

From: Richard Goldberg, 202 Fallen Log, Chapel Hill
To: Chapel Hill town council
Subject: Petition regarding bike lanes
Date: April 8, 2002

I congratulate the current and previous Town Councils for encouraging mass transit instead of auto transit in the past year. The fare-free transit has been very successful so far, and this will greatly benefit the people who live and work in Chapel Hill. However, the Council should do much more to another form of alternative transportation: bicycling.

Chapel Hill should be embarrassed at the lack of bike lanes in town. While Carrboro provides bike lanes along all its major streets in the downtown area, the only downtown bike lane in Chapel Hill is on Pittsboro St. There is a lane on Cameron Ave, but it exists only for a few hours a day before giving way to free parking. This is in an area with great weather and thousands of students, faculty, and employees who have bicycles and live within easy commuting distance to the campus and downtown area. People who live farther away also bring their bikes downtown using the bike racks on buses.

As a result, the town should encourage bicycling as a means to alleviate traffic and parking constraints in Chapel Hill. There are several ways that this could happen immediately and with little cost to the town:

- Reduce Columbia St. from 4 lanes to 2 lanes from Manning Dr. to South St, and add a bike lane instead. A one-way street with 2 lanes should be sufficient because adjacent Pittsboro St. is also a one-way street with 2 lanes. This will have additional benefits. With only two lanes, traffic will slow down along this "speedway" that has many cars, bikes and pedestrians. Also, it will also be easier for pedestrians to cross a two lane street.
- Remove on-street parking from Cameron Ave and make these bike lanes for 24 hours a day. With the current system, bike lanes are heading downtown from 7-9:45 am and out of town from 3-6 pm. However, hundreds of bicyclists come and go from UNC campus at all times of day. In addition, cars start parking in these bike lanes at about 9:20 am for a coveted free parking space. At 9:30 am this morning, I counted 19 cars illegally parked in the eastbound bike lane. The UNC students sit in their cars, often with their engines running, as they do their homework and wait till they are legally parked at 9:45 am. If a policeman makes them leave before 9:45, they just drive someplace else and return a few minutes later. For example, I have watched someone drive to the Credit Union parking lot on Pittsboro St. after a policeman made him leave Cameron Ave.

In addition, cars are often parked in the outbound bike lanes after 3pm. I see this happen at least 3 days a week. While these cars often have tickets in their windshields, it is still a hazard for bicyclists to be forced into traffic.

This on-street parking serves less than 100 cars, yet it inconveniences hundreds of bicyclists. And if this were a safe bike lane, there would be even more bicyclists. The drivers have another option – take the free bus – but the bicyclists have no safe place to ride. This lane should be for bikes, not cars.

- Remove on-street parking from McCauley St. and replace it with bike lanes for 24 hours a day. Currently, parking is allowed on this street only after noon, but as on Cameron Ave, cars start parking here starting at 11:15 for a coveted free space. They wait, running their engines, until noon strikes.

Students may complain about losing their free parking spaces on these streets. As a former student, I can appreciate the value of free parking! However, they have no right to complain since the buses are now free.

Residents on Cameron and McCauley may complain about losing their on-street parking; however, it appears that they have adequate parking in their driveways. This action would not be unprecedented around here, as Carrboro residents who live on Main, Hillsborough, N. Greensboro, and Poplar Streets seem to survive without on-street parking. But if residents on Cameron and McCauley feel that they really need the on-street parking overnight, an acceptable (although less desirable) alternative is for bike lanes from 7am to 7pm and parking from 7pm to 7am. A proposal along these lines for Cameron Ave was approved by the Bicycling and Pedestrian task force on November 14, 2000, but it was rejected by the manager.

I know there is controversy about whether to mark bike lanes with a white line to separate them from traffic. I urge the town to paint this line so that the traffic lanes on Cameron, McCauley, and Columbia are narrower. This will reduce traffic speeds and increase safety for bicyclists and pedestrians.

The steps outlined here would provide immediate benefits to bicyclists at little cost to the town. I also urge the town to investigate bike lanes on every other major street in the downtown and campus area. I realize that the town is pressed for funding, but I feel the town should develop a vision for an integrated network of downtown bike lanes. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Richard Goldberg