

July 2019

# POLICY BRIEF

# PROTECTED BIKE LANES & STREET RESURFACING



## Protected bike lanes should remain protected when NYC DOT is refreshing street surfaces

- Protected bike lanes are increasingly present on major bike routes. They improve safety for all street users and attract new bike trips and riders.
- In the 10 years since introducing this street form, the NYC Dept of Transportation has done nothing to preserve protected bike lane rights of way when it resurfaces city streets. This neglect is especially problematic and dangerous along the increasing number of two-way bike lanes NYC DOT is installing.
- Street resurfacing coincides seasonally with the heaviest use of bikes on city streets.
- NYC DOT's Roadway Repair & Maintenance Division should develop a consistent and effective protocol for indicating protected bike lane rights of way and floating parking lanes during its resurfacing operations.



*A milled street - all markings removed*

asphalt, and then replacing markings such as lane lines, crosswalks and so forth.

The city's street resurfacing practice clashes with the presence of protected bike lanes. Essentially, one unit of NYC DOT creates robust, attractive bike corridors on city avenues and another unit removes some of those bike lanes for weeks during peak riding season without any acknowledgement of bike transportation.

The amount of time between the start of milling, resurfacing and restoring pavement markings can last for weeks, a month, and sometimes more.

A hallmark of many protected lanes is the "floating" parking lane. Cars parked one lane away from the curbside create a barrier between bike riders and moving

## Street Resurfacing

NYC DOT periodically renews the worn asphalt surface of city streets. The process involves scraping ("milling" in DOT parlance) the old surface of the street away, leaving the concrete foundation. This is followed by laying new



*Usually the east curb of 2nd Avenue is a bike lane protected by a row of parked cars*

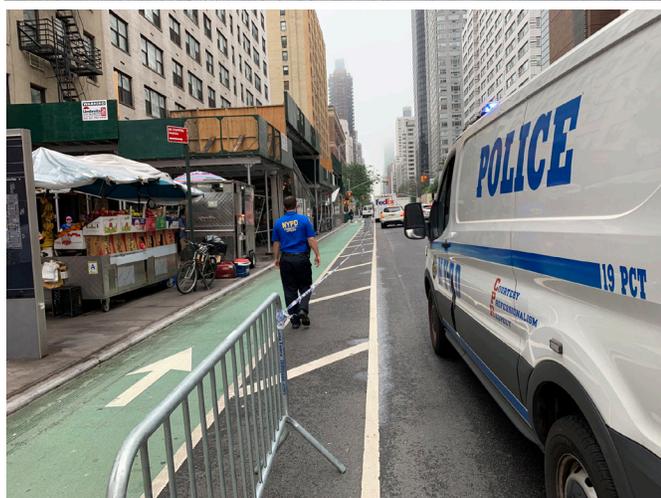
cars and trucks. The removal of street markings generally obscures any indication that cars should park away from the curb, erasing the protected bike lane and leaving bike riders habituated to using protected lanes to fend for themselves amid the city's heavy traffic.

Addressing this problem is becoming more urgent. While removal of protected bike lanes on one-way avenues may be daunting, inconvenient and confusing, it's downright dangerous to do on a street with a two-way bikeway. NYC DOT imposes a hazardous grey area when it does this: street regulations and the developed habits of bike riders say the street is two-way for bikes, but nothing on the unmarked street allows for this. Providing detour information online and with signs could help in these cases, but this is not current practice.

## Simple, Low-Tech Remedy

Fixing this problem isn't difficult, though it will require additional effort by NYC DOT's Roadway Repair & Maintenance Division. It should simply mark protected bike lanes with cones or other temporary barriers/indicators while the painted street markings are absent.

This summer, NYC DOT has responded to heightened discussion of this problem by positioning traffic barrels with small signs at some corners where protected bike lanes ordinarily feature pedestrian refuge islands. We greatly appreciate NYC DOT taking action in this regard, but further testing of how to keep cars out of the cycling



*This curb is usually occupied by a two-way bike lane. How are bicyclists – especially those riding against the direction of car traffic – supposed to approach this street when no markings are present?*

right of way is needed, as is a more consistent effort. Recent use of moveable barriers and emergency tape along newly implemented (not physically protected) blocks of the 2nd Avenue bike lane by the NY Police Dept's 19th Precinct may be a useful, low-cost model to emulate.

Fixing the problem of protected bike lanes and street resurfacing would end a disconnect in official practice that creates unnecessary danger for bike riders and may discourage more New Yorkers from choosing bikes as a regular way of getting around the city.

## Recommendations

- NYC DOT's Roadway Repair and Maintenance division should adopt a standard operation procedure for defining/identifying protected bike lanes for times when markings are removed from city streets.
- NYC DOT should experiment with a variety of techniques to keep protected bike lane rights of way clear for bike traffic. Cones, barricades plus tape and other barriers should be tested.
- Two-way bike lanes should receive urgent attention in this regard.
- NYC DOT should impose a quicker schedule from milling to resurfacing and marking on key bike routes. DOT will have to keep cones or other barriers in place for fewer days if the entire process is compressed.
- NYC DOT should establish an in-house Bike Lane Inspection team that can help maintain protected bike lanes during resurfacing. The unit would have broader duties to organize maintenance of bike lane surfaces and markings, enforce construction permits that affect bike lanes, create bike traffic detours and call in enforcement where needed.