

CITY OF NEW HAVEN

# BOARD OF ALDERS

***Abigail Roth*** 42 Lincoln Street

Alder, Ward 7 New Haven, CT 06511-3806

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Member 203-535-5338

City Services and Environmental Policy Committee E-mail: Ward7@newhavenct.gov

Public Safety Committee

Tax Abatement Committee

5 November 2020

Dear Chair and Members of the New Haven Traffic Authority,

We are writing to request changes to the York Street and South Frontage Road intersection, to make it safer for pedestrians and cyclists. As you know, three people have been killed at this intersection since 2008, the most recent, a Yale Law School student, on October 6 of this year. This intersection is shared by our wards, and so we jointly are writing to request important changes to try to prevent any more traffic fatalities at this intersection.

We believe the city, along with Yale University and Yale New Haven Hospital (YNHH) – whose employees, students, and patients comprise a significant portion of the people who walk and bike across this intersection – should engage in conversations about longer-term infrastructure changes at this intersection. However, we think it is critical that three changes be made as soon as possible to make the intersection safer:

1. Remove the right turn arrow from the middle lane of York, on the approach to South Frontage;
2. Change the timing of the traffic signal at York and South Frontage, to allow pedestrians on York to cross South Frontage a few seconds earlier – and add signage saying cyclists are permitted to cross with pedestrians at this leading interval; and
3. Remove the left lane of traffic on York, from Howard Avenue to Crown Street, and replace it with a clearly marked and separated bike lane.

Let us briefly explain why we think these changes are critical to make, and to make soon.

The details of the October 6 crash are important to understand our request. In case you are not familiar with what happened, the victim was riding his bike on York, in the right-hand lane. When he had a green light at the South Frontage intersection, he began to cross South Frontage to continue straight on York. Unfortunately, a truck was parallel to him in the middle lane on York, and the driver of the truck began to turn right onto South Frontage, dragging the cyclist under his truck and tragically killing him.

We have heard from cyclists and drivers who frequent this area that having a turn from the middle lane of York onto South Frontage is dangerous and confusing, not just for cyclists, but for drivers turning from the left-most lane. The cyclist would still be alive today if that middle lane did not have a right turn arrow. There is no need for it, and it should be removed. We have spoken with traffic engineers, who agree with this analysis.

Changing the timing of the traffic signal would not only give pedestrians more time to cross a dangerous intersection, but it would allow cyclists time to cross it in advance of cars and trucks, reducing the risk of deadly crashes.

Finally, replacing a lane of traffic with a bike lane has two benefits. One, it creates a safe and protected space for cyclists to ride on a busy road. Had the student had a bike lane to ride in on the left-hand side of the street, he would not have been in the path of the truck, and arguably would have been more noticeable to all drivers. Second, reducing a lane of traffic importantly calms traffic, slowing speeds and removing some of the jockeying between lanes that currently occurs.

We are very open to different designs for this bike lane, but based on conversations we have had with traffic engineers, know a bike lane could be designed for this space that would improve traffic safety, at a fairly low cost.

While arguably the proposed changes will slow traffic at this intersection by a few seconds, as referenced above, we believe that is a positive outcome. While speed was not a factor in the most current death, speeding – and red light running – are serious problems at this intersection, which put all users of the road at risk every day. Given the high number of pedestrians and cyclists who frequent this area, which also has vehicles speeding to and from the highway, we think changing the infrastructure to enable traffic calming is long overdue.

Because the intersection is near the hospital, we of course do not want to create any risk that ambulances will not be able to easily and quickly reach the hospital. We ran our idea by the Emergency Department of YNHH, and were told they do not have concerns that removing the right turn arrow or removing a lane of traffic on York Street and replacing it with a bike lane will impede ambulances from accessing the hospital, given the routes that ambulances take.

Thank you very much for considering this important request. We would welcome the opportunity to share additional thoughts at a Traffic Authority meeting and know that many constituents also would like to attend to show their support for these changes.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

Ron C Hurt,

Hon. Ron Hurt, Alder, Ward 3

Abigail Roth

Hon Abigail Roth, Alder, Ward 7

Cc: Doug Hausladen, Director, Transportation, Traffic, and Parking