

MLK DRIVE: BIKERS, CARS, AND PEDESTRIANS

By Ben Zuckerman, CCRA Board Member

Hey fellow bikers. Have you experienced the repaved, reconfigured MLK Drive yet? If you're like me, you had lots of concerns about what the City would do when it reopened it to cars (at least the part beyond the Sweetbriar cutoff to Lansdowne Ave.) So I was really pleased to see the new lane lines. They look as if they provide one lane in each direction for cars and buffered bike lanes at each curb. In fact I was so pleased I wrote a letter to the Inquirer, which was published, lauding the city for this solution.



Except that I was wrong. Someone in the know informed me that the buffered curb lanes are NOT for bikes. They are designed to keep auto traffic to one lane in each direction to discourage speeding vehicles from passing each other.

What? Pissed? Me? You bet! How lame-brained is that?

Except now that I've driven my car on the new Drive in both directions, and have biked it in the curb lanes and on the path, both during the week when auto traffic is permitted as well as on weekends when its closed to cars, I now agree with the City's plan.

Holy spokes!

Why do I say this? Three reasons.

First, when I drove my car on the Drive recently I actually felt that bikes in the street curb buffer lanes are a bit close to cars for comfort.

Second, while biking in those lanes I felt that the passing cars were a distraction and a possible safety hazard. Worth noting is that the curb lanes are not the officially prescribed width for bikes; they are 38 inches wide, unlike the 50-inch bike lanes you'll find, for example, on Lansdowne Drive from the Zoo into Fairmount Park.

Third, and most surprising, biking on the paved path is very pleasant. It is more than wide enough for safe use by bikers, runners and walkers. It is beautifully paved and in many places separated from auto noise and pollution by wide grassy areas.

So fellow bikers, I suggest that you sample the path and limit your biking in the Drive to sections and days when there are no cars on it. I think you'll like it.