



WASHINGTON AREA BICYCLIST ASSOCIATION

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Mr. Stephen Rice
DDOT Project Manager
55 M Street, SE, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20003

Re: Comments on Alabama Avenue SE Corridor Safety Study

Mr. Rice,

On behalf of the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA), and our 2,900 members in the District of Columbia, I am pleased to submit these comments on the Alabama Avenue SE Corridor Safety Study.

Alabama Avenue is a key east-west corridor for Wards 7 and 8. It provides the only direct link from the commercial areas of Congress Heights to the Metro. It is one of the four streets that crosses the major barrier of Suitland Parkway. And, as one of the few continuous streets, it provides a helpful link between many Ward 7 and 8 neighborhoods.

Due to its connectivity, Alabama Ave is integral to the bicycle network. It directly intersects bike lanes on MLK Jr. Ave, Massachusetts Ave, the Pennsylvania Ave sidepath, Fort Dupont Trail, signed bike routes on 4th St, 13th St, Naylor Rd and Bowen Rd, and four Capital Bikeshare stations. In the near future, Alabama Ave could link a planned protected bike lane on Ridge Road, the refurbished Oxon Run Park Trail, and, with a minor spur trail, the Suitland Parkway Trail.

Despite its connectivity, Alabama Ave's road design creates a hostile environment for people walking and makes it unusable for all but the most confident bicyclists. Wide vehicle travel lanes encourage drivers to speed well above the 25 mph limit. On blocks where parking is restricted or not often used, the road becomes two lanes in each direction, which further encourages speeding. People on bikes must either take the right lane, where they contend with aggressive traffic and right turning vehicles, or squeeze between parked cars and a travel lane where they risk colliding with an opening car door. Due to these factors, DDOT's Mobility Analysis shows that the majority of the corridor is suitable for very few people who bike. Less than 12% of residents would feel comfortable riding on Alabama Ave.¹

¹ District Mobility <https://districtmobility.org/stories/accessibility>

DDOT's speed and crash data confirms an alarming pattern of speeding and crash frequency. On some blocks, 85th percentile vehicle speeds reach 42 mph, meaning that 15% of vehicle traffic is traveling faster than 42 mph. As we know from considerable research, 90 percent of pedestrians hit by a car traveling at 40 mph will die, whereas 90 percent of pedestrians hit by a car traveling 20 mph will live. And crashes happen every week: between 2013 and 2015, there were 875 total crashes in the 4.2 mile corridor (8.5 per week). 312 involved injuries (3 per week) and 4 resulted in a fatality. In a similar period, 45 pedestrians and 5 people on bikes were hit by cars. Alabama Ave has an unacceptable speeding problem and it stems from bad road design. As an agency committed to eliminating traffic deaths and serious injuries on DC's roads by 2024, DDOT must make safety the priority on Alabama Ave.

Considering these challenges, we are pleased to see that all of the study alternatives include a road diet on Alabama Ave. Removing travel lanes will help reduce speeding, while still accommodating current vehicle volumes. We support the proposed new crosswalks, new signals, Rapid Rectangular Flashing Beacons and simplified intersections, which will make Alabama Ave safer to travel along and easier to cross for vulnerable road users on foot and bike.

Typical Roadway Sections

We applaud DDOT planners for proposing Alternatives 1 and 2, which are both complete street designs that support all modes of transportation. Since Alabama Ave is a very long corridor with considerable variation in width and uses, it is likely that a mix of the proposed alternatives will be used. Recognizing that many neighbors and businesses on Alabama Ave are heavily dependent on driving for transportation and customers, we support a final corridor design that employs a mix of alternative 1 for areas with lower parking demand and high transit coverage and alternative 2 for areas with higher parking demand. We would like to see modifications to both alternatives 1 and 2. We do not support Alternative 3, which does not comply with Title III of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Act of 2016.

Alternative 1:

As proposed, Alternative 1 should be effective in reducing speeding and improving safety for road users. Medians physically narrow and separate the roadway, making it harder for drivers to speed and preventing head-on collisions. Medians also create a refuge for pedestrians crossing at unsignalized crosswalks and reduce the exposed crossing distance from 44 feet to 18 feet, which is particularly helpful for older residents and children. The curbside buffered bike lanes also create a designated space for people on bikes.

Unfortunately, this alternative does not do all that it can to protect people on bikes because it does not account for likely driver behavior. This design would remove parking from both sides of the road. Yet,

the design does not include any deterrent to prevent parking in the bike lane. Additionally, we are concerned the median may in fact encourage, rather than discourage, speeding because it feels more like a highway and lowers the perceived risk of a head-on collision with another vehicle. Sherman Ave NW was recently upgraded to a two lane road with a median, and vehicle speeds remain high. Instead of creating a design issue that will require significant enforcement to counteract, we urge DDOT to include flex-posts, curbs or other vertical barriers in the buffer area to keep vehicles out of the bike lane and vehicle speeds down.

Alternative 2:

Alternative 2 also proposes interventions that would reduce speeding, increase pedestrian safety and add a dedicated space for people on bikes. Removing travel lanes and striping buffered bike lanes will help reduce speeding. Curb extensions on one side of the street will slightly shorten pedestrian crossings distances. And by maintaining parking on one side, this design will have less of an impact on residents who rely on street parking.

Compared to alternative 1, however, this design does less to protect people on bikes. In alternative 2, bicyclists are separated from moving cars by only a narrow 1 foot painted buffer, which puts bicyclists very close to the travel lane. As with the alternative 1 design, we suggest DDOT install vertical separators for the non-parking side of the road to prevent drivers from driving or parking in the bike lanes.

To better separate bicyclists from traffic on the parking side, we propose a different configuration that accomplishes the same goal of maintaining parking. With a full nine feet devoted to bike lane and buffer on the parking side, there is adequate space to place the bike lane between the curb and parking lane. This could accommodate a 6 foot wide bike lane, 3 foot buffer and full parking lane. Pedestrian refuge islands, similar to those found in New York City, could be added at crosswalks to shorten crossing distances, and floating bus stops could be added to eliminate the bus passenger / bicyclist conflict. Consult the NACTO Urban Street Design Guide for best practices.

Alternative 3:

Whereas alternatives 1 and 2 apply a complete streets approach to make Alabama Ave accessible and safe for all road users, alternative 3 does not. Indeed, by introducing additional risks to existing conditions, this design would make conditions dramatically worse for people on bikes. By converting the outside lanes to full time parking and adding curb extensions at intersections, this design concentrates vehicle traffic and bicyclists to a single shared travel lane. Most bicyclists will not be comfortable positioning themselves in front of a line of faster moving traffic, especially on the many hills throughout the Alabama Ave corridor. Instead, the bicyclists who ride on Alabama Ave will likely ride in the narrow space between the travel lane and parked cars, creating a constant risk of right hooks from turning vehicles and of colliding with opening car doors.. By not providing a separate

space for people on bikes, this design increases crash risks, and increases the likelihood of harassment and driver frustration towards cyclists who bike in the shared lane.

Alternative 3 is Not a Complete Street

Title III of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Act of 2016, signed in July 2016, required DDOT to create and implement a Complete Streets Policy “by which streets are designed, operated, and maintained to accommodate safe and convenient access and mobility for all users of the District's transportation system, including pedestrians, bicyclists, users of mass transit, motorists, emergency responders, and persons of all ages and abilities.” It requires that DDOT incorporate the complete streets policy into plans, construction, reconstruction and maintenance of all highways unless use of the particular roadway is prohibited by law, costs are excessively disproportionate to the need or probable use, or the safety of vehicle traffic, pedestrians or bicyclists would be put at unacceptable risk.

Alternative 3 does not make the corridor safe and convenient for bicycle use and does not satisfy the Complete Street requirement. This project does not fit the criteria required for an exception to the complete streets policy. Bicycle lanes, even protected lanes, will not substantially increase the costs of the project and will increase bicycle use and safety throughout the corridor. Because Alternative 3 does not satisfy the Complete Street requirements, it should not be considered further.

Additional Comments

1. Risk to people on bikes is highest at high volume intersections, particularly where the road widens to four lanes. While it may seem expedient to lay down shared lane markings as an accommodation to bicyclists, these treatments make a negligible positive impact on safety and increase the likelihood of harassment and driver frustration towards cyclists. Instead, we recommend narrowing lanes, removing parking, or combining turning and through lanes in order to create a designated space for people on bikes. Even a one block gap in the bicycle network can prevent a facility from achieving its safety purpose. Every multilane intersection is a severe risk for crashes and injury.
2. The Alabama Ave & Suitland Parkway intersection is a busy transition point between a high speed highway and a low-speed street, making it a high risk and stressful area for vulnerable road users. We support the sidewalk expansion, but would like to see a dedicated space for people on bikes as well. By narrowing the recommended lanes to 10 feet and repurposing the unused road areas, a westbound protected bike lane will fit easily against the northern curb. An eastbound bicycle connection could be added as well, either as a pocket lane² to the left of the vehicle turn lane with a well-marked mixing zone, or as a protected lane against or behind the

² A pocket bike lane is a bike lane positioned to the left of a right turn vehicle lane which allows bicyclists to travel straight through an intersection without drivers turning across their path. Proper pocket lanes require a mixing zone for drivers to transition across the bike lane before they reach the intersection.

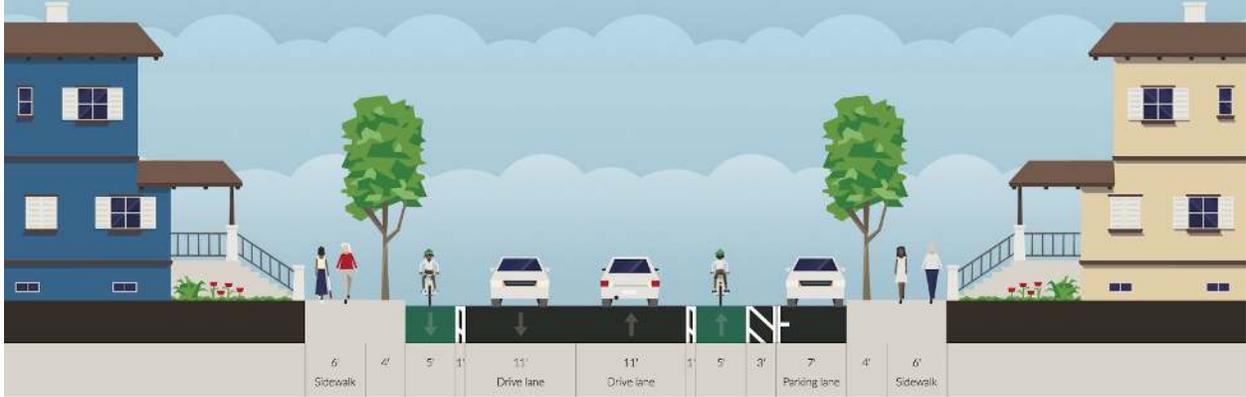
southern curb using a protected bike and walk phase to cross 23rd and the access ramp in the crosswalk.

3. Alternative 1 for the Knox Place intersection clearly provides safe and convenient access for people on bikes whereas alternative 2 does not.
4. We support the simplified intersections at Burns St, Stanley St & Bowen Rd and Suitland Rd & 36th St SE.
5. Neither alternative for the 25th St intersection considers the need for a dedicated space for bicyclists. The roundabout, particularly where it widens to two lanes, presents serious exposure and likely conflicts for bicyclists. We urge DDOT to create an alternative that protects bicyclists through this interaction such as a protected bike lane that parallels the sidewalk around the roundabout with raised road crossings.
6. As mentioned above, speed is a primary factor in crash survival. We urge a 25 mph speed limit (down from 30) east of Massachusetts Ave.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important safety study. For follow-up or questions, please contact Garrett Hennigan at 202-518-0524 x 210 or advocacy@waba.org.

Garrett Hennigan
Community Organizer

Alabama Ave Alt 2



Alabama Ave Alt 2 Modified

