

## Bicyclists belong on the road, not on separate paths

By **BOB SOETEBIER**

**W**ell-meaning — but naive and woefully misinformed — individuals and organizations are clamoring for construction of a network of separated-from-the-road-bicycle paths or trails throughout our region. In general, bicycle paths are very expensive to design, construct and maintain. And they are rarely, if ever, well maintained.

Bicycle trails are inherently hazardous. Safety is jeopardized by their relative narrowness, pedestrian congestion and conflicts, debris build-up, overhanging branches, lack of maintenance, inferior surfacing and, with few exceptions, generally poor sight distances and sharp curves, along with extremely dangerous intersections with side streets and driveways.

Such facilities are a tremendous financial liability to the taxpayers, who must not only pay for the design, construction and maintenance of these separate facilities but end up subsidizing the “hidden” costs (through higher insurance rates) of settling a multitude of lawsuits from those who are injured while using such separate facilities. To cite just one example: The city of Austin, Texas, paid \$4.5 million to settle a single bicycle path liability suit

As can be substantiated by data provided by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), nine out of 10 of all auto-bicycle collisions occur at intersections, with the bicycle rider getting hit from the side or head-on. Because of these hazardous intersectional conflicts, the well-known bicycle transportation engineer John Forester says that “bicycle paths are 2.6 times more dangerous than the average roadway.”

### COUNTERPOINT

Quoting NHTSA information, John S. Allen, a bicycling transportation expert, states: “But astonishing to many people is the high rate of accidents on bike-paths — until you reflect that many paths are narrow, with sharp curves, poor sightlines, pedestrian traffic and poor design of intersections with streets.”

Bicyclists, like everyone else, pay property taxes that provide maintenance funds for our roads. Therefore, bicyclists are not second-class citizens who must be relegated to typically vastly inferior, separated-from-the-road facilities.

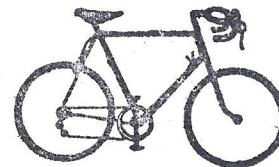
Bicycles are most definitely *not* toys! They most definitely should not be driven upon sidewalks and so-called sidepaths. Many ill-informed bicycle riders (both individuals and groups) seem to suffer from what Forester terms the “cyclist’s inferiority complex.” These people merely reinforce the public misconception that the bicycle is something other than a valid means of transportation upon our roadways.

Bicycle riders using sidepaths are forced to ride through each and every intersecting side street and driveway — rather than by them, as they would be if they were riding — as they properly should be — upon the adjacent or parallel street or road. By promoting the construction and use of separate bicycling facilities — under the guise of “doing something for bicyclists,” bicycle-path advocates are naively endangering not only bicyclists but also the tax-paying public.

Additionally, wherever so-called separated bicycle trails parallel an existing nearby or adjacent road there is increased motorist harassment — with or without a “mandatory-use sidepath law” — of on-road bicyclists who frequently get yelled at: “Get off the road; get on the bike path!” This occurs despite the fact that, by law, bicyclists have “the same rights and duties as operators of motor vehicles” on the roads in all 50 states!

Bicycling has been around for a long time and is here to stay as an adult form of physical fitness, recreation and transportation. It’s time to stop foolishly misdirecting our energies and limited funds to promote inherently hazardous, separated-from-the-roadway so-called bicycle facilities.

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“There IS Another Way!”