

Washington Avenue Report

Written by Ben Zuckerman

Although technically Washington Avenue isn't in CCRA's territory, this major east-west artery running from 2nd Street to Grays Ferry Avenue is probably used by our residents with some frequency.

How to align its lanes to best accommodate moving cars and trucks, parked vehicles, and bicycles has been the subject of much controversy ever since plans to repave it were announced a few years ago. Now that the repaving and lane striping have been completed--at least for now--I took a bike ride over its entire length today to check it out.

From a biker's perspective it is significantly improved but sections of it could be better. All of the killer potholes, bumps, depressions and generally rough surfaces finally are gone. Hooray! That alone would have been worth the cost.

Better still, many blocks have excellent protected bike lanes buffered from moving traffic by parked cars and white posts. The photo shows the stretch from 2nd Street to 11th that is configured this way.

From 11th Street to the western terminus of Washington Avenue at Grays Ferry Avenue the parked vehicles have been moved against the curb and the bike lanes shifted next to moving vehicles--not optimal. See below.

The problem with these lanes is that drivers wanting to park at the curbs, and pull out from them, must cross the bike lanes, which is dangerous for bikes and requires drivers to check their side mirrors not only for moving vehicles but also for bicycles. Also, some drivers view Washington Avenue as a speedway, risking injury or worse to bikers riding in lanes adjacent to them.

Another interesting puzzle is the varying numbers and configurations of traffic lanes. In the eastern-most blocks there are two lanes for vehicles moving in each direction. As you travel westward this changes, sometimes with two lanes heading west and one heading east, or vice versa.

In some blocks there is an additional center lane for vehicles making left turns onto the numbered streets. In other sections there are none of these. And even in some of the blocks with the extra center left-turn lanes people park cars in them--remember, this is South Philly where parking in the center of Broad Street is a time-honored tradition.

So, on balance I'd give this project a B. Better than it was but not optimal.