

April 7, 2015

Update on Safety Improvement Request for North Interstate Avenue:

- We began this process in October 2013 to advocate for changes to North Interstate Avenue between Tillamook and the Memorial Coliseum
- The process has included soliciting input from stakeholders including people who bike, business owners, neighborhood associations, Portland Public Schools and the Portland Water Bureau to create a letter signed by 6 neighborhood associations and the npGreenway group.
- The letter was sent to PBOT Director Leah Treat, Commissioner Steve Novick and Mayor Charlie Hales in October 2014 and was followed by a presentation in front of PBOT Director Treat and Commissioner Novick's Chief of Staff in the PBOT Transportation Class at Portland State University in December 2014.
- In the days or weeks ahead we will meet with PBOT and Commissioner Novick's office to discuss our concerns with their response to date which has not yet met our expectations. Our primary areas of concern are:
  - Speeding (video with speed gun of vehicles travelling 10-20mph above posted speed limits [on YouTube](#))
  - Signs approaching narrow bike lane under Larrabee overpass
  - Continuous right turn lane and vehicles crossing extended bike lane
- You can help!

Dear Supporters:

It has been quite a long time since the last update and the primary reason for that delays is that we wanted to allow for a full review of the request submitted to PBOT Director Leah Treat and Commissioner Steve Novick. They have now been quite clear that they are view any changes to this section of North Interstate, such as the very modest, cost effective safety improvements to N Interstate Avenue, as not part of a long-term solution. The long-term solution is a capital project for which there is not money available. We hope to gain additional clarity about the status of the requested changes in the letter when we meet with them in the next couple weeks.

What we know now:

### **1) SPEEDING**

Regarding speeding on North Interstate Avenue, Laura Hanson from Commissioner Novick's office said:

According to the most recent request made on your behalf on 11/30/2014, Officer Mark Gaither was the officer assigned to work and assess the location. His notes state that he observed "no significant safety issues." Given that information and the Traffic Division's limited resources, it is unlikely that the location would be made a priority for ongoing enforcement at this time.

People do slow down when they see a police officer enforcing the speed limit. However, as this video that Ted took from under the Larrabee overpass shows [[insert link to Ted's video](#)], when there is not an officer present, people drive between 10 and 20 miles per hour above the existing 30 mile per hour speed limit.

## 2) SIGNS APPROACHING NARROW BIKE LANE

Regarding the changes requested on the Northbound and Southbound portions of N Interstate Avenue between the southern end of Larrabee Street and Tillamook Street, the review rejected or overlooked that there was any problem except as follows:

We have received multiple complaints about the narrow bike lanes on N Interstate Ave at two locations. Under the Broadway Br and under the Larrabee Ave Ramp. The major obstacle is that the bridge supports narrow the available pavement width where currently there is a single vehicle lane and a bike lane. Engineers have responded to those complaints and have made several site visits. As part of their investigations they have discussed this issue with Roger Geller, Jeff Smith, Lewis Wardrip and others. All agree that moving the bridge supports or providing some type of infrastructure that would provide a bike facility that goes around the bridge is really the only way to permanently resolve the issue. Obviously that would require significant capital expenditures.

As part of the investigations, engineering staff did recommend some changes. We issued work orders to install new warning signs at all four locations where the bike lane narrows.

There are several of the specific requests in the letter we all sent to the Commissioner and Director that are completely ignored in the response, and this is also at odds with some of what PBOT staff explained to me over the phone. In addition, the warning signs are easily and often ignored by drivers and many people have told me they are confusing. We hope to get more clarity in our upcoming meeting.

When we asked for a review of the signs used in the lead up to the Larrabee pinch point, he was told that "If we had data that suggested that the signage was inadequate, we could make a more informed decision and I might be able to persuade my supervisor to take another look." With just a few emails, we were able to present them with the following examples of people who either indicated concern about the signs, concern about the lack of pavement markings and the survey results from the BTA of people who ride bikes saying that dangerous gaps like on North Interstate were one of the most important concerns. The full responses we included in an email to a PBOT traffic engineer requesting reevaluation of the signs were:

A **BTA staffer** said he preferred the "[Bikes] On Roadway" sign (the organization does not have an official position) and said "when we polled bike riders in the Portland Metro area about what could be done to improve the safety and accessibility of biking, there was lots of talk about new trails, new cycletracks, and new bike lanes but about half of all responses pointed to dangerous points like this -- dangerous gaps in an otherwise decent network."

Another **person familiar with the problems biking in this section** said he thought the issue here is in part due to the bike lane being striped there. When there's a bike lane, drivers are expecting bikes to use it and stay in it. He was curious if maybe a sharrow or something else near the bridges might help. Another possibility might be "advisory bike lanes" that is being considered as part of the Portland Milwaukie Light Rail project near the new bridge on the east side.

Another **person who lives in North Portland** suggested that it could be improved with some green paint because it is something that motorists understand and that pavement markings are more effective at alerting motorists.

Another **person who rides this section daily from North Portland to the Central East side** points out that

Interstate Ave offers the only direct bike connection. He added the following observations:

As PBOT is aware, the bike lane unceremoniously disappears under the Larrabee overpass, a spot where the adjacent lane is also constrained. Bikes frequently share this narrow spot with buses and full-size semi-trucks and double-trailer dump trucks. In an attempt to address this very dangerous and extremely uncomfortable situation, PBOT installed signs informing road users that bikes may be in lane.

Unfortunately, these signs are very small, they are obscured by vegetation and infrastructure, and they are ambiguous. These signs do not communicate to people driving or to people biking that an unsafe condition is just ahead, and the safest thing to do is slow down and merge into a single lane. Blake has some suggestions for **clearer signs**, I would suggest reevaluating the sign placement and size of sign.

Also, Portland has a well-understood symbol for a road condition where people driving are expected to yield to people biking: the **sharrow**. Until a safe road configuration can be constructed, PBOT should consider **using a sharrow between Tillamook and Larrabee**. Also, where the southbound bike lane of Interstate disappears when the route turns into Lloyd Blvd, **many people driving do not seem to observe the sign** informing them to merge with bikes; sharrows would be very useful here, too. To summarize, in 3 locations on my daily commute my vehicle lane (the bike lane) either reduces to an unusable level or disappears entirely. The City has placed **tiny, unclear signs that are being ignored by people driving**. Requests for safer conditions and enforcement (made over the last 3-4 years!) remain ignored. There are more clear ways to communicate that: a dangerous road condition lies ahead, cars must yield to bikes, and bike should merge into a single lane for everyone's safety. I believe this stretch of road should also be **considered for a reduced speed limit**.

### 3) CONTINUOUS RIGHT TURN LANE

One of the requested changes that could have had the most impact if it were seriously considered and implemented rapidly would be to address the continuous right turn lane before the Larrabee ramp when headed southbound on Interstate. For clarity, we are enclosing the supporting images which were sent with the letter to Commissioner Novick and Director Treat at the bottom of this letter.

Not only has nothing been done to improve this section, it was not even addressed in the official response sent by Commissioner Novick's office on behalf of his office and PBOT. Based just on the communication we have received from Commissioner Novick's office and PBOT, we are deeply discouraged about the seriousness with which they have considered the changes we requested and we hope that our concern will be addressed in our upcoming meeting.

Based on the communication we have received, there is a gap between rhetoric from Portland's elected leaders and bureaucrats about commitment to ideas such as Vision Zero—recently trumpeted at the Oregon Active Transportation Summit on March 30-31—and the reality about what they are willing to undertake. We hope these concerns will be addressed in our upcoming meeting and we will be able to provide more promising developments to our supporters including 6 neighborhood associations and the NP Greenway organization; the letter also received no opposition from any of the businesses or other organizations who we sat down with over many, many months.

During the period when the letter was being finalized and shortly after it was sent, Blake participated in the PBOT Transportation class at Portland State University to increase his ability to be an effective

advocate. He presented related ideas to what was sent in the letter in his final project, which he presented to the class [as well as Director Treat and Commissioner Novick's Chief of Staff Chris Warner](#).

From all of the interactions we have had over the past year, we anticipated that the requests in the letter would be taken more seriously than the response from the Commissioner's office and PBOT indicates it has been. We hope to come out of our upcoming meeting with a different impression and regardless, we don't intend to stop working to improve this section of N Interstate. It is too important as a direct connection for many people (including many at PBOT) to get to and from North Portland to Southeast and Downtown Portland.

#### **4) HOW YOU CAN HELP**

While we hope to have a productive meeting with PBOT and Commissioner Novick's office, it will help if they hear your voice as well. Please direct your concerns and complaints to PBOT by whichever method suits you best (see below).

- Complain about speeding
- Complain about ambiguous signs
- Complain about unorthodox center bike lane and continuous right turn south of N Tillamook Street (southbound)

PBOT can be reached by:

- Phone: (503) 823-SAFE
- Email: [safe@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:safe@portlandoregon.gov)
- Twitter: @PBOTinfo
- Or send in an image and description with your smartphone through the PDX Reporter app

The area of biggest concern are also within the Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods (NECN) and it would be excellent if you also shared your concern with their Land Use and Transportation Committee (<http://necoalition.org/issues/community-committees/land-use-and-transportation-committee/>) and ask if they would join in asking PBOT to address the safety issues on North Interstate Avenue.

We thank you for all of your help, we want to hear your feedback whether in person, by phone or by email and we look forward to finding the next steps to move forward in our advocacy relating to safety on North Interstate Avenue.

Sincerely,

Blake and Ted



The long conflict zone in the bike path on Interstate Ave south of Tillamook St. can be fixed by eliminating the continuous right turn lane.

