The Plan for 35th Ave NE: Myths & Misrepresentations

⚠ Myth 1: Bike lanes will make 35th less dangerous

The key reason given to justify the dedicated bicycle lanes on 35th Ave is that they will improve safety, in large part by reducing vehicle speeds. We all support a safe 35th, including a lower speed limit, but there is no credible evidence that removing parking to install unnecessary and harmful bicycle lanes is the answer.

Plan supporters exaggerate the danger on 35th with no supporting data:

SDOT states that there have been 113 traffic collisions on it in five years (years not specified). SDOT adds that its plan is answering the neighborhood's "call" to reduce serious and fatal traffic crashes. However:

- WA State Patrol collision data for 2013-2017 show only 77 collisions on 35th.
- SDOT Traffic Reports (2012, 2014-2017) show NO serious or fatal collisions on 35th between 2012-2016, only 2 bicycle collisions, and maybe 12 pedestrian collisions (SDOT charts are unclear). State Patrol figures for 2013-2017, however, show only 2 collisions involving pedestrians.
- There were literally millions of trips on 35th over five years. This is not a dangerous street.
- Councilmember Rob Johnson says there have been 250 collisions on 35th over 5 years. Where did these numbers come from?

If safety is the real rationale, the City has many less detrimental options:

- Post new speed limit signs and install solar speed display monitors.
- Increase blinking light crosswalks.
- Look at the myriad other ways to calm traffic that do not include bike lanes.[1]

There already is a safe alternative bikeway nearby:

- The 39th Avenue Bike Greenway is only four blocks away.
- It is safe and goes directly into the Burke Gilman Trail.

⚠ Myth 2: Safety data support the plan

SDOT ignores its own data and relies on misleading information to justify its plan. A few examples.

Placing the bike lanes on an arterial ignores safety data:

- 74.5% of bicycle crashes and nearly 80% of pedestrian crashes happen on arterial streets.[2] 35th is a busy arterial – with a safe bike greenway nearby, a duplicative bike lane does not belong there.

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[1] Vision Zero Los Angeles – Collision and Countermeasure Analysis: Literature Review," March 2016.

[2] SDOT "City of Seattle Bicycle and Safety Analysis," 9/30/16, page 7. (It is also noteworthy that 35th Ave is not in the top 30 high risk locations identified in this report, page 17.) See also "Vision Zero Los Angeles, cited above, page 5.

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- The majority of bicycle and pedestrian crashes happen at intersections.[3] On 35th, between 47th and 85th, there are 4 major intersections, 14 residential cross streets, and some 150 driveways.
- An NIH-funded study concluded that riding on an arterial is 2 to 8 times more dangerous than riding on a designated bike way on a side street.[4]

The "protected" bike lane on the east side of the street, with cars 7' from the curb, is not safe:

- Studies of the effectiveness of protected lanes to reduce collisions show they are not very effective: they result in statistically significant increases in collisions at intersections (+24%), between bikes and right-turning vehicles (+140%), and between bikes and left-turning vehicles (+48%).[5]
- Seattle's street design standards direct that buffer zones between protected lanes and parking be 3 feet wide. This reduces the risk of bikes running into open car doors. Under SDOT's plan, the buffer zones are only 2 feet wide due to the narrowness of the street. "Dooring" is inevitable.
- 35th Ave. is already too narrow for vehicles and transit; shoehorning in bike lanes will make it worse.

"Vision Zero" misstates the data regarding speed:

- "Vision Zero," a touchstone of all Seattle traffic safety efforts, states that 10% of pedestrians who are hit by a vehicle traveling 20 mph will die, 50% will die if the vehicle is traveling 30 mph, and 90% will die if the vehicle is traveling 40 mph.[6] Councilmember Rob Johnson has repeated this.
- These figures are not supported by any evidence. Studies show far lower figures.[7]
- Speed hurts. So do false statistics used as scare tactics. They don't help us address the real problems.

⚠ Myth 3: A UW study shows that neighborhood businesses are not hurt by removal of parking

- The "UW study," touted by Councilmember Rob Johnson[8] was actually a **2013 senior class project by a UW undergraduate**, a self-declared urban cyclist. Entitled, "Bikenomics: Measuring the Economic Impact of Bicycle Facilities on Neighborhood Business Districts," the student's stated goal was to support the Seattle Bicycle Master Plan.

[3] SDOT "City of Seattle Bicycle and Safety Analysis," 9/30/16, page 6 . See also "Vision Zero Los Angeles – Collision and Countermeasure Analysis: Literature Review," 3/16, p .5.
[4] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22269506.
[5] Vision Zero Los Angeles – Collision and Countermeasure Analysis: Literature Review," 3/16, pp. 30-31.
[6] E.g., SDOT's Move Seattle, Spring 2015, page 9.
[7] E.g., "Relationship between Speed and Risk of Fatal Injury: Pedestrians and Car Occupants" September 2010, Department for Transport: London; Literature Review on Vehicle Travel Speeds and Pedestrian Injuries, October 1999, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, pp. iv – vi.
[8] This was highlighted in an article on CityLab.com entitled, "No, Bike Lanes Don't Hurt Retail Business."

- Using sales data, the student found that the removal of 3 parking spots in one neighborhood business district and 12 parking spots in another did not have a negative impact on business.
- A report by a biased undergraduate should not form the basis for public policy. The student's findings, moreover, are of little comfort. The loss of 3 parking spaces? 12? The 35th plan removes 38 blocks of parking -- more than 22 spaces in front of the public library alone.
- Councilmember Johnson also cites a New York City study for the proposition that bicycle lanes that replace parking spaces do not impede and even boost economic growth.[9] Even a cursory review of this study shows it is completely inapplicable to 35th Avenue NE in Seattle, Washington.

⚠ Myth 4: Parking on the west side of 35th is underutilized so will not be missed

- According to SDOT, the midday peak average parking on 35th is "~40% and highest utilization at commercial nodes, between NE 68th and NE 77th streets and at the NE 85th St intersection."[10]
- According to Rob Johnson, "on weekdays between 10:00 am and 2:00 pm, on every block parking utilization was less than 70%, and most blocks were under 55%. Numbers were very similar … during weekdays during morning and evening rush hours."
- What neither SDOT nor Johnson mention, however is that these figures are based on a total of 12 hours of counting on two days **in the middle of the summer** (August 2 and 6, 2016); 4 of these hours were on a Saturday—during Seafair weekend. This is not representative data and citing it is deceptive. In addition, they fail to note that in fact, even in the middle of the summer, on August 2nd the "commercial nodes" had 70-85% utilization from 5-7 a.m. and 7-9 p.m.
- All who use 35th (throughout the year) know that parking on 35th, particularly in the "commercial nodes," is critically needed and well-used. Even if SDOT's figures were valid, which they are not, they don't tell us whether there are open spaces when and where people need them. Finally, nothing in these figures addresses the many impacts on business and users of removing the large amount of parking that even SDOT acknowledges will be gone.

⚠ Myth 5: If we build it, they will come.

- City statistics show that currently, bikes account for about 3% of transportation modes (on a good day). They also show that even with more bike lanes, that percentage either will not increase or may increase to about 5% - by 2035.[11]
- In other words, SDOT's 35th Ave plan seeks to benefit a tiny minority of road users and will not significantly increase their numbers. Or: Even if we build it, they still won't come.

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[9] https://www.ssti.us/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/dot-economic-benefits-of-sustainable-streets.pdf

[10] http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/projects-and-programs/programs/maintenance-and-paving/current-paving-projects/35th-ave-ne

[11] Seattle 2015 Comprehensive Plan Update Draft EIS, adopted in final Plan.