

Protected Bike Lanes in Florida: A Ways to Go

Florida, as well as the rest of the US, has experienced a cycling boom over the past fifteen years, proving that it isn't just for kids, athletic enthusiasts, or occasional recreational riders. People of all ages are physically capable of cycling, and it remains the most efficient means of independent travel for children, elder adults, and those with low incomes.

Cycling is mobility at an affordable cost. It's also an essential component of present-day transportation systems that can cut congestion on crowded streets, save money in city budgets, boost local commerce, improve health, bolster traffic safety, and reduce pollution.

Updating Urban Infrastructure

Protected lanes are separated from vehicle traffic by a vertical element: concrete, rubber or raised curbs, fences, plants, planters, concrete or plastic posts, and parked cars. They come in one-way and two-way varieties, either on one or both sides of city thoroughfares. All users—car drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians—benefit when barriers are put in place that give clear, protective boundaries for everyone on the road. As any cyclist who has ever been “doored” can relate, space equals safety.

Florida has long held the unfortunate record of being the most unsafe state in the country for cyclists. But things are slowly beginning to change as national, state, and local government bodies, along with private entities (like People for Bikes, Alliance for Biking and Walking, and The Green Lane Project and its successor program, Places for Bikes), are coming together to find ways of creating safer alternatives to outdated cycling infrastructure such as road shoulders or simple painted lines, particularly in large metropolitan areas.

As a consequence, the call for protected or buffered bike lanes has been growing in recent years, a demand coupled with inventive alternatives

for urban design that safely integrate bicycle networks with vehicle and pedestrian traffic.

Investment in Safety

In crowded city streets it's no wonder that 88 percent of people surveyed say they would ride bicycles more frequently or even regularly if they had protected or buffered bike lanes. Collier County, Florida's Master Bicycle & Pedestrian plan revealed that among seven NACTO (National Association of City Transportation Officials) cities that enlarged the lane mileage of their bikeway networks by 50 percent between the years 2007–2014, ridership more than doubled while risk of death and serious injury to cyclists was halved.

A major east coast city that added protected bike lanes to streets reduced injury crashes for *all* users by 40 percent over four years. When Arlington, VA implemented its “Complete Streets” program, integrating safer car, bicycle, and pedestrian usage, there was a 50 percent decline in injuries among all users.

Increased bicycle use for commuting purposes also improves air quality and reduces noise pollution. Thus cycling infrastructure is arguably the most efficient way to move people around in less space in denser areas and is a significant factor in the effort to clean up our environment.

Economic Vitality

Research reports from PeopleforBikes and Alliance for Biking & Walking show that protected bike lanes encourage local business growth in towns and cities. The website www.archinet.com says that protected bike lanes bring order and predictability to streets and provide choices on how to get around, while helping to build neighborhoods that don't have to wait for sluggish transit development.

Protected bike lanes are attractive to environmentally informed Gen X and Millennials who prefer downtown jobs and nearby homes. This

trend attracts companies to move into those areas, stimulating local service industries such as gyms, salons, internet coffee shops, and restaurants. And almost no one would be opposed aesthetically to seeing fewer concrete-box-like parking structures on city streets.

A Portland, OR study revealed that bike commuters spent 40 percent more money at local businesses than car drivers did. On Salt Lake City's Broadway, replacing parking with protected bike lanes generated higher retail sales and was supported by 59 percent of business owners in the area. Even the assessed value of properties within protected bike lane corridors goes up, in some places by more than 100 percent. Buffered lanes are also cost efficient when compared to roadway construction.

Healthy People, Healthy Profits

As companies struggle to provide adequate health care benefits, by encouraging more employees to start peddling, burn calories, clear their minds, and strengthen body's muscles and organs, they put themselves in a win-win situation. Overall hourly productivity and lower medical bills are important and real side benefits.

Florida's Status

Across our country, urban centers building the next generation of safe cycling infrastructure are Seattle, WA, Portland, OR, San Francisco, CA, Austin, TX, Chicago, IL, Minneapolis, MN, New York City, NY, and Washington, DC. Nationwide the number of protected bike lanes in the US quadrupled between 2011 and 2016. Florida has come late to the game with only a cumulative total of ten miles of urban protected bike lanes across the state: Tallahassee has five, Miami has three, St. Petersburg and Tampa have one each.

Of course, cost is a factor. In 2016 projected costs in Miami of a half mile of PBLs on NW/NE 8th St. from NW 1st Ave. to Biscayne Blvd. were between \$6400 and \$160,000, depending on the types installed. From the lowest expense to the highest were: on-street parking,

delineator posts, rigid bollards, and decorative planters. The projected installation of another half mile of PBLs on South Bayshore Drive from Aviation Ave. to Mercy Way ranged between \$20,000 and \$500,000. But in contrast, buffered lanes are actually cost efficient when compared to roadway construction. In San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, one mile of roadway planned cost 1,283 times more than one mile of protected bike lane.

In Gainesville, according to www.safety.fhwa.dot.gov, travel on the University of Florida's campus is 40 percent non-auto. The construction of 100 miles of traditional bicycle lanes and paved shoulders has resulted in an 80 percent drop in bicyclist's fatalities.

In December of 2019 the City of Tampa stated on www.tampagov.net that protected bike lanes consisting of a raised curb, such as on Cass Street and Jackson Street in downtown, and the use of flexible delineators on Azele Street near the SoHo Publix and on Bayshore Blvd. have successfully deterred drivers from parking in painted bike lanes and have significantly resulted in safer traffic in those areas. Other locations currently being considered for PBLs with flexible delineators include North Hyde Park, Tampa Heights and V.M. Ybor, downtown, and Harbour Island. Tampa also completed a green bike lane along Platt Street in South Tampa running from Armenia Ave. to Bayshore Blvd.

In 2018, Tallahassee earned the coveted Silver Level Bicycle Friendly Community (BFC) designation that recognizes communities for actively supporting bicycling by providing safe accommodations and encouraging community members to bike for recreation and transportation. Protected bike lanes in the state's capital cover Pensacola Street and St. Augustine Street. The Downtown-University Protected Bike Lane Network will provide over five miles of new and improved bicycle services connecting downtown, Cascades Park, Florida State University, Florida A&M University, the Stadium Trail and other destinations and trails after completion.

Creative Future Investment

Bearing in mind safety, connectivity, equity of use, health, economic stimulus, and multimodal routes, Florida's urban areas are being challenged to keep up with national trends in cycling safety and improved infrastructure. No one realistically expects the federal or local government to shoulder the total costs. Partnerships between government entities, local businesses, and private and/or grass roots initiatives offer a potentially creative solution to this pressing need. Investing in protected bike lanes is a great starting point on the road to building a more viable, prosperous, and vibrant future for our cities and citizens.

Jim Dodson is an experienced bicycle accident lawyer, cyclist and bicycle safety advocate who has been representing accident victims for over 25 years. Although his primary office is in Clearwater, he represents injury victims throughout Florida. He is the author of the [Florida Bicycle Accident Handbook](#) which answers the most commonly asked questions by injured cyclists. If you have questions about a Florida cycling accident this valuable resource is available to you absolutely free of charge at www.jimdodsonlaw.com.

**Legal information is not legal advice. Nothing in this article may be considered legal advice. If you have specific questions for Jim Dodson, simply call his office at 1-888-340-0840. There is never a charge to talk about your case.*