



Bicycle-Friendly Berkeley Coalition
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The Honorable Loni Hancock
Assembly Member, State of California
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for AB 594: Statutory Exemption for Bike Lanes

Dear Assembly Member Hancock:

The Bicycle-Friendly Berkeley Coalition, working in conjunction with the East Bay Bicycle Coalition and the thousands of bicyclists in the East Bay we represent, works tirelessly with city planners to design and implement bicycle facilities for safer bicycle travel. One of our most important tools is bike lanes, which provide safe and convenient separation of bicyclists from vehicles on busy streets. Yet, bike lane projects are a lot of work. We can't afford to add more work to the process. Please support AB 594.

Assembly Bill 594 (Leno) will provide a statutory exemption to the California Environmental Quality Act for projects that simply restripe existing rights of way to install bike lanes. The purpose of this bill is to make it less costly and time-consuming for communities to improve pedestrian and bicyclist access and safety. There is already a CEQA guideline that exempts bike lanes, but courts have misinterpreted it.

Why is this bill needed? Cities across California (Berkeley, Oakland, San Jose and Sacramento, among others) are considering or implementing capacity diversification strategies to make streets work better for all modes. The entire community benefits when streets are restriped to replace travel or parking lanes with bike lanes. Because these "road diet" projects lower the top speed of vehicles with minimal impacts upon traffic flow, they're arguably the most cost-effective means of improving roadway safety.

Yet, these projects are controversial and undergo intense scrutiny before being implemented. They first must pass muster with planners and undergo extensive analysis by traffic engineers. Neighborhood and business associations and the general public also have their say. After subsequently being approved by local elected officials, these inexpensive, highly cost-effective projects (whose primary purpose, after all, is to promote environmentally sound transportation) ought not to be delayed or made cost-prohibitive by CEQA reviews.

Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley and Oakland is a prime example. Bike lanes planned for this important bikeway, connecting UC Berkeley and downtown Oakland, have been needlessly delayed over two years because of CEQA. In addition to 12 public meetings held on this issue, a court required additional analysis of traffic movements. We will never fully implement a network of safe and convenient bike routes in the East Bay at this rate.

Bicycling is completely consistent with the intent, spirit and goals of the concerned environmentalists who successfully passed CEQA legislation many decades ago. Anytime a street is reconfigured for improved bicycle travel, there are going to be some changes for other roadway users, but the net result will be a more balanced, environmentally-friendly transportation system. Both commuters and environmentalists win when our streets are upgraded for bicycle travel. Environmentalists (and bicyclists) know this, and an important piece of environmental legislation (CEQA) should countermand its own goals by blocking or needlessly delaying bicycle projects.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dave Campbell
President

enclosure