

STAFF RECOMMENDATION



A. Tarce

NCPC File No. 7154

15TH STREET, NW BIKE LANE FROM EUCLID STREET TO PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE NW

15th Street, NW
Washington, DC

Submitted by the District Department of Transportation

August 26, 2010

Abstract

DDOT is proposing to install a 10-foot wide, two-way bike lane along the west side of 15th Street, NW, from Euclid Street to Pennsylvania Avenue, NW near the White House. The protected bike lane, also called a cycle track, will be separated from vehicular traffic by a continuous line of plastic flexposts and a two-foot wide painted buffer. Signage is proposed in lieu of lane striping and flexposts on Madison Place, NW to direct bike traffic through the Lafayette Square. Because of the need for further coordination, DDOT has agreed to except out the section of the bike lane through the Lafayette Square area, that portion of the bike lane south of H Street, NW, until such coordination is completed.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of preliminary and final site development plans, pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d).

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves the Preliminary and Final Site Development Plans for the 15th Street, NW Cycle Track, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 00.00(40.00)43141, with the exception of that portion

south of H Street, NW running along Madison Place and Pennsylvania Avenue, pending further consultation between DDOT and NCPC staffs to resolve outstanding planning issues.

Commends DDOT for expanding the 15th Street cycle track into the Central Employment Area from adjacent residential neighborhoods, thereby providing an alternative mode of transportation for residents, workers, and visitors, including federal employees living in the District of Columbia, thus supporting the goals of the federal and District elements of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital.

Notes that DDOT states that it considers “flexposts” along the length of the bike lane critical for cyclist safety while drivers become accustomed to the presence of bike lanes in the street rights-of-way, and has committed to re-evaluate the safety and effectiveness of flexposts in one year, including consideration of minimizing the number of flexposts, and to consult with NCPC and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts; to find alternatives to flexposts that would minimize the visual impact on L’Enfant street rights-of-way.

Notes that the District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT) and NCPC staffs have agreed to work together to resolve outstanding planning issues regarding the portion of the proposed cycle track south of H Street, NW running along Madison Place and Pennsylvania Avenue. NCPC and DDOT will further consult and coordinate with the U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Park Police, the National Park Service, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, and other affected federal agencies to accomplish this goal.

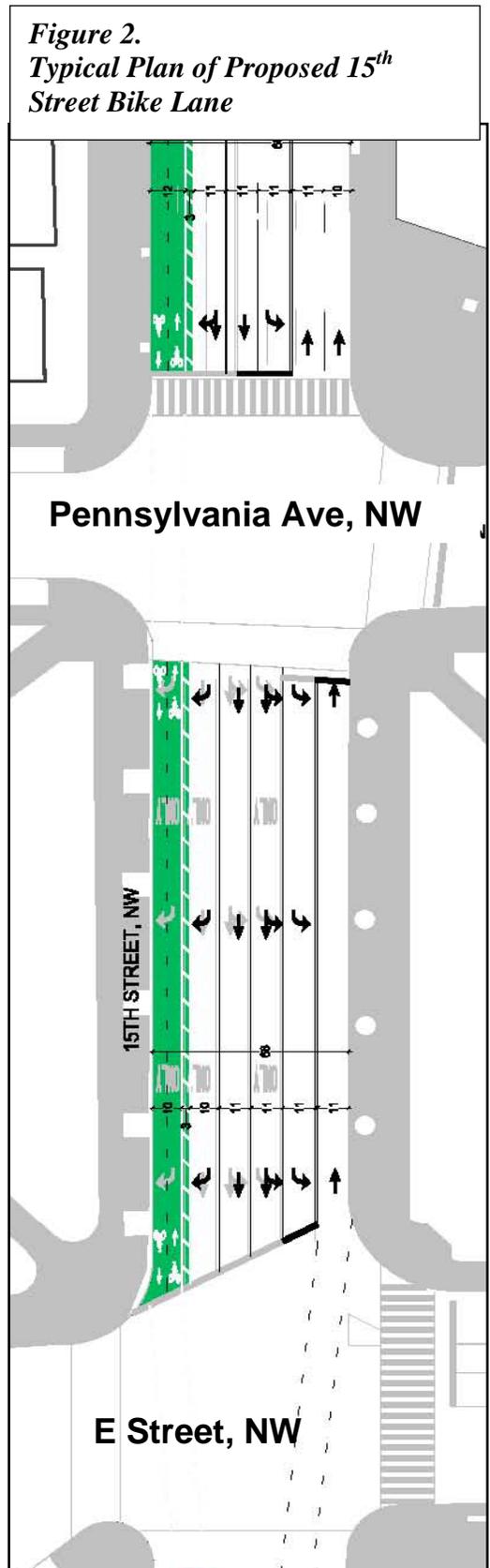
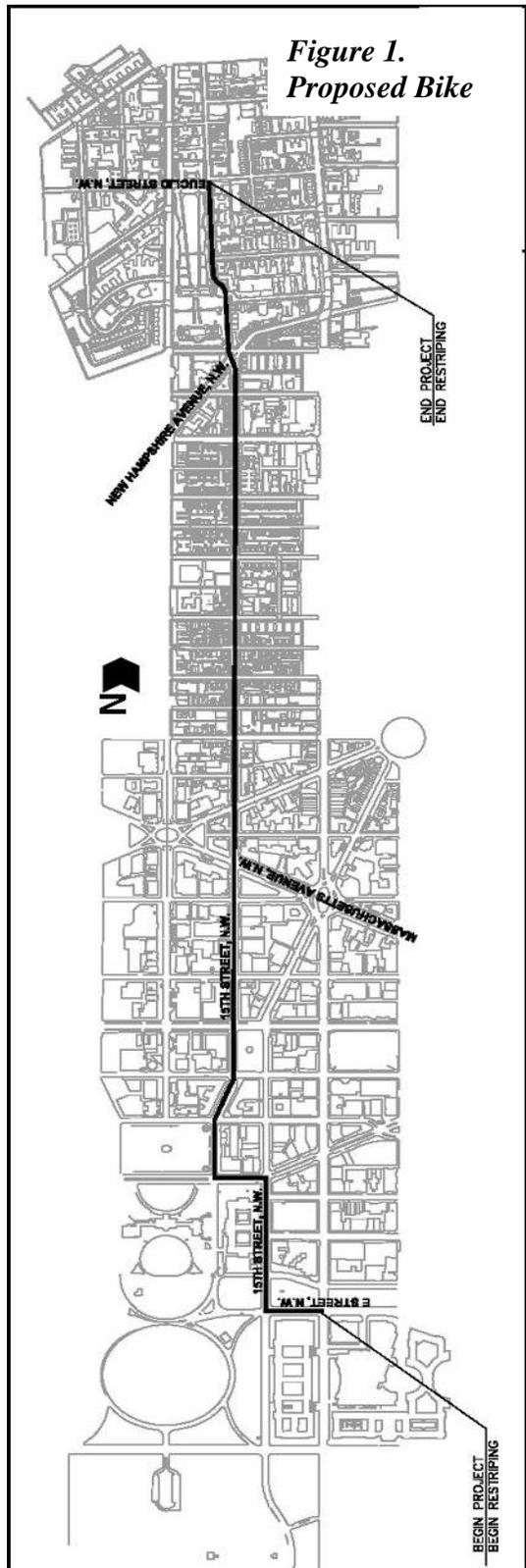
Notes that NCPC has determined that the 15th Street, NW Bike Lane, as proposed, will have “no adverse effect” if constructed without the portion proposed on Madison Place and Pennsylvania Avenue south of H Street, NW and provided that DDOT re-evaluate the continued need for the flexposts with NCPC and other relevant federal and District of Columbia agencies one year after installation, and further provided that DDOT continue consultation with relevant agencies on the identification and resolution of effects of a final route for the bicycle lane south of H Street, NW.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

DDOT is proposing to install the 15th Street Bike Lane from Euclid Street, NW in Columbia Heights to the western terminus of Pennsylvania Avenue, NW near the White House (see *Figure 1, Proposed Bike Route* and *Figure 2, Typical Plan of Proposed 15th Street Bike Lane*). At present, 15th Street and Vermont Ave. have surplus roadway capacity according to DDOT’s traffic modeling, meaning that the re-purposing of the western lane will not produce significant traffic impacts for motor vehicles using the remaining five lanes of traffic. Vermont Avenue is shown as the diagonal line oriented in the southwest direction in Figure 1.



Background

The 15th Street Bike Lane is part of a system-wide Bicycle Master Plan adopted by DDOT in 2005. The Bicycle Master Plan identified 5 streets in the District that will have innovative bike lanes, also known as Cycle Track, shown as purple lines, on the *Existing and Proposed Bike Facilities for Downtown DC 2010/2011* below. The five streets were:

- Pennsylvania Avenue, NW from 3rd Street, NW to 15th Street, NW
- I Street from New York Avenue to Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
- L Street from Massachusetts Avenue to 25th Street, NW
- 9th Street, NW, from Massachusetts Avenue to Constitution Avenue
- 15th Street, NW from W Street to I Street

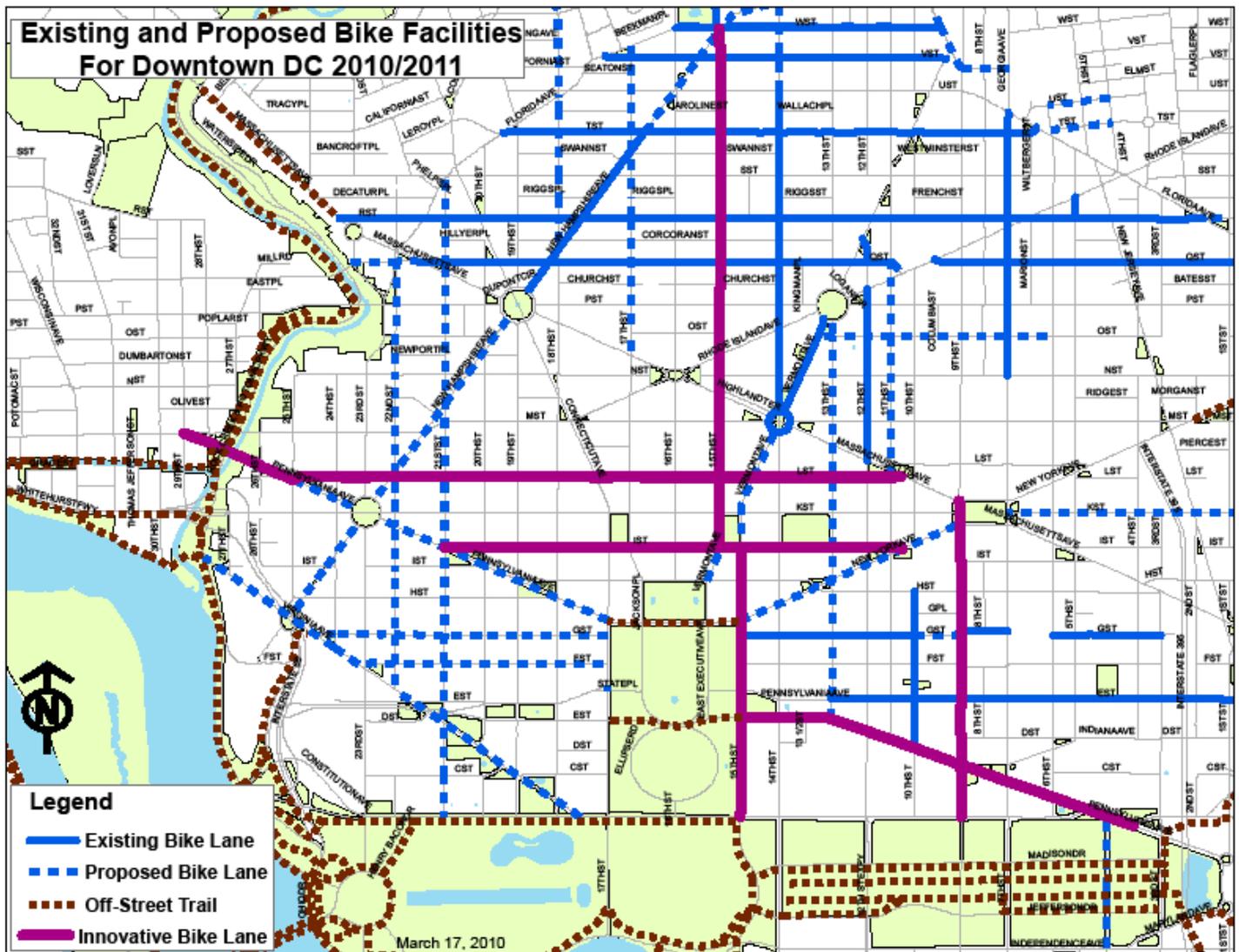


Figure 3. Existing and Proposed Bike Facilities for Downtown DC 2010/2011. The 2005 Bicycle Master Plan identified 5 streets where protected bike lanes will be installed (labeled as “Innovative Bike Lane” on this map).

Pennsylvania Avenue from 3rd Street NW to 15th Street, NW

NCPC staff presented the Pennsylvania Avenue Bike Lane project to the Commission on April 1, 2010 as part of the Executive Director's report. The project was not formally reviewed and approved by the Commission because at that time, DDOT's proposal was limited to striping the bike lanes and no excavation or installation of plastic bollards were proposed. NCPC staff expressed concern about the potential visual impacts of two alternative concepts showing the use of flexposts as lane separators, and painting the entire bike lane in a solid color. NCPC wrote a letter to DDOT requesting DDOT to include NCPC staff in the design development and final inspections of the Pennsylvania Avenue Bike Lane project.



Figure 4. Flexposts flanking both sides of the bike lane at the intersection of Pennsylvania Avenue, NW and 13th Street, NW



Figure 5. View of Pennsylvania Avenue bike lanes with the U.S. Capitol in the background.

The bike lane, as represented to the Commission, was to replace one existing vehicular travel lane. Since then, DDOT has re-aligned the bike lane to the median and retained the vehicular lane. DDOT has also installed plastic bollards or flexposts along the two sides of bike lane within 30 feet of all intersections of Pennsylvania Avenue. DDOT did not consult NCPC on the installation of the flexposts, but submitted the 100% construction drawings to NCPC on June 19, 2010, showing flexposts as they were installed on Pennsylvania Avenue.

The Commission of Fine Arts reviewed the Pennsylvania Avenue Bike Lane concept at their March 18, 2010 meeting. A letter from CFA, dated March 26, 2010, to DDOT, states:

The Commission approved the proposed design without colored pavement on the bicycle lanes or median, noting the importance of the avenue's design character as a prominent visual symbol of the nation. The Commission also recommended against the installation of reflective plastic stanchions, commenting that these would be intrusive and incompatible elements in this iconic landscape.

15th Street, NW Pilot Project

The 15th Street bike lane pilot project was installed in November 2009. The pilot project was a contraflow one-lane protected bike lane, meaning the direction of bicycle traffic is opposite to the prevailing vehicular traffic and the bike lane is protected with a continuous line of plastic bollards to prevent vehicles from encroaching into the bike right-of-way. The existing 15th Street bike lane extends from U Street south to Massachusetts Avenue.

Proposal

The 15th Street Bike Lane project under consideration is an expansion and replacement of DDOT's southbound cycle track. According to DDOT, recent traffic counts indicate that at peak AM rush hour, 146 cyclists are using this facility. DDOT states that the proven demand supports citizen requests for extensions of the bike lane. In comparison to the route shown on Figure 3, *Existing and Proposed Bike Facilities for Downtown DC 2010/2011* above, the bike route has been extended further north to Euclid Street, and shortened to link to Pennsylvania Avenue, NW on the southern leg (see Figure 1, *Proposed Bike Route*).

In order to accommodate the bike lane within the curb-to-curb width of the right-of-way, existing on-street parking will be removed for some blocks and existing travel lanes will be moved east or removed. Additional "No Parking" signs and "Stop" signs will also be installed. The lanes will be marked with white thermoplastic material, approximately 4-inch wide. DDOT plans to start work on the 15th Street cycle track in late August 2010, and intends to complete the project in September.

15th Street NW Bike Route

DDOT determined that 15th Street, NW is an ideal bike route from the Ward 1 and Ward 2 neighborhoods to downtown. A cyclist does not encounter any traffic circles or major impediments on this route. It serves high density residential neighborhoods with high bike-to-work rates. It traverses the two major employment districts (roughly the Downtown BID and Golden Triangle BID zones) as well as the major federal employment areas, and this route will

connect to the existing innovative bike lanes along Pennsylvania Ave, connecting from 15th Street to 4th Street, NW in front of the US Capitol. The route will also safely link DC neighborhoods to federal attractions in the monumental core with a sustainable non-motorized transportation route.

DDOT has identified Madison Place, NW and Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the Treasury Building as a bike route (see *Figure 4, Proposed 15th Street bike route south of I Street, NW in the vicinity of the White House*). Instead of thermoplastic markings and flexposts, DDOT is proposing to install signage in this section of the bike lane to direct bicyclists from 15th Street, NW and H Street, NW south through Madison Place, NW and east on Pennsylvania Avenue to link back to 15th Street, NW. This section of the bike route has been pulled out of this review because additional consultation with the National Park Service, U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, the DC State Historic Preservation Officer and NCPC is necessary. Madison Place, NW and Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the Treasury Building is part of President's Park and the Lafayette Park National Historic District.

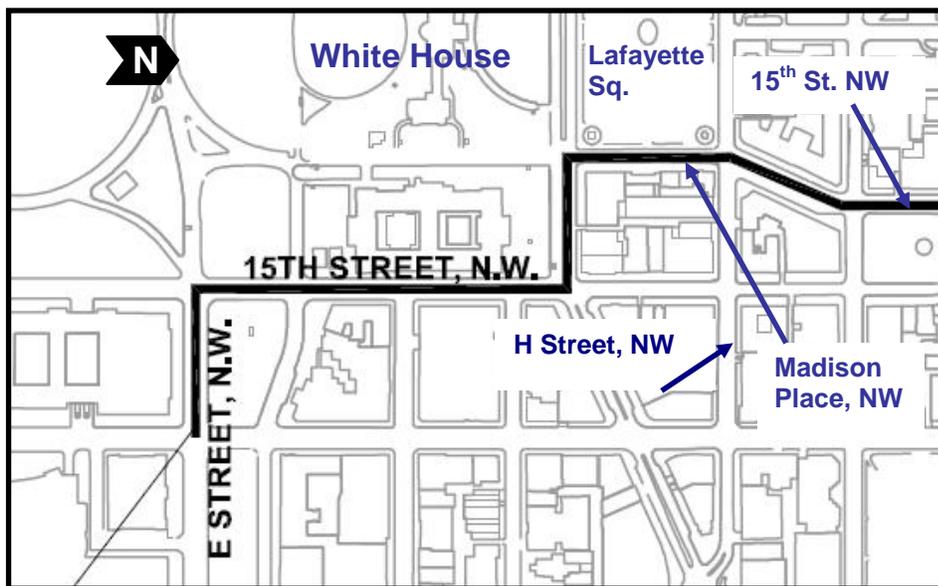


Figure 4. Proposed 15th Street bike route south of H Street, NW in the vicinity of the White House. This section of the bike lane is not part of this approval.

The 15th Street Bike Lane is proposed to include two 4-foot wide bike lanes going in opposite direction, and a 2- to 3-foot wide buffer demarcated with white thermoplastic double lines and diagonal striping in between the lines (see *Figure 2, Typical Plan of Proposed 15th Street Bike Lane* and *Figure 5, Typical street section showing the bike lane adjacent to a restricted parking lane*). Plastic bollards or flexposts will be installed at the center line of the buffer strip along the length of the entire bike lane. DDOT's view is that flexposts are a temporary solution for vertical separation to inform and educate the public on how to navigate 15th Street, NW with a new bike lane. DDOT intends to monitor the new 15th Street bike lane in the next 12 months and evaluate whether flex posts will be replaced with permanent lane separators. Until DDOT

has fully assessed the effectiveness of the cycle track, the time to install, cost and permanence of these materials rule out the permanent materials as an option.

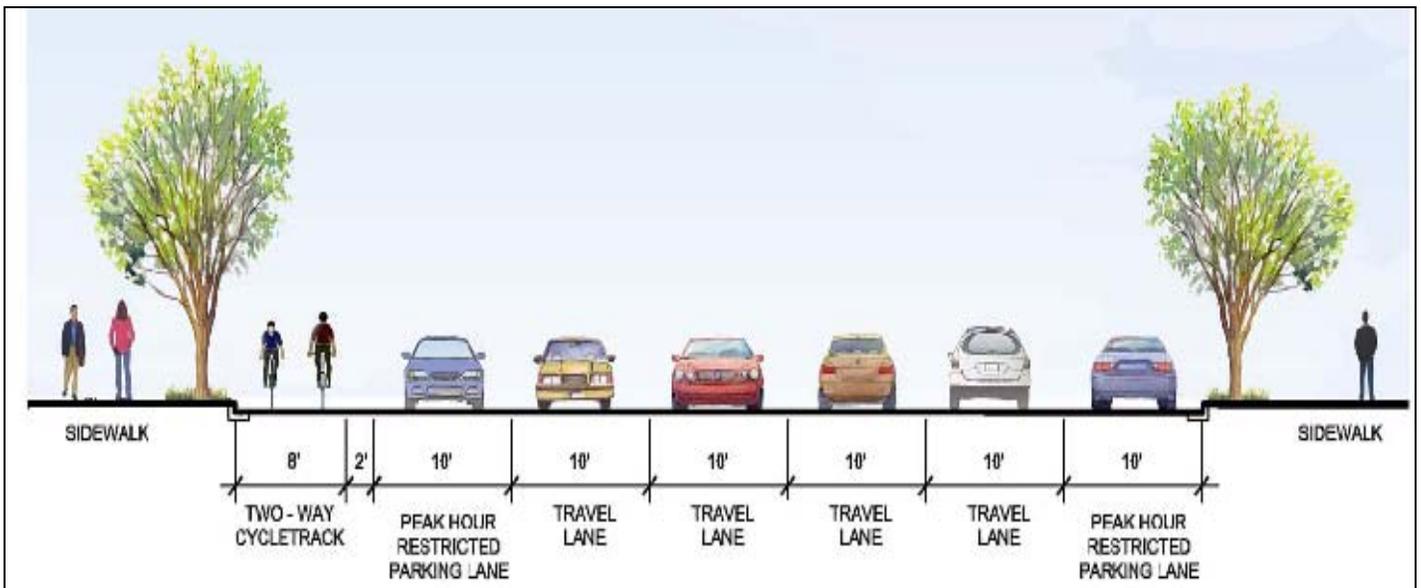


Figure 5. Typical street section showing the bike lane adjacent to a restricted parking lane, with flexposts not shown. This condition is only typical for the length of 15th Street, NW from Massachusetts Avenue and northward. South of Massachusetts Avenue, 15th Street, NW will not accommodate on-street parking, except on Vermont Avenue, between I Street, NW and H Street, NW.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

NCPC staff supports the concept of installing of a bike lane on 15th Street, NW as part of a system-wide network of bicycle facilities in the District that can provide an alternative mode of transportation for residents and workers along the 15th Street corridor. The bike system provides a healthy and low-cost alternative for federal employees and others to commute to work.

Issue 1: Coordination with various federal agencies

DDOT has agreed to continue coordinating with the various federal agencies on the proposed route through President's Park and the Lafayette Park Historic District, including the National Park Service, Secret Service, NCPC, CFA, as well as the DC SHPO. DDOT has met with these agencies individually, including NCPC staff, to discuss its proposal. However, the multi-layered and multi-agency operation and security issues affecting the vicinity of the White House and President's Park require additional consultation of all relevant federal agencies so that they can better coordinate with DDOT on the appropriate location for the bike route. In current, ongoing consultation, NCPC staff and National Park Service staffs have recommended to DDOT to reconsider a bike route that more closely matches DDOT's Bicycle Master Plan Proposed Bicycle

Facilities Map (see Figure 6 below). NCPC will continue to work with DDOT in finding the most appropriate location for the bike lane south of H Street, NW.

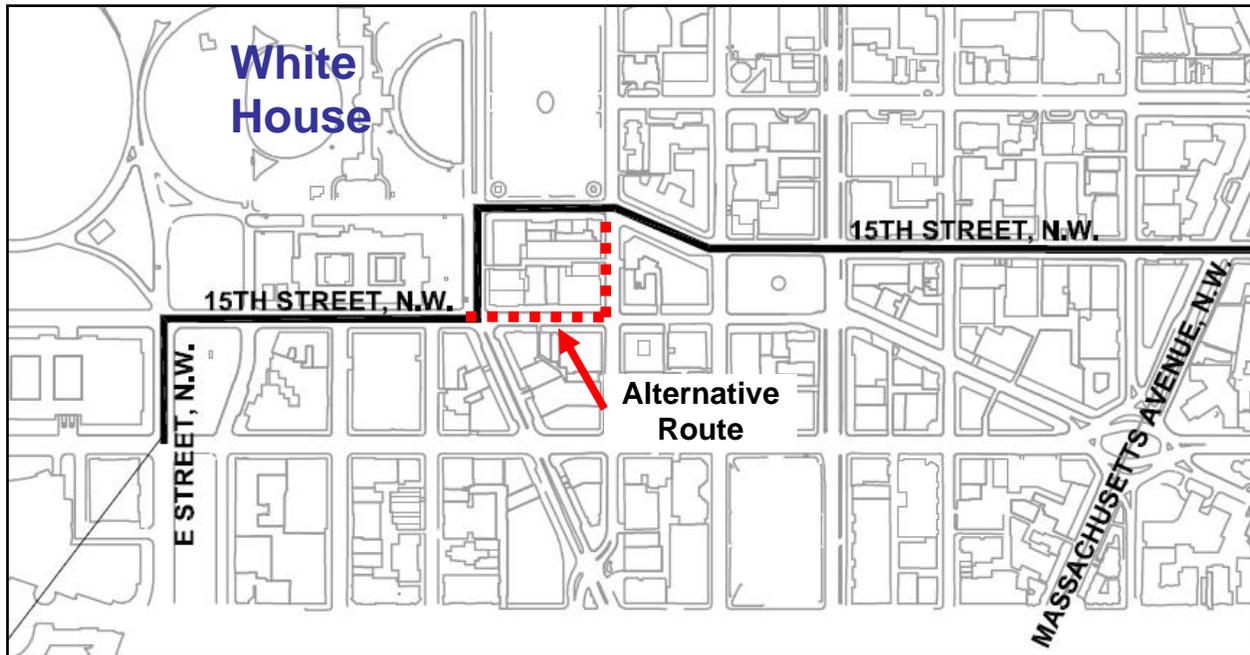


Figure 6. Alternative bike route in lieu of Madison Place, NW.

Issue 2: Flexposts

Except where the bike lane crosses a street, DDOT will install flexposts or plastic bollards to prevent vehicles from encroaching on the bike lanes. This is similar to the existing 15th Street bike lane north of the proposed project (see Figure 7). DDOT has informed NCPC staff that the flexposts are meant as temporary safety measures along the new bike lanes and that they will be monitoring the effectiveness of these flexposts in the next 12 months. NCPC staff recognizes that adding a bike lane along a heavily traversed street warrants careful design to ensure that pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists can all safely navigate through this major north-south street. However, NCPC staff finds that the use of flexposts along most of the length of the bike lane will affect the aesthetic and visual integrity of 15th Street, NW. While the Commission did not formally review the Pennsylvania Avenue Bike Lane, NCPC staff concurred with the assessment of the Commission of Fine Arts that the flexposts along Pennsylvania Avenue between 3rd Street, NW near the U.S. Capitol and 15th Street, NW, are intrusive and incompatible with the visual character of the street. The large number of flexposts that are proposed along 15th Street, NW would have the same or more intense effect on the street. Therefore, NCPC is asking DDOT to review the necessity and effectiveness of the flexposts and report back to the Commission within one year of installation of the flexposts. DDOT will also need to consult with the CFA, SHPO and NCPC staffs in identifying a less intrusive lane separator.



Figure 7. View of the existing contraflow bike lane at 15th Street, NW. The proposed expanded bike route under consideration will have a similar look, although the bike lane will be wider, and will have more striping to define two-way bike lanes and the 2-foot buffer.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The following policies in the *Transportation* and *Preservation and Historic Features* Elements of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital Federal Elements (Federal Elements), apply:

The federal government should:

*Encourage ridesharing, biking, walking, and other non-single-occupant vehicle modes of transportation for federal commuters (Under **Transportation Demand Management** policies, p.88);*

*Work with local jurisdiction bike coordinators, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, Commuter Connections, and bicycle proponents such as the Washington Area Bicyclist Association and others to promote bicycle commuting among federal employees (Under **Bicycle Facilities**, p. 93);*

*Plan carefully for appropriate uses and compatible design in and near the monumental core to reinforce and enhance its special role in the image of the nation's capital. (Under **National Capital Image**, p. 161)*

*Protect and enhance the vistas and views, both natural and designed,, that are an integral part of the national capital's image. (Under **National Capital Image**, p. 161)*

*Create transportation infrastructure that is consistent with the pedestrian character of the L'Enfant City and other historic settings. Bridges across the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers should be integrated with the design character of historic contexts. Highway structures should be removed and replaced with at-grade streets where possible. (Under **National Capital Image**, p. 161)*

*Protect the integrity, form, and design of the L'Enfant Plan's system of streets and reservations from inappropriate new buildings and physical incursions (Under **The Historic Plan of Washington, D.C.**, p. 167)*

The new bike lanes may encourage federal employees who work in one of the federal buildings along 15th Street, NW to consider biking as an alternative mode of transportation to and from work, and between various destinations in Downtown DC throughout the day. The Federal Elements cite "smart growth" and sustainable development as one of the NCPC's overarching planning principles. They highlight the importance of transportation mobility overall, of reducing congestion and air pollution, and of employing multi-modal transportation strategies as critical to promoting a sustainable region, and specifically, a federal workplace. On the other hand, further consultation with the DC SHPO and other affected federal agencies on the location of the bike lane south of H Street, NW and the use of flexposts will determine if the proposed bike lane is fully consistent with the Federal Elements policies related to the historic plan of Washington.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

The project conforms to the Commission's categorical exclusion at Section 8.C.8 of NCPC's **Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures** (69 FR 41299).

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

The National Capital Planning Commission has the responsibility for conducting review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act because most of the proposed lane is in the Central Area, within which the Commission has a licensing role for District of Columbia projects. The relevant historic properties include streets and reservations designated as elements of the historic Plan of Washington, residential and commercial blocks of National Register-listed historic districts, and the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site.

In accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106, NCPC has determined that the installation of the bicycle lane on 15th street would not constitute an adverse effect, provided that DDOT re-evaluate the continued need for the flexposts with NCPC and other relevant federal and District of Columbia agencies within one year after installation and ultimately remove them or replace them with an alternative, subject to NCPC review and

approval. NCPC's determination of no adverse effect for the undertaking is also conditioned on DDOT's further consultation with the federal and DC agencies on the future route and elements of the bike lane south of H Street, NW.

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal at its August 11, 2010 meeting. NPS and NCPC did not coordinate, pending further discussions with DDOT. The participating agencies were the District of Columbia Office of Planning, the General Services Administration, the District Department of Transportation, and the National Capital Planning Commission.

Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission of Fine Arts will review the concept for the 15th Street Bike Lane at its September 12, 2010 meeting.