

Frome Street Bikeway: the way ahead

At the 23 June Adelaide City Council's Economic and Community Development Meeting, the Committee decided 6:5 to ask staff for a report on taking away the landscaping, while keeping the bike lane. This is in order to provide four lanes of traffic during peak periods, with two traffic lanes and two parking lanes during off-peak periods.

The committee decision will be put to the Council for ratification at the next Council meeting.

It was heartening to hear all speakers profess their support for the concept of separated bikeways. In fact those in favour of taking away the landscaping are arguing that such a move would make future separated bike lanes more politically feasible.

However there are a number of concerns we should be raising:

1. the new bike lane would have to be narrower than the existing, because a parking lane (typically 2.1m wide) would have to be converted to a traffic lane (typically 3m wide). The space would have to be found somewhere. Would we still have a 1m buffer from the doors of the parked cars?

A narrower bike lane would create problems. Unlike motorists, who are confined to the speed limit, cyclists' speeds vary a lot. Faster cyclist will need space to overtake wobbly children and other slow cyclists. (Those who have cycled in Copenhagen quickly learn that there is a de facto slow lane and a "commuter lane" of 25kph within the separated bike lanes.) If there isn't the space to overtake, then faster cyclists will use the car lanes instead.

Assuming the space would be taken from the bike lane, then a normal street sweeper would no longer fit it in, creating potential debris problems.

2. The existing buffered bike lanes has lured many more women and children to Frome Street. This will not be the case if that buffer is removed.

3. The plan is to provide more space for more cars to use Frome Street. That means more left-turning traffic cutting across the bike lanes, more danger.

We are sympathetic to the argument that changing the existing bikeway would make the roll out of future separated bike lanes politically easier, but there seems to be an assumption that whatever is in Frome Street will be a template for all future bike lanes.

It won't be: conditions change from street to street and even from block to block. Even the northern part of Frome Street won't look like the southern part, because of higher traffic levels and buses.

And then there is the cost. Council commissioned an \$89k report that told them that the Bikeway needed only minor changes. But now it seems some on the council would want to take out all the \$900k worth of infrastructure put in so far and build a new bikeway. This has been estimated to cost \$520k. Sounds like Sturt Street all over again! Surely the money would be better spent extending the bikeway (in some form) to North Terrace – and beyond.

Let's not dither about spending lots of money in an attempt to get things perfect for one part of Frome Street, while cyclists face diabolical conditions on the rest of it.