



Testimony for the DC Council Committee on Transportation and the Environment in support of B24-0673 Safer Intersections Amendment Act of 2022 & B24-0674 Upgrading Tactical Safety Projects Amendment Act of 2022

Good afternoon Chair Cheh and members of the committee. My name is Garrett Hennigan. I am a Ward 5 resident, and I am speaking today on behalf of the Washington Area Bicyclist Association to offer our enthusiastic support for the Safer Intersections Amendment Act of 2022 & B24-0674 Upgrading Tactical Safety Projects Amendment Act of 2022.

Upgrading Tactical Safety Projects Amendment Act

WABA supports the proposals of the Upgrading Tactical Safety Projects Amendment Act. This is a common-sense approach: test an idea cheaply and quickly. Invest in ideas that are proven to work. Upgrading to more durable materials reduces maintenance costs in the long run, allowing our street safety planners more time to look proactively at unsafe intersections before tragedy strikes. The Mayor's budget supports this kind of approach with a significant investment, and we support the broad set of improvements covered in this legislation.

Establishing No Right Turn on Red As Default in DC

Right turn on red was legalized in the US in 1979 to cut fuel consumption, but it left a lasting negative mark on the comfort, walkability, and livability of US cities. We applaud the Council's past work to restrict right turn on red at intersections near schools, bikeways, and community centers. WABA supports the citywide approach because it is far more effective to prohibit an undesirable behavior while allowing exceptions in specific locations, than to individually specify every location where that behavior is prohibited.

Right turn on red is inherently hostile to the most vulnerable users of our streets. Studies show that right turn on red crashes are far more likely to involve pedestrians and bicyclists. A driver of any vehicle cannot safely make a right turn without first putting their vehicle in a crosswalk. Therefore, right turn on red empowers drivers to inch into crosswalks, pushing pedestrians out into the intersection, blocking view of signals, blocking visibility to other traffic, and blocking curb ramps for wheelchair users. All of these safety hazards are not worth it just to shave a few seconds off a driver's trip.

The proposed change is about how DC clearly communicates expectations to drivers. Today, a driver knows they can turn right on red anywhere, unless a prohibition is signed. If the sign is hard to see, or the driver is not attentive, they assume right on red is permitted. With more than 80% of signalized intersections soon to carry right turn on red restrictions under the signed, but not yet fully funded Vision Zero Omnibus Amendment Act, we need drivers to expect no right on red everywhere, except where permitted. It works in New York, in Montreal, and in the Netherlands. It will take an intentional education effort, but it will work here too.

Stop as Yield

WABA also supports the proposal to allow people riding bikes, scooters and e-bikes to treat a stop sign as yield and stop light as a stop sign - also called the Bicycle Safety Stop. If passed, DC will join 9 states, including Delaware, Washington State and most recently Colorado in permitting a person on a bike to treat a stop sign as a yield.

Intersections are particularly dangerous for people on bikes. 54.5% of injuries occur at intersections according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). At intersections, where people on bikes are most likely to cross paths with much faster and heavier vehicles. The best ways to reduce this danger are increasing bicyclists visibility and reducing exposure or the amount of time they spend at intersections.

Under stop as yield, a person on a bike would be required to slow down as they approach a stop-controlled intersection. Only if there are no pedestrians, no cross traffic, and no other road users present, would they be allowed to proceed without fully stopping. In all other cases, they would stop as they do today and wait until they have the right of way. This is not an invitation to ignore traffic laws, but a recognition of different abilities and different vulnerabilities.

When Delaware enacted stop as yield in 2017, we gained valuable data about the safety benefits. Comparing 30 months before passage with 30 months after, crashes involving bicycles at stop-controlled intersections dropped 23% while at the same time all other bicycle crashes only dropped 8% in the same time.¹ For a review of available data on outcomes from stop-as-yield laws, see the Bicyclist “Stop-As-Yield” Laws and Safety Fact Sheet² produced by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

The Bicycle Safety Stop recognizes that a car and bike are very different vehicles and should not always be held to the same exact standards:

- DC law already treats bicycles differently from cars. Bicyclists are given many of the same rights as pedestrians. They can use crosswalks and can follow the leading pedestrian interval.
- There is a difference in visibility and awareness. people on bikes are sitting or standing upright with a much better view of their surroundings than a person in a car. Bicyclists have no A pillars blocking their view, no blasting stereo or insulated cabin preventing them from perceiving our surroundings. At the same time, people on bikes are far smaller and less visible than a car, especially when not moving, even when using lights and bright clothing. At intersections, a bicyclist is easily dwarfed and blocked from view by even the average size vehicle on the market today.

¹ <https://www.bikede.org/delaware-yield-crash-data/#page-content>

²

<https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.gov/files/2022-03/Bicyclist-Yield-As-Stop-Fact-Sheet-032422-v3-tag.pdf>

- Bicycles are also different mechanically. They are least maneuverable when traveling slowly or starting from a stop. So If a bicyclist must stop at an intersection, it takes much longer to enter and exit the intersection, and they are less able to quickly change direction to evade a fast-approaching hazard.
- People on bikes face different consequences. Being hit by a car vs a person on a bike are not the same. Heavier vehicles are exponentially more damaging to human life. A typical rider on a bike may weigh ~250 lbs while the average car is more than 4,000 lbs. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (People who bike are acutely aware of this imbalance and therefore have a strong built in incentive to yield.
- Finally, DC has many reasons to make bicycling more convenient. Affordable transportation is part of an affordable city and bicycles, are far more affordable than cars, and can be just as effective at getting people where they need to go when combined with transit. DC has set strong goals for We need to do everything we can do reduce driving, which is the 2nd biggest contributor in DC's carbon emissions

Red Light as Stop

Currently, four other states allow people riding bikes to treat a red light as a stop sign. Like Stop as Yield, this change would apply only in specific, limited circumstances and allow a bicyclist to to mitigate risk to their advantage, increase their visibility to drivers and reduce exposure in the intersection.

People on bikes want to spend as little time in an intersection as possible because that is where we are most exposed to the unpredictable danger of cars. When stopped at a light, bicyclists are at risk of being hit from behind, perhaps by a driver executing a rolling right turn on red. They are also at risk of being hit head-on by an out-of-control driver while they wait for the signal. At a standstill, a person riding a bike is less visible, and less able to move out of the way if danger approaches.

Under this act, a person riding a bike will be required to come to a complete stop, to evaluate their surroundings, and proceed only if there are no pedestrians, no cross traffic and no other road users with the right of way. After stopping, they may proceed only if it is safe to do so. Otherwise, they wait for the signal to change as they do today.

Despite significant progress on expanding DC's network of safe bicycle streets, the vast majority of major streets are extremely hostile to people on bikes. Yet often our major avenues without any safe bicycling infrastructure are still the only path into or through some areas of the city. When traveling on one of these avenues the difference in traveling speed between a person on a bike and person in a car or truck is significant. Therefore, many bicyclists feel far more safe and comfortable waiting for a large break in cross-traffic, then crossing against the red signal to get a head start on the drivers beside them. When these drivers catch up, the bicyclist is positioned to be more visible and the difference in speed is smaller. In this case, a person on a bike may be breaking the law as written today, but they do so to get to their destination safely,

Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective on these bills