

Cyclists Highlight City's

BY FELIX WONG

For Fort Collins Now

The meeting room at New Belgium Brewing Co. was filled to near-capacity, but not one attendee had a cup of beer in his hand.

Instead, more than 60 wind-breaker- and lycra-clad cyclists discussed infrastructure improvements to make bicycle commuting in Fort Collins safer and more enjoyable.

"Have you ever ridden on Riverside Avenue?" asked Rick Price, president of Friends of the Fort Collins Bicycle Program. "It's a great adrenaline rush."

Laughter erupted and soon others were shouting the names of other roads with marginal, discontinuous, or non-existent bicycle lanes. Within 45 minutes, a large easel pad was covered with a couple dozen street names. The attendees voted for the six that need improvement most urgently.

The verdict: Horsetooth Road (east and west of College Avenue), Laurel Street (from Howes Street to Remington Street), Taft Hill Road (from Elizabeth Street to Laporte Avenue), Shields Street (from Laurel Street to Laporte Avenue), North College Avenue, and, yes, Riverside Avenue. Several of these arteries are frequently used by bicycle commuters with few expedient alternative routes in those areas.

That meeting was Nov. 8.

The Friends of Fort Collins Bicycle Program will take this list and prepare formal recommendations to transportation planners for the city's upcoming bike plan, which is scheduled to go before City Council early next year.

Just how dangerous are these street segments for bicycle commuters? I have pedaled along all those streets but only during weekend morning rides while most people were still in bed. With no traffic to contend with, I didn't remember the roads being that frightening.

Curiosity got the best of me, so the next day I devised a plan. As a Friday bike ride, I'd do my own



Felix Wong | for FCNow
The bike line on this section of Taft Hill Road, just north of Mulberry, disappears.

Tour de Fort Collins, criss-crossing the town on each of those roads a couple hours before sunset.

I first rolled along Taft Hill Road heading south, negotiating the new roundabout at Vine Street without incident. I cruised

comfortably within the bike lane and was unperturbed by cars rushing by until I approached Mulberry Street, where the bike lane abruptly disappeared. Finding myself suddenly side-by-side by a hulking Ford F-150 pickup in a single 10-foot-wide lane, I resigned to riding in the one-foot-wide gutter.

Some improvement, I thought, does need to be made here, such as posting signs or painting road stencils proclaiming, "Bikes Merge with Traffic," "Bikes in Lane," or "Share the Road"—all ideas suggested by attendees of the bicycle meeting. This would reduce confusion for both cyclists and motorists on how to negotiate these areas.

The next span I biked was on Shields Street, north of Laurel Street. Beyond this intersection, the bike lane ended as suddenly as it did on Taft Hill Road, only

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'Danger Zones'

this time it would not reappear for more than a mile. It was gutter time again. Or was it?

No, I resolved, I was not going to roll down the gutter like a bowling ball. Besides, as a bus pulled alongside close enough that I could reach out with my left hand and knock on its door, I realized that even riding in the gutter would put me too close for comfort to two-ton vehicles that could easily squash me as if I were a mosquito.

Instead, I shifted up a gear, and then a second and a third. Accelerating away from the bus, I decided to assert myself like a motorcyclist.

With my legs spinning furiously in the highest gear and the cyclometer on the handlebars displaying speeds above 30 mph, I drifted to the middle of the right

lane, riding in line with traffic. As I "motorpaced" three car-lengths behind a truck for two minutes, I smiled and thought this was fun.

That is, until a motorist who had turned on his blinkers to turn left onto a street after Laporte Avenue unexpectedly changed his mind and suddenly swerved back into the lane a few feet in front of me. My heart rate—already high from riding fast—shot up another 20 beats per minute.

After my nerves calmed down, I decided to head home, being convinced that some roads in Fort Collins do need immediate improvement to be more bicycle friendly. There was no need to ride on Riverside Avenue—I already had my adrenaline rush for the day. ☺

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