

To: The Transportation and Infrastructure Commission

From: Rick Raffanti

Aug 1, 2023

Dear fellow commissioners,

I have found being a member of this commission to be quite bizarre. It seems as if there is never the opportunity to just discuss things, to just understand one another's point of view. At the end of our last meeting Adrian started a "paving is a racket" discussion that I thought was fascinating- new methods, let nature take Shattuck back! Interesting ideas, but of course no time to talk about things like that, instead we spend our time suggesting that grooves in speed tables might be nice, or that this lane might be 10.0 ft rather than 10.5 ft wide. Adrian suggested that we should be "shaping the discourse" is I think the way he put it, but where is the discourse?

And of course we can't email each other or get together; that would violate the Brown Act. But what we can do is what I'm doing here, send a message to everyone, via the secretary, to be included in the agenda packet. Here we go! You haven't had to listen to me much in meetings, so I hope you'll indulge me here. Or it may just be TLDR for everyone; it's up to you.

In addition to a lack of discourse I feel there might be a set of taboos which must **not** be discussed. First example is l'affaire Farid. At our June meeting we spent 95 minutes discussing a letter that had been drafted expressing the commission's concern and, I would say, outrage, at something that transpired in the transportation department. If you read the (draft) letter you will see a lot of discussion about the impacts of the staffing shortage but no discussion of how it came about. There was no context given at the meeting; as a relative newcomer I tried to ask discreetly about it but didn't glean much. It seemed that everyone had a sort of "inside baseball" knowledge of what happened, but not me. It seemed like something which mustn't be discussed (but we could spend 95 minutes parsing the exact language and then a month later didn't have a revised draft- of course we could consult the minutes for the amendments that we arrived at but, yeah, there's no information there). Having since then read the reporting on the incident and talked to some people in city government I think Farid got fired for a good reason. I'm an engineer in a different field and would have certainly gotten fired for something analogous, and rightly so. Maybe there's another story, but I don't know what it is. If the vote were taken again I'd vote against sending the letter altogether.

Maybe the measurement of outcomes is another taboo which must not be discussed. Do people really use some of the bike lanes, for instance? Bryce asked to have a brief demo of a cheap, traffic-counting camera as part of our last meeting, but somehow it never made it to the agenda. I suspect (don't know, because, how could I?) what he was getting at is that this would be a good innovation for measuring the outcomes of various traffic strategies. But maybe these are questions that shouldn't be asked. When I asked Ron of city staff why they stopped doing traffic counts in 2018 he mumbled something about "priorities". Nobody on the commission seemed interested. I brought it up once before with no uptake. To my mind, if we are to shape some discourse, this would be a good topic.

And that brings me to the third taboo. Hopkins Street. In our subcommittee discussion about the paving plan we talked about it and I suggested that the council should be encouraged to direct staff (or however it works- the administrator should direct staff, you can go ahead and correct me here, Bryce) to change

the plan to include Hopkins Street, and do it pronto. Kim and Ray didn't object and I think to some extent at least were in accord. I included that in the "Recommendations" section because I thought we could perhaps have some, you know, discourse about it. But somehow that didn't make it to the agenda. Toward the end of our brief discussion Barnali said to me "and you'll take that out", referring to the Hopkins Street recommendation, and with an implied "of course". And I said no. There was a suggestion to add a fourth member to the subcommittee, perhaps to guide us away from such dangerous topics.

But I think we should discuss it. And now I'll give you my opinion.

Here's the executive summary: if this project is built as planned, nobody will use it and everybody will hate it. More accurate, less hyperbolic version: if this project were built as planned, few cyclists would use it and the vast majority of Hopkins St community members would hate it, and the rest of the city would forget about it.

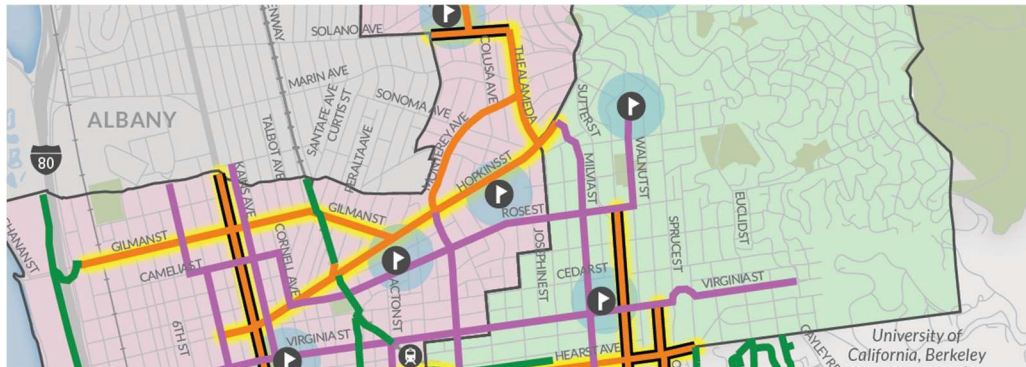
Let me establish my bicycle bona fides at this point. I'm 67 years old and I put about 5000 miles per year on my (non-electric) bike, which is more than my partner and I put on a car we share. I ride to work, I ride in the Rockies, I ride in the Trinity Alps, Hawaii, France. I ride the local recreational routes: Mt Diablo, Bay Trail, 3 Bears, Mt Hamilton, Redwood/Pinehurst, the bridges, on and on. I'm an officer of the Oakland Yellowjackets club and I've been for years a significant donor to Bike East Bay. Cycling has been a huge part of my life for the last 15 years and the bike infrastructure that has been built out in recent years has been a boon to me. Still, not every bike project is a good bike project.

I'm sensitive to this issue because I was also the president of the Temescal Telegraph Business Improvement District in Oakland for 10 years. That is a Community Benefit District funded by property tax to serve the community along Telegraph in Oakland, roughly 55<sup>th</sup> to MacArthur. During that time mine was a lone voice (among the BID board) advocating for the construction of bike lanes on Telegraph. The project was hugely unpopular among almost all merchants and most residents of the Temescal district when it was proposed. Many, many outreach meetings were held. The project which was ultimately built is still very unpopular in the neighborhood and little-used. I always ride it when I'm going that way and typically I count zero to 3 other cyclists coming in the other direction when traversing from 51<sup>st</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup>. A lot of cyclists really don't like the project, and it's easy to see why when you ride it.

There's just too much going on, and you have to go very slowly to avoid the perils of people stepping off the sidewalk backwards with earbuds in, car passengers opening their doors (it's a "parking protected" project), waiters serving people at parklets, drivers making right turns (who need to try to keep an eye on both pedestrians on the sidewalk and cyclists in the bike lane). There are a lot of close calls, but I generally ride it at about 7 mph, which makes it safe enough. Still, if I were in a hurry, I'd take a different route, and I think a lot of cyclists come to the same conclusion. It would be interesting if we had traffic counts there to see if there has actually been an increase in bike traffic on Telegraph since the project was built. I'll bet Oakland doesn't do it either, though.

Telegraph, at least, is a street that really needed traffic-calming and pedestrian safety measures. The project did that, but I think there were much better ways to accomplish it. I was surprised that Hopkins was seen as a street in need of traffic-calming; it never seemed that way to me. When I lived at Shattuck and Delaware for five years I would ride my bike down Milvia to Hopkins to go to the Monterey Market; it never occurred to me to seek another route. But I could have taken Rose to McGee or California; that's a perfectly fine bike route. There's a nice letter from Naveen Gattu in last month's agenda package (does anyone read this stuff? This could have been a could subject for a brief discussion) urging us to recommend implementing some traffic calming measures now, while the paving of Rose St is underway. That would make Rose an even better route, and just a couple blocks from Hopkins.

Where I live now (near the Arlington) there's a beautiful bike path on Monterey which I take to go to the Market sometimes. My ride to work takes me across the city to 7<sup>th</sup> St; a bike path on Hopkins would be useful to me, perhaps, but I doubt if I'd use it since my ride down Virginia is already so nice. The reality is that the vast majority of cyclists who you find east of the Alameda and north of Rose are recreational cyclists and we're on our way to ride on much more dangerous roads- we don't need a safer way to get into the hills. Looking at this map from the 2017 Bike Plan it's hard for me to understand why Hopkins Street is so important to the bicycle network:



I have another concern specifically about two-way cycle tracks. As e-bikes come into more common usage we're going to find people going much faster. On a regular bike, if you're going 20+ mph, you're going downhill, and the opposing traffic will be doing maybe 8 mph uphill. But with Class 1 e-bikes, you can do 20 mph uphill, and with Class 3 you can do 28 mph. I wonder if planners have thought through the potential danger of this- bikes going 20+ mph in both directions. And I note that we've started referring to the cycle track as a "micro-mobility" project- does this mean we expect wheelchair users to use it? How will that co-exist with e-bikes?

On my way to our meeting in July I stopped to take this photo at the corner of The Alameda and Marin:



People are starting to notice that these projects are frequently little-used. The Temescal project is a good example, and another one is the San Rafael Bridge bike lane, which was previously available as a "crash" lane. A recent UC report ([https://dot.ca.gov/-/media/dot-media/programs/research-innovation-system-information/documents/final-reports/ca22-3141\\_final\\_reportv3-a11y.pdf](https://dot.ca.gov/-/media/dot-media/programs/research-innovation-system-information/documents/final-reports/ca22-3141_final_reportv3-a11y.pdf)) shows that on weekdays in summer only 75 cyclists use the bridge, in winter only 40 (vs 38,000 cars). The vast majority are recreational riders. Twice in the last month I've been biking across and witnessed a huge westbound backup caused by a stall on the bridge which could otherwise have been relieved by that crash lane.

People are stuck in traffic and can easily see that there's a lane next to them that very few are using. It makes them angry. Bike advocates should take a step back to see if the projects are working- to see if more people are taking up cycling and if these projects are in fact serving them well. Maybe we'd find that some projects work better than others, knowledge which could inform future plans.

There is a suspicion that the main point of bike lanes is to punish drivers, rather than to benefit cyclists. If the city refuses to pave Hopkins Street until a new plan can be put in place (5 more years?) people will feel they are being punished for having opposed this project.

Summing up, I'd like to suggest that our discussions center on larger issues and avoid the technical details of

specific projects. Here are some issues that I would like to see discussed:

- Why don't we measure outcomes of projects, specifically bike lanes?
- What do we do about streets which are "too costly to pave" (like Shattuck)?
- Have we thought through the use of two-way cycle tracks in the context of much greater adoption of e-bikes? What is meant by micro-mobility devices and how do these co-exist with e-bikes?
- Why is a bike lane on Hopkins so important anyway? Is there data to support this, and can we see it?

Respectfully submitted,

Rick Raffanti