



Outlook

[Draft] Fw: CSEP Testimony: Orange Street Redesign

From MMaza@newhavenct.gov

From: Stasia Brewczynski

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To: Misty Maza; Anna Festa; Kampton Singh; Alder Caroline Tanbee Smith; Amy D. Marx; Gary B. Hogan; Alder Kiana Flores; Troy Streater; Public Testimony; Eli Sabin

Cc: Mayor Elicker; Giovanni Zinn; Justin Elicker; Sandeep Aysola; Michael Piscitelli

Subject: CSEP Testimony: Orange Street Redesign

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Dear CSEP Committee Members,

I'm dismayed to be emailing in strong opposition to spending state dollars on the current Orange Street plan. While the current design of Orange Street puts users in danger, the proposed plan, unfortunately, does not address this problem. Instead, it proposes spending a substantial amount of money to create both similar and new problems.

Despite safe street advocates flagging detailed concerns about the design's disregard of best practices (including those put out by NACTO, the National Highway Institute, and more) throughout the years-long planning process, the current proposal will make Orange Street more dangerous and less user-friendly for all street users, this includes pedestrians, micromobility users, drivers, and bus passengers.

Proponents of the proposed design are inaccurately and dangerously co-opting safe streets language to push through a plan that is anything but. Simply calling something a "Neighborhood Greenway" or "Shared Lane" or "Bike Boulevard," for example, does not make it so. Evidence-based, best practice design does.

New Haven needs and deserves more slow, people-centric, car- and truck-light/free streets. In fact, there are many New Haven streets that need this treatment even more urgently than Orange Street, and that could achieve it even more easily and inexpensively. The proposed design, however, will not achieve this goal, instead it will further endanger people while spending a huge amount of resources.

Lack of political will to follow evidence-based best practices as well as the results of the parking study commissioned by the city is not a good reason to forward this flawed proposal. I urge you not to justify negligence from authorities and mollify a small percentage of residents who value individual convenience over community safety by forwarding this plan.

Instead, I implore you to listen to the people who are asking for this proposal to follow laws and proven best practices. In doing so, you will help prevent anti-social individuals and reckless authorities from harming us and themselves. Please refer to the below sections on Design Issues and Process Issues for additional context.

Sincerely,
Stasia Brewczynski, New Haven

Design Issues:

I am very supportive of the goals that this design and the Mayor's public 2024 announcement suggest, which I take to be:

1. Increasing pedestrian safety at all crossings
2. Reclaiming un- or under-utilized streetspace for placemaking and sustainable infrastructure
3. Significantly slowing traffic to prioritize pedestrian and cyclist safety and movement

The design looks like it will go a long way in advancing the first goal. Elements of the design will advance the second, though substituting the previous narrow (4') bike lanes with an 8' median is not an especially effective use of space on a valuable neighborhood corridor.

Without further changes, however, the third risks backfiring dangerously: the proposed neighborhood greenway, or "bike boulevard," design conflicts with best practices in key ways and would actually make cycling on the street more dangerous than the previous narrow bike lanes or even as currently striped by using cyclists themselves as a traffic calming tool, which is neither effective nor safe. Anyone who has biked in the travel lane on a fast moving and narrow street knows that this would create unnecessary and dangerous conflicts beyond current conditions (just take a ride up or down Orange and you will instantly notice the difference between north and south of Pearl street and this will be immediately apparent). This would also dramatically slow traffic and create conflict points with existing bus routes.

Based on NACTO's guidelines there are two key issues, both of which stem from the fact that Orange Street, as currently used, is not a local road but an arterial:

- Speed: A shared street on which cyclists of all ages and abilities can ride safely requires an average traffic speed of 12-15 mph (see NACTO table), not 20 as in the proposed design limit (or 25-30 as the proposed design infrastructure may realistically set). There are many speed management tools, all of which the city already has experience implementing elsewhere, that could be added to address this concern (speed humps or speed tables with sufficient grade on each block south of Willow, raised intersections wherever possible, chicanes, traffic circles)
- Traffic volume: neighborhood greenways, or bicycle boulevards, are recommended for streets with 1,500 vehicles per day or fewer, while Orange street currently has 2800 to 3800. It also has a number of buses between CT Transit and Yale shuttle services. I raise this as a question: has the city considered how this design would work with current traffic volumes? Is the intention to divert significant traffic onto other streets? Or to drastically reduce traffic in the short term? How would bus movement work? None of these questions have been answered by alders or city staff since the plan's release despite numerous requests from residents.

Process Issues:

The original impetus for this project as far as I am aware came at the unveiling of the Safe Routes for All Plan in 2021 when Chief Engineer Zinn suggested that it was long overdue to improve the very first bike lanes installed in the city: those on Orange street. He suspected that there was excess on-street which, if removed, would make room for widened and fully protected bike lanes. The street was milled and left entirely unstriped

for over a year as the protracted process of alder community engagement began. It has since been partially re-stripped, though there are still no bike lanes 3 years later.

During the community input process:

- Residents gave input on several TT&P design options. These were all simple restriping designs that differed in where and whether parking would be removed and what kind of protection the bike lanes would have. Never was anything related to the current design proposed throughout the community input process.
- Though I'm not aware of a vote or other quantitative measure at these meetings, resident input via chat and spoken input was overwhelmingly in support of removing parking to support adding protected bike lanes.
- Members of the Safe Streets Coalition of New Haven canvassed every door on this stretch of Orange street and found over 95% of people that we spoke with were in support of protected bike lanes.
- Over 300 residents signed a petition in support of protected bike lanes and removing one side of parking.
- The city commissioned a parking study which, though it was never made fully public, clearly stated that removing one side of parking would not place an undue burden on residents.

If those reasons were not enough to indicate that protected bike lanes were warranted, the Complete Streets Ordinance, passed into law in New Haven 15 years ago, seems to have already decided it for us by clearly stating the hierarchy of modalities for any new street design: "The City of New Haven shall require the accommodation of the safety and convenience of all users of the transportation system using a hierarchy of users which supports and encourages non-motorized transportation and prioritizes the needs of the most vulnerable users: children, the elderly and persons with disabilities." (p11) On top of that, parking is explicitly listed as a "societal cost" (p23) and the listed priorities (p25) in the manual for Safety, Human Health, Equity, and the Environment all explicitly say we must prioritize non-motorized transport.