bike lanes in NYC. Furthermore, with nearly every politician in Manhattan and Community Board 2 in favor the bike lane, there should be absolutely no reason for the DOT to ignore their request.

As Noah Budnick of [Transportation Alternatives](#) said on NY1 tonight, less than half of New York City residents own cars, so there's no reason that the city should be bending over backwards to accommodate the drivers. Instead, [it's time New York followed the lead of a city like Chicago](#), whose mayor wants "to make the City of Chicago the most bicycle-friendly city in the United States."



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