

Bicycle Advisory Council (BAC) Recommendation:

Immediate Implementation of Mobility and Safety Improvements to the Ann Richards Congress Avenue Bridge

WHEREAS, the purpose of the BAC is to advise the City of Austin and other jurisdictions on all matters relating to the use of the bicycle, bicycle infrastructure, and individuals of all ages and abilities who utilize bicycles;

WHEREAS, the Ann Richards Congress Avenue bridge is currently dangerous for vulnerable users due to many factors, including:

- Poor sightlines in the southbound travel lanes caused by the crest of the bridge, creating a blind spot that makes slow-moving vehicles (such as bikes, pedicabs, and scooters) especially vulnerable to rear-end collision by faster-moving vehicles,
- The use of sharrows markings,
- The highway-width of vehicle lanes and absence of signals for the length of the bridge encourages unsafe driving speeds,
- Steep curbs immediately bordering the travel lane with no buffer for the sidewalks,
- Sidewalks that become overflowing with users during rush hour, special events, and the daily gathering of spectators on the sidewalk for the iconic urban bat colony flight at dusk;

WHEREAS, the death of Robert Chops Ramirez – who was struck and killed while riding his bike in the southbound lane of the bridge on September 23, 2012 by an intoxicated motorist– could have been prevented by having a physically protected bike lane;

WHEREAS, in February 2013, the Bicycle Advisory Council recommended the immediate implementation of protected bicycle lanes following the death of Ramirez;

WHEREAS, since September 23, 2012, there have been at least 19 reported crashes involving bicyclists and pedestrians on the Congress bridge and at least 21 people injured, including a car rear-end collision with a pedicab in the southbound lane on September 17, 2017 which nearly killed the two passengers and the pedicab driver;

WHEREAS, the recent 2019 deaths of Tony Diaz and Jessica Saathoff while riding bikes on busy central streets without protected bike lanes underscore the urgency for implementing safety improvements without delay to avoid future losses of life;

WHEREAS, the existing six vehicle travel lanes, over 75% of the available street space, puts the movement of single-occupancy vehicles ahead of the safe access and mobility of people walking, biking, pedicabbing, scooting, and/or taking nearby public transit on an overwhelming scale;

WHEREAS, according to the NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide, shared lane markings should not be considered a substitute for bike lanes, cycle tracks, or other separation treatments where these types of facilities are otherwise warranted or space permits;

WHEREAS, the recent introduction of dockless mobility to Austin has dramatically increased the numbers of people using bikes and scooters on the bridge for short-distance trips;

WHEREAS, people on bikes and scooters on the bridge seeking separation from vehicles in the main travel lanes currently must use the sidewalk, which creates conflicts with pedestrians and unsafe conditions for all modes;

WHEREAS, future bike/ped improvements included in the Our Congress Avenue Urban Design Initiative are in the planning stages, with an unknown timeline for implementation;

WHEREAS, recent and upcoming developments on Congress Avenue, such as Music Lane, the Yeti flagship, and the future South Central Waterfront, are increasing activity on Congress and increasing pedestrian and bike travel demand on both sides of the river;

WHEREAS, the Congress bridge is a major connection across Lady Bird Lake, and links employment, commercial, entertainment, hotel, recreational, and residential opportunities on both sides of the Colorado River;

WHEREAS, people connect to the bridge through the existing bike and sidewalk network on Congress Avenue, Barton Springs Blvd., and Cesar Chavez/Butler Trail, and the bridge is designated as part of the city-wide All Ages and Abilities Network by the 2014 Austin Bicycle Plan which calls for physically protected bike lanes on Congress from W. 11th St. to W. Riverside Dr.;

WHEREAS, the goal of the 2016 Vision Zero Action Plan is zero traffic deaths and serious injuries in Austin by 2025;

WHEREAS, the 2019 Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (ASMP) is based on the implementation of a Safe Systems approach and prioritizes the protection of human life over all else in the planning, design, and operation of Austin's transportation network;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Bicycle Advisory Council (BAC) recommends the rapid implementation of safety improvements to the Ann Richards Bridge, including:

- the creation of protected bicycle lanes,
- safe accessible connections from the bridge to the surrounding street grid for people walking and using low-speed multimodal transportation options,
- improved sidewalks with a buffer;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the BAC recommends the application of traffic calming design and strategies to reduce the speed of all traffic on the Ann Richards Bridge;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the BAC recommends a pilot program to put these improvements into place without delay, which will in exchange provide valuable insight and data about their performance to inform the final redesign of the bridge within the Our Congress Avenue project when it is funded and ready to phase in.

Date of Approval:

Record of the vote:

Attest: