

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and members of CSEP,

I am writing to express strong concerns about the proposed Orange Street redesign. I base this on my experience walking, biking, driving, and riding the bus along Orange street every day for 11 years and my involvement with the Safe Streets Coalition of New Haven in many street safety and modal equity projects in our city. Unless the project undergoes significant design changes to address fundamental issues, I urge you not to approve the use of state dollars for this project. I will be out of town for the hearing; I hope you will consider my written testimony in place of in-person testimony.

**The proposed project is flawed both from a design perspective as well as from a process perspective** (details in the pages below). Along with many other residents, I have been closely involved in the process since it was first suggested by City Engineer Giovanni Zinn several years ago. While the city is often slow and conservative in its approach to street infrastructure improvements, this is the first time I am aware of in which an expensive and ambitious design has been proposed that, according to every advocate and transportation planning expert I have spoken with, is fundamentally misguided and will work against its stated aim.

It seems there is simply a lack of political will to follow a) evidence-based best practices, b) the results of the parking study that the city itself commissioned, c) overwhelmingly clear feedback from residents over years of community input, and d) the city's own Complete Streets law. In an attempt to appease a small minority of residents and a handful of influential business owners who are loudly concerned about losing on-street parking, we have ended up with a \$1.6million plan that would work against its stated aims. The city should use state money (and city staff time) to improve streets that actually warrant major interventions like this.

Why is the city unwilling to listen to residents and follow the laws they have passed? Why hold years of community input when the city just ends up proposing something entirely different that ends up getting no resident input? Which problems is this design actually intended to solve?

Thank you for reading and for doing what is best for our city.

Sincerely,

Max Chaoulideer, 107 Foster St Apt 2, New Haven, 06511

## 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 parking 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-striped, 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.