

Boston bikers urge City to build cycle track on Comm. Ave.

September 25, 2014 6:17 am · By Jaime Bennis

Several Boston bicycle advocacy groups are pushing for the construction of a cycle track on Commonwealth Avenue, arguing that physically separating bike lanes from the roadway will reduce the number of accidents that occur on the street each year.

“Commonwealth Avenue has the highest rate of collisions per the amount of bicycling anywhere in the city of Boston, and it’s right in the heart of a major university,” said Jeffrey Rosenblum, advocacy director and co-founder of LivableStreets, a local transit safety group. “If you’re going to do separated bike lanes somewhere, this is where you want to do them.”

Between 2009 and 2012, there were 100 collisions between motorists and bicyclists on the stretch of Commonwealth Avenue that runs through Boston University’s campus, a report released Monday stated.

In 2012, one of these crashes resulted in the death of BU student and cyclist Christopher Weigl, an aspiring photojournalist who was pursuing a master’s degree in the College of Communication.

“Boston is way behind the rest of the country on cycle tracks,” said Pete Stidman, executive director of the Boston Cyclists Union. “There are some in the works, but there are currently none on the ground. New York City has 44 miles of cycle tracks on the ground. Chicago has 16 miles. Memphis, Tennessee is working on a 16-mile track. Memphis is going to put us to shame. We have in Boston .5 miles of cycle track so far that’s only on one half of the street on Western Avenue in Allston.”

Construction on Commonwealth Avenue is scheduled to take place over the course of the next few years, but current plans only guarantee the construction of painted bike lanes, Rosenblum said.

“Five or six years ago, just even having bike lanes was something special, but that time has passed, and we are in a new era, and the city could easily fall behind,” he said. “So the question is whether the Walsh administration and BU are going to step up and say, ‘[Do] we want the best and safest for our students and for the city of Boston, or are we going to settle for the status quo?’”

Rosenblum said current plans to reconstruct Commonwealth Avenue do not sufficiently address bike safety concerns.

“The question is, why are they not planning on building cycle tracks in a stretch that’s through a campus, when the BU administration had a say in the design, with a city that has adopted Complete Streets Guidelines, in a country that is moving towards separate bike facilities,” he said.

Tracey Ganiatsos, a spokeswoman for the Boston Transportation Department, said the city will review design plans for Commonwealth Avenue over the course of the next few weeks.

“We are in the process of taking a second look at the existing, current design,” she said. “We are likely to make some changes to the bike accommodations.”

President of BU Bikes David Miller said students would be more likely to ride on campus if there were protected bike lanes.

“Many people who bike at home and come from smaller towns are very afraid to ride their bike in Boston,” he said. “One of the great benefits of having these bike lanes is that they will increase ridership and people will feel a lot more comfortable biking.”

Several BU students said the construction of protected bike lanes on Commonwealth Avenue is a necessary safety precaution.

“One of my neighbors in Allston goes to Emmanuel [College], and he’s a frequent user of the bike lane on Comm. Ave.,” said Chris Salazar, a junior in the College of Arts and Sciences. “He rides his bike every day to school, and he was actually still hit by a car. He broke a wrist, and that’s with the use of a bike lane. It is just a necessity to have something like that, because it ensures a lot of safety.”

Hallie Smith, a sophomore in the College of Communication, said the painted bike lanes on Commonwealth Avenue are often improperly used.

“If you had an actual divided lane, people might actually pay attention and abide by it,” she said. “Right now, people walk in the bike lane, and people obstruct the bike lanes.”

Eddie Huh, a junior in the School of Hospitality Administration, said he often rode on Commonwealth Avenue during the summer months and found the experience hectic.

“Separated lanes for bikes are necessary,” he said. “It’s all about safety, and the painted lane doesn’t really keep us safe as bikers. If we had a separated lane, we could reduce casualties and accidents.”