

Kathleen Krager: Doubling Down Despite Data

Krager backtracks on lane reduction.

In early 2016, the Old North End Neighborhood (ONEN) Board of Directors, in collaboration with Colorado College (CC) and City Transportation Manager Kathleen Krager, [released a plan](#) calling for lane reductions on multiple roads throughout ONEN in the name of pedestrian safety (1). Though the proponents claimed to be interested in collaborating with “[the broader community](#)” (2), many ONEN residents feel their viewpoints aren’t being represented. In response we put together a note outlining objections to lane reduction: “[The ONEN Plan: Paved With Good Intentions](#)” (3). As of June 15, 2016, nearly 300 ONEN residents have signed [the petition](#) at SaferCC.com opposing lane reductions (4).

In the wake of increasing public backlash against the ONEN Plan, Krager broke with the ONEN Board and offered a more [modest proposal](#): reduce lanes only on Cascade Avenue and only on the blocks that pass through CC campus (5). According to the City, this compromise is an attempt to balance “[mixed public support](#)” for lane reduction with “the pressing safety concern on Cascade Avenue” (6).

Cascade Avenue is not a pressing safety concern.

As outlined in our previous note (3), the safety concern on Cascade Avenue is, in fact, [almost non-existent](#) and certainly not urgent. Based on CC’s pedestrian estimates¹, there have been over 1,600,000 pedestrian crossings on Cascade Avenue from 2000 to 2012, yet CC has been able to cite [only 15](#) pedestrian-vehicle collisions on Cascade in that time frame (7).

Furthermore, lane reduction only addresses one form of pedestrian-vehicle collision: the “hidden car” collision, which is when the vehicle in the first lane stops but the vehicle in the second lane fails to yield. CC’s report lists only one “hidden car” collision on Cascade Avenue from 2000-2012 (7). The other collisions involved either a vehicle in the first lane failing to yield or the pedestrian, skateboarder, or cyclist running into the vehicle (7). Lane reduction would not address these types of collisions. [So out of at least 1,600,000 pedestrian crossings on Cascade from 2000 to 2012, Krager’s latest proposal addresses literally one collision.](#)

Lane reduction doesn’t resolve pedestrian safety issues.

A pedestrian underpass is the safest option.

Even if there were significant pedestrian safety issues at Cascade Avenue, lane reduction wouldn’t be the solution. As outlined in our previous note (3), lane reduction not only [fails to address](#) the more common types of pedestrian-vehicle collisions but also becomes increasingly problematic as the City’s population [continues to grow](#) (8).

In contrast, a pedestrian underpass would address all forms of pedestrian-vehicle collisions by completely decoupling pedestrian traffic from Cascade Avenue. According to CC, nearly all campus users cross Cascade at least once daily (2). Instead of pedestrians negotiating hundreds of traffic interactions every day, it would be safer and more efficient for them to use an underpass at any time, regardless of traffic conditions. Additionally, pedestrian underpasses remain effective as population increases, as demonstrated by the underpasses on the more populous campuses at [Colorado State University](#) and [CU Boulder](#) (9, 10).

¹ Per the Colorado College Transportation Master Plan (2013), at peak times Cascade Avenue sees 900 pedestrian crossings; 900 crossings per day x 150 days per school year x 12 years = 1,620,000 crossings. Note this calculation does not include Cascade Avenue crossings during non-peak times of the school day or during days when school is out, making 1,620,000 a conservative estimate.

[CC has considered](#) the safety benefits of pedestrian underpasses before (11) but decline to pursue that option for reasons of aesthetics. If it had, the accidents Krager cites as justification for lane reductions at Cascade would not have occurred, and the City and its residents would not have to revisit this debate every few years.

Eliminating flashing light crosswalks would increase safety.

Even if CC is set against the more effective option of the underpass, there are other solutions to the pedestrian issue besides lane reduction. Based on [CC's analysis](#), Nevada Avenue has both higher average vehicular traffic and fewer pedestrian-vehicle accidents than Cascade (12). This phenomenon is likely in part because Nevada has fewer crosswalks, and the crosswalks it does have are all signaled, whereas Cascade has multiple unsignaled crosswalks. As CC has explained, signaled crosswalks lead to “timed and expected” traffic flow, providing “[clarity to drivers and pedestrians alike](#)” (2). In contrast, as Krager has previously suggested, unsignaled crosswalks with only flashing lights can make pedestrians “[feel too safe](#),” such that they aren’t appropriately cautious when crossing (11). Krager has now proposed [removing two of the unsignaled crosswalks](#) on Cascade (13).

If pedestrian safety is the primary goal, the most effective solution is still the underpass. An underpass fully eliminates pedestrian exposure to all forms of pedestrian-vehicle collisions. Fewer unsignaled crosswalks are the second choice, decreasing (though not fully eliminating) exposure to all forms of collisions. Lane reduction, the option least favored by residents, is the most drastic, least effective choice; it would neither eliminate nor decrease most types of pedestrian-vehicle collisions.

So why do Krager and CC continue to push for lane reduction?

Despite scant evidence that Cascade is particularly dangerous, or that lane reduction would mitigate that danger, [Krager claims](#) the safety concern is so pressing she must reduce lanes on Cascade very soon—before students return to CC in August (13). Yet there is no indication that Cascade is so perilous, much less that Cascade became perilous very suddenly in the weeks since ONEN residents have come out against the ONEN Plan. Pedestrian safety is a dubious reason for this allegedly urgent effort.

The less palatable but more probable incentive for lane reduction is to discourage people from using automobiles. In her [most recent proposal](#), Krager refers to statements from the Colorado College Master Plan that she says support her proposal (5). Specifically, she quotes CC explaining, “[Colorado College] has [a desire to limit \(to the extent possible\) the reliance on the automobile](#) by its students, faculty, and staff” (2). Lane reduction would likely have that effect. As outlined in our previous note (3), lane reduction on improper roads [increases traffic congestion](#). [Krager has claimed that congestion is “good”](#) because it “increases other modes of transportation” (14). In fact, CC has already acknowledged its preferred “vehicular circulation scenario” would involve [reduced vehicle access](#) across and through campus (2).

Krager suggests her most recent proposal meets the “present and future mobility needs of the community in a safe and efficient manner” (5). If the mobility needs of Colorado Springs include strong-arming citizens into giving up their preferred mode of transportation, perhaps this claim makes sense. But when it comes to handling current and future vehicle capacity, facilitating efficient traffic flow, and ensuring pedestrian safety, Krager’s proposal falls short.

We urge the City to put an end to this decade-long debate:
reject lane reduction proposals in favor of data-driven solutions.

References

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