Neighborhood Greenways, Fuck

posted by CIENNA MADRID on THU, MAR 22, 2012 at 10:38 AM

Six months after starting a citywide conversation about strategically altering non-arterial streets to prioritize walkers and cyclists, neighborhood greenway activists have a lot to brag about: City workers have started construction on a NE 44th Street greenway route in Wallingford and committed to developing greenways in Beacon, Ballard, and West Seattle, for a total of seven miles of bike- and pedestrian-prioritized routes.

The swiftness with which activists have spurred the city into action is commendable, sure, but the real shocker is that no one's complaining about it. "There seems to be widespread support for enhancing biking and walking on low-speed non-arterial streets," says Seattle Department of Transportation spokesman Rick Sheridan, who reports that his office has received absolutely no angry emails or bitchy voice mails about the projects.

That's a big fucking deal in a city where residents have been known to bitch about their neighbor's flower gardens being too bright. (Really.)

To celebrate their victory, Seattle Neighborhood Greenways is holding a public meet-up tonight from 6:30 to 8:30 pm at the Phinney Neighborhood Center Auditorium (Auditorium 6615 Dayton Ave N), to speak with special guests SDOT director Peter Hahn and city traffic engineer Dongho Chang about how to integrate neighborhood greenways into Seattle's Bike Master Plan.
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Because while seven miles of greenway spread over four neighborhoods may not sound like a lot, activists explain that this is a decade-long process with the short-term goal of adding another 10 miles of new greenways on an annual basis (give or take).

"We submitted 12 miles to the city and said, 'If we're going to build the network, these are the low-hanging fruits—the spine,'" explains Cathy Tuttle, leader of the citywide effort, who says that the routes come directly from crowdsourced maps (.pdf) developed by residents (but must still be approved by SDOT planners).

Portland implemented a similar program five years ago and the city now has over 60 miles of interconnected routes. Tuttle adds: "We fully expect the few greenways that weren't approved [in Phinney Ridge and the U-District] to be approved next year."

Neighbors selected the routes based on a variety of factors, including incline steepness and how well they connected to other neighborhoods or major shopping areas. To complete their greenway transformation, each route will be enhanced with bike-friendly road sharrows, speed bumps, cross walks, and signage that will discourage car traffic.

Bridging the Gap funds are expected to cover the cost of each $150,000 mile of new greenway.

And while they've been endorsed by the city's Seattle Bicycle Advisory Board as a good alternative to simply painting bike sharrows on busy arterials, Tuttle stresses that the routes weren't chosen or designed just for cyclists—they're for pedestrians, dog walkers, runners, geriatrics on a leisurely stroll to their neighborhood pharmacy for vital heart medicines, children skipping to school, etc.

"Really, these are more for pedestrians than for bicycles, that's the message we want to get out," she says.

SDOT is also working with Seattle Children's Hospital to create additional greenway routes in the Laurelhurst, Magnuson Park, and Wedgewood areas, although those routes are still in the early stages of planning, Sheridan says, and they will be funded with neighborhood mitigation money attached to the hospital's expansion.