

Testimony of William Hoffman to Senate Transportation Committee re: HB 140

I am a lifelong cyclist, a cycling instructor for 42 years, and an active cycling advocate for 50 years. I am the only original member of the Pedalcycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee still serving, after 27 years, but I am writing on my own behalf, not as a PPAC member.

HB 140 seems on its surface to be a minor “technical fix” to Title 75. But it’s much more significant than that, as I will show. In fact, HB 140 upends over a century of road design, traffic law and driving conventions in order to authorize a type of bicycle facility that has built-in safety hazards.

According to the latest PennDOT Strategic Highway Safety Plan (2022), 60% of all bicyclist fatalities result from turning movements. These primarily occur at intersections and driveways. The five-year rolling average of cyclist fatalities has increased almost steadily from 14.6 to 18.6 per year between 2011 and 2020. Serious injuries for the same period increased from 57.6 to 93.8 average per year.

I ask: how do so-called parking-protected (a more accurate term is “hidden”) bike lanes contribute to cyclists’ safety when they prevent same-direction cyclists and motorists from seeing each other until or immediately prior to a turn because their view of each other is hidden by a row of parked vehicles?

Historically, same-direction collisions (hits from behind) on urban roads are well below 5% of all car-bike crashes, while intersection crashes are about 80%. Even using PennDOT’s 60% number—which relates only to the most recent 5-year period in PA—this type of bike lane represents at least a 12-fold increase in collision risk.

These data disprove the fear that many cyclists have about being hit from behind, which causes some to ride against traffic and to clamor for separated facilities. Yet HB 140 would authorize a type of separated facility that increases, not reduces, the most frequent and serious type of collision.

The only way such a facility can be made safe is with separate movement controls at every intersection. That means separate phases at signalized intersections, or stop signs at unsignalized intersections. Such controls increase travel times for all modes, add to motor vehicle idling, and are likely to be ignored, mainly by cyclists, who would be forced to make many more stops. Cyclists have a finite amount of energy and do not want to waste it with unnecessary stops. It requires more energy to start from a standstill than to accelerate from even a slow speed.

For far less than the cost of building parking-protected bike lanes, every cyclist in the affected locality could be trained in proper operation on existing roads. Training is a one-time cost, while any built facility requires on-going maintenance. My city of Lancaster has already built one of these lanes, and is proposing a second, that has none of the safety features I cited above. Therefore, I do not use it and I discourage my cycling students from using it.

There is another, subtle message that separated bike lanes convey: bikes belong in the gutter. The infamous *Plessy v. Ferguson* US Supreme Court decision in 1896 mandated separate but equal accommodation for blacks and whites on interstate carriers. But it was quickly learned that “separate” was never “equal.” Such is the case with parking-protected/hidden bike lanes, as I have shown.

My interpretation of Title 75, Chapter 61 prevents local governments from enacting laws or ordinances that do not conform with Title 75. Because HB 140 opens the door to construction of a dangerous type of facility, it should be defeated by this Committee.

Thank you for your consideration.

Bill Hoffman  
624 Candlewyck Rd.  
Lancaster, PA 17601  
billhoffman47@gmail.com  
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