





STREETSBLOG

Designing self-policing streets, and other mobility justice strategies

By Courtney Cobbs | Jun 25, 2020 | 33 COMMENTS



Ideally every residential street would have traffic calming. Photo: John Greenfield


Recently neighbors reporting problems with [cut-through traffic and fast driving](#) on the Bloomingdale alternative Slow Streets route. (The city of Chicago calls these “Shared Streets”). And last week Chicago Department of Transportation [commissioner Gia Biagi said](#) she hopes to see a future “where we drive a little slower, and we look out for each other.” These were reminders that we need traffic calming on as many residential streets as possible.    

The vast majority of Chicago roadways already are, in effect, shared streets,” where motorists are expected to drive safely around people on bikes. But just about anyone who has cycled in our city has a story or five about an encounter with an aggressive or speeding driver.

When it comes to sharing the road, people on bikes are on the losing side of the equation. Those who [follow me on social media](#) know that I will not cheer CDOT slapping paint down on the road and calling it a safe bike lane. Paint is not protection. We must build real, physically protected cycling infrastructure, the kind that doesn’t leave people on bikes vulnerable to the whims of drivers and will actually lead to more people choosing biking as a form of transportation.

As thousands of Chicagoans are calling on the City Council to greatly reduce funding for the Chicago Police Department, or completely eliminate it, residents are demanding more investment in things that actually improve people’s lives, such as healthcare, including mental health services; education; affordable housing, and other forms of community development.

Improving our transportation system, with a focus on mobility justice, falls under this category as well. We can invest in improving the commutes of the Black and Brown Chicagoans who are most likely to have long commutes. Improvements such as increasing bus and [South Side Metra line frequency](#), bus-only lanes, transit-priority traffic signals, and more affordable fares would be a step forward. We can help make biking a viable option for African-American and Latinx residents through better infrastructure, education, and encouragement. We can prevent racial profiling incidents by reducing the use of police officers for traffic enforcement. One way to do so is to create self-policing streets.

A few months ago I asked an officer to do his job by citing a driver who was parked in a bike lane, and the cop responded by threatening to arrest me. I came back to the desire to have bike lanes that greatly reduced the chances of anyone parking or driving in them. The key to keeping bike lanes free of motor vehicles isn’t more enforcement by police or anyone else. 

It's designing the lanes in such a way that drivers intuitively know the space isn't meant for them, or at the very least are not able to maneuver themselves into the space. These types of physically protected bikeways must become standard and be installed citywide in order to help get more Chicagoans from all walks of life on bikes.



However, I don't have any illusions that protected lanes alone will be enough to reduce Black and Brown Chicagoans' interactions with the police. In recent years Chicago police have [written exponentially more tickets](#) for bike in fractions in some communities of color compared to majority-white neighborhoods. CPD officials justified that practicing by claiming that using zero-tolerance bike enforcement as a pretext for searches in high-crime areas is an effective crime-fighting strategy.

But as Chicago activists fighting for reallocating police funds have noted, the most effective way to reduce crime is not to increase policing, but rather to address the root causes. And as I said above, along with investing in social services, improving mobility justice is part of the solution. Here are some more strategies:

- Traffic calming such as [chicanes](#), raised crosswalks , [pocket playgrounds](#), and road diets (perhaps by building planter-protected bike lanes?) on the majority of residential streets
- Install more speed cameras on arterial streets. To make the penalties for violations more equitable fines should be assessed on a sliding scale, according to the speeder's income, and traffic school should be offered as an alternative to paying a fee.
- Bike vouchers for low- and moderate-income Chicagoans who would like to take up cycling
- Subsidized transit fares for [low-income Chicagoans](#)

There are so many more possibilities to increase mobility justice, and therefore racial equity, in Chicago. What would you add to this list?

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How do we promote efficient and equitable transportation during and after the pandemic?

By Imelda March | Apr 24, 2020

Audrey Wennink from the Metropolitan Planning Council and Lynda Lopez from Active Trans discuss what needs to be done to promote mobility justice during the pandemic, and prevent a spike in driving afterwards.



Talking about Slow Streets and equitable community input

By Courtney Cobbs | Jun 22, 2020

47th Ward alderman Matt Martin hosted a panel on these topics with reps from the Active Transportation Alliance, the Metropolitan Planning Council, and Streetsblog Chicago.



Did Chicago miss the chance to make streets less car-centric? CDOT's Gia Biagi responds

By John Greenfield | Jun 25, 2020

During an interview with Streetsblog, the CDOT chief also discussed bike lane restriping, pandemic bus lanes, and how she's settling into life at the department.





Ahmaud Arbery's death, mobility justice, and the open streets debate

By Courtney Cobbs | May 11, 2020

For Black and Brown people to feel completely safe walking, biking, or just existing in public space, we need to make fundamental changes in the way our society is structured.



ATA talked with West Siders about barriers to walking, biking, and using transit

By Courtney Cobbs | Jul 29, 2020

We must look at all the factors that are preventing people from using more sustainable modes of travel and work to address those issues.

STREETSblog USA

When People Aren't Afraid to Walk in the Street With Cars

By Angie Schmitt | Oct 19, 2016

“Shared spaces” are streets where driving is allowed but walking and biking take priority. They are designed without curbs, signage, and other typical markers that separate cars from people on foot. The design cues are subtler. Everyone mixes together in the same space, and drivers travel slowly enough that they can make eye contact with pedestrians. Can [...]

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**Tom McCarey** • a month ago

Calming creates even greater delays to emergency vehicles. Emergency vehicles' longer wheel-bases, stiff suspension, and high vehicle weights require their drivers to slow almost to a stop to negotiate the devices safely. Scientific analysis predicts that deaths in a community rise due to delays of emergency vehicles caused by traffic-calming measures.

Even minor delays to emergency vehicles caused by delay-inducing traffic calming devices create far more risk to a community than speeding vehicles.

Researcher Ronald Bowman's analysis shows that if Boulder, Colorado implemented its plans for traffic-calming devices, they would increase emergency vehicle response times. Bowman predicts that patients needing emergency treatment would incur an increased risk to their survivability of 85 to 1 for every one minute of additional delay to response times due to planned traffic calming. In other words, if emergency medical technicians were delayed one additional minute by traffic-calming devices, a heart attack patient would be 85 times more likely to die.

^ | ▾ 1 • Reply • Share ›

**Marven Norman** ➔ Tom McCarey • a month ago

EMS could always buy vehicles that aren't impacted (as much) and of course, there's the fact that more activity will reduce the need for emergency responses in the first place.

^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

**Tom McCarey** • a month ago

What these people want is less mobility for the rest of Earth destroying cars and their homicidal



what these people want is less mobility for the nasty Earth destroying cars and their homicidal drivers. It's all agenda driven to destroy the most important invention of the 20th Century.

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu...>

^ | v 2 • Reply • Share ›



Dan Allison • a month ago

Thank you! Not from Chicago, so these are more general comments. 1) Protected bikeways and protected intersections are expensive, so I think it is necessary to really know where people are already going, and need the higher level of safety, AND where they are NOT going because it is so unsafe, and prioritize those streets for protection. For other streets, calming, with some of the ideas you mentioned, makes sense. Seattle has proved that simply lowering speeds limits city-wide does in fact have some effect on vehicle speeds, so that should be in the mix. 2) Sliding scale based on vehicle value would be easier to implement, less concern about privacy, and the state already has that information with vehicle registration. The automated (not police) ticket could look up the value and send the appropriate scaled ticket.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

CourtneyCyclez → Dan Allison • a month ago

Hi Dan! I like the idea about tickets based on vehicle value. I agree that not every street needs a protected bike lane. The greenway that I ride on could be made safer if it was converted into a people street OR if the vehicle storage lane was eliminated on one side and the street made into a one-way with a planter-protected bike lane.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Sebastian Baptiste Huydts • a month ago

Thank you for yet another great article in which you . I keep finding myself plugging a much cheaper and faster solution for separated bike infra, one that I believe would work just as well for Chicago as it has done in Barcelona and other cities. They're certainly sturdier than those plastic posts that continuously get mowed down, and unlike the concrete barriers, allow bikes to escape in case of need. The so-called armadillos are made of used car tires btw.



1 ^ | v 1 • Reply • Share ›

Marven Norman → Sebastian Baptiste Huydts • a month ago

Armadillos are a disaster for bicyclists.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Sebastian Baptiste Huydts → Marven Norman • 21 days ago • edited

I'm a cyclist, live 4 months out of the year in Barcelona, and love the armadillo paths, and judging from the numbers I'm not the only one. They have been a great success in Barcelona—see for yourself



great success in Barcelona – see for yourself.

<https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/bicicleta/en/services/cycle-routes/the-bicycle-lane-network>. I'm sure some drivers find them annoying. In sharp contrast, I'd say the true disaster for cyclists in Chicago is the current lack of vision/action for comprehensive bike infra.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Marven Norman → Sebastian Baptiste Huydts • 21 days ago

With you on the lack of infrastructure being a problem in itself, but the armadillos really are also quite problematic. They're way to low so they represent a hazard which can trip up a bicyclist, potentially even throwing them into the street.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Bernard Finucane → Sebastian Baptiste Huydts • a month ago

Steel posts with a concrete core would be better. The problem with the armadillo is that it doesn't give drivers good visual cue as to what they should do.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Tom McCarey • a month ago

Members of city councils and transportation divisions often portray delay to emergency response by calming devices as simply a tradeoff for increased safety from speeding cars. They avoid making the analysis which shows which risk is greater. Ronald Bowman, a scientist in Boulder, Colorado developed an analysis to compare these risks. The results show that even minor delay to emergency response by calming devices imposes far greater risk on the community than vehicles, speeding or not. The result of Bowman's analysis, showed a risk factor of 85 – 1 from an additional one minute of delay (predicted to result from the installation of all the devices proposed for the City of Boulder at the time) before one life might be saved by the devices — if it can be shown that the devices do save lives. Bowman's analysis, based on the curve of survivability for victims of cardiac arrest and severe trauma (AHA) has been verified by a professional mathematician.

The Bowman analysis was applied to the City of Austin, Texas by Assistant Fire Chief, Les Bunte, with similar results.

^ | v 3 • Reply • Share ›



S Taylor → Tom McCarey • 17 days ago

Man-splain it, Tom! Tell us what your one expert knows that we don't. Win it. No, what I really think is that these concerns have been amply addressed by engineers and designers already.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



ChicagoCyclist → Tom McCarey • a month ago

Mr. McCarey's post is not correct. The consensus is that in urban and suburban settings...



...the measure of a post is not correct. The conclusion is that, in urban and suburban settings, emergency responders of all kinds (fire, police, EMS) taken together -- as well as the societies, whom these responders serve and of which they are a part -- will **benefit much more from slower traffic** (and fewer fatal and serious crashes that results from slowing traffic in urban areas) than from "doing nothing" / continuing with the status quo of street (over)design. The right equipment (especially fire trucks), limiting urban "sprawl," and reducing the number of private, single-occupant vehicles on the roads (and the congestion that results) is the best way to improve response times and outcomes.



Here are some key resources:

<https://nacto.org/wp-content...>

<https://www.epa.gov/smartgr...>

<https://www.cnu.org/sites/d...>

<https://www.metrotrans.org/ass...>

<https://www.lgc.org/resourc...>

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Sebastian Baptiste Huydts → Tom McCarey • a month ago

Funny, I never thought of traffic jams as calming devices. But I can imagine that it would be bad if you're stuck in a jam in the ambulance...



1 ^ | v 1 • Reply • Share ›



Bernard Finucane → Sebastian Baptiste Huydts • a month ago

No, there is plenty of room for ambulances to get through. Look at the distances between the cars. They are traveling very slowly in lanes wide enough to support 200 kph traffic.

^ | v 1 • Reply • Share ›



Marvin Norman → Bernard Finucane • a month ago

Yet that's not what happens in reality. Instead, they too get stuck.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Tooscrapps → Tom McCarey • a month ago • edited

^National Motorists Association propaganda^



<https://www.motorists.org/i...>

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



rwy • a month ago

I think Jalopnik made a good point about how traffic stops do little to make our streets safer. Most of us are aware that the threat of being pulled over does little to deter drivers from breaking the law. There is a very good case for downplaying to role of police in traffic safety.

But just about anyone who has cycled in our city has a story or five about an encounter with an aggressive or speeding driver.

Only five? That is a lucky cyclist.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Tooscrapps ➔ rwy • a month ago

It certainly feels like it used to be a roll of the dice if you'd get caught, but it seems like more and more people are doing it in front of traffic enforcement. Everyday you see motorists blowing through crosswalks at City Hall or parking in bike lanes and bus stops in front of police. Already entitled motorists are becoming more entitled. A sustained enforcement blitz in the Loop would do much in the way of public perception about how the City views traffic safety.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Courtney Cobbs ➔ Tooscrapps • a month ago

Even "traffic enforcement" parks in "bike lanes". Even when I called 911 about someone parked in a "bike lane", the responding officer sided with the driver and threatened to arrest me. One solution is to build REAL bike lanes that drivers cannot park or drive in.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Tooscrapps ➔ Courtney Cobbs • a month ago

That of course is the goal. Physical barriers and camera enforcement don't see class or race. I would love to remove the CPD from enforcement, but the City is unwilling/unable to make the changes needed to do that.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



CourtneyCyclez ➔ Tooscrapps • a month ago

For now. Things are constantly changing and I believe we will look back on these times of extreme policing and wonder why we didn't do away with it sooner.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Tooscrapps • a month ago

Diagonal diverters in the middle of residential intersections where two one-way streets meet would lower speeds and abolish cut-through traffic. Cheap, simple, and effective.



2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Anne A** → Tooscrapps • a month ago

Diagonal diverters have to be thoughtfully placed so they don't cause other problems. We have a few of these in North Beverly (see map link below). Openings at the curb need to be wide enough to accommodate bike trailers and adult trikes so that passing these corners does not require going on and off the sidewalk.

When diverters in North Beverly were replaced in recent years after water dept. construction, I tried to get these modified in that way, but they were replaced in the same stupid way. We need better diverter designs that are bike friendly.

<https://www.google.com/maps...>

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Marven Norman** → Anne A • a month ago

Bad design, all the others I recall seeing definitely don't do that.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Anne A** → Marven Norman • a month ago

Yes, it IS a bad design.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Tooscrapps** → Anne A • a month ago

There should be a sidewalk width, street level cut right in the middle.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**johnaustingreenfield** Mod → Tooscrapps • a month ago

That's a completely logical idea. So of course Chicago motorists freaked out and killed proposals for traffic diverters on Berteau and Manor.

<https://chi.streetsblog.org...>

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Tooscrapps** → johnaustingreenfield • a month ago

Unfortunately that street was a two-way, which is always an uphill climb with residents. The fact that CDOT didn't change the two-way portion on Dickens b/t the Howe/Larabee alley and Lincoln to homogenize the proposed greenway is a testament to that. Instead, cyclist get sharrows.

But, I think the opinions have changed, especially on streets like Leland. Place diverters at Hermitage and/or Paulina.

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

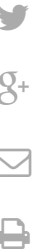
**Anne A** • a month ago

This is a great set of strategies. More speed cameras - yes! Sliding scale and traffic school - sounds good.



I see speeding problems in so many locations around the city. Most of my riding since shutdown has been in Beverly and Morgan Park, where speeding enforcement was almost non-existent to begin with and many speeders are off-duty first responders. I would LOVE to see speed cameras on Western, where we are now seeing near-highway speeds in some neighborhood locations.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



CourtneyCyclez → Anne A • a month ago

The thing about Western, Sheridan, and so many of the major arterials that see speeding is that they're managed by IDOT which has proven they are not at all interested in doing anything to make their streets safer. I wish it was easier. If I had a dollar for every speeding driver I observe on Sheridan Rd alone.....

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Carter O'Brien → CourtneyCyclez • a month ago

IDOT has bully authority when it comes to most of the east-west arterials as well, which is extremely annoying as when combined with the expressway on and off ramps, all of us who need to cross an expressway are basically ensured that Joe Schmoe Suburbanite's "right" to quickly get in and out of the city by car will trump city residents' right to safety and improving the greater public health.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Anne A → CourtneyCyclez • a month ago

IDOT is a huge obstacle to making our streets safer.

I remember the speeding problems on Sheridan well from my Rogers Park days and earlier. Speeding has been a problem there for decades.

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

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