

With the Maryland Avenue cycle track, Baltimore starts a network of ‘Complete Streets’

By [JONNA MCKONE \(/PEOPLE/JONNA-MCKONE\)](#) • DEC 5, 2016

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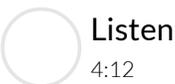
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http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wyprmain/files/styles/x_large/public/201612/md_ave_lane_bikemore.jpg

Bikes and cars now share Maryland Avenue.

CREDIT BIKEMORE

Protected bike lines are cropping up all over Baltimore, and the newest is an especially long stretch of Maryland Avenue, 2.6 miles from 29th Street in Charles Village to Preston Street devoted strictly to non-motorized vehicles.

The long-stalled Maryland Avenue lane is the third major bike lane in the city, part of Baltimore’s planned Downtown Bicycle Network which aims to bring 10 new miles of bike lanes to city street. But unlike previous lanes, this one did not cause what Liz Cornish, executive director of non-profit Bikemore, calls “bike lash” – the vitriol to changes in traffic and to reallocation of public spaces – that bike lanes cause.

Cornish says if people haven’t been “included in the public input process or they hadn’t been aware of the changes that were coming, it can feel almost like a personal attack against their routine, their individuality, their personal choice.”

Rose Weeks who was commuting by bike to her job in East Baltimore and stopped to chat at Maryland and North avenues, says the construction of this bike track has gone better than the one on Roland Avenue where delays and design plans caused explosive community disagreement (<https://www.baltimorebrew.com/2016/03/03/before-a-doubting-audience-city-officials-defend-the-roland-avenue-cycle-track/>).

The Maryland Avenue track was built quickly. Bicyclists were already using the street before the lane was constructed; and there was extensive community outreach.

“I think it’s maybe the first piece of infrastructure that’s been constructed appropriately according to best practices and engineered up to code,” Weeks said. “I think a lot of the other infrastructure has been haphazard. The cycle track that goes past the prison is as grim and depressing as can be. And it feels isolated whereas this feels like it’s integrated with the rest of the city,” she said.

Early on a Monday morning, Graham Coreil-Allen (<http://grahamprojects.com/>), a public artist and organizer, was explaining the design of Maryland Avenue track, pointing out safety features.

“Separating the cycle track, which is a two way bike lane, we have a two and half foot wide buffer zone that’s marked off with white paint diagonal lines,” he explained while perched atop his bike at an intersection. “That is reinforced with a series of white bollards; they are called flexi posts and they remind motorists and block motorists from driving into the cycle track itself.”

The posts can bend and spring back up for emergencies.

Two blocks south of 27th and Maryland Coreil-Allen pointed out “a bunch of cycle commuters” who were “mostly heading south... maybe one passing every two minutes.”

And the lane is benefiting more than just bikers. A 69 year old who identified himself only as Reno was cruising down the bike track in his electric wheelchair.

“All I can say it’s the best thing that happened so far,” he said. “Cut down on traffic people getting hit and what not.”

He said he prefers the bike lane to the sidewalk because it’s smooth and “you ain’t got nothing behind you, so ain’t gotta worry about it. It’s all good.”

Not everyone is happy though with the new lane.

“The biggest problem with it is coming from downtown uptown it’s not safe at all,” says Warren Smith, a 26 year old biker who lives and works in the area. “Motorists don’t know to look downtown for traffic; they just look uptown and so they miss everyone who’s coming this way. I’ve been almost hit a couple times since it happened.”

Smith also said pedestrians, particularly near North Avenue, crisscross through the bike lane adding yet another obstacle for bikers.

Coreil-Allen, the public artist, sees multiple uses of the space, though, as a sign Baltimore is taking not just cars into account in its street design.

“That shows you that pedestrians need more space and when provided with what is an intuitively a safer space, they will accommodate themselves and wander out into that area,” he said.

Navigating traffic he, says, is a series of compromises and negotiations.

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