

Here are my impressions from one short Petaluma errand where I rode my bike instead of taking my car. I went from my house in the Westridge neighborhood to my health club (Active Wellness).

I start on a local street to the entrance to the newly repaved (yeah!) path through the Westridge neighborhood. Here's the entrance:

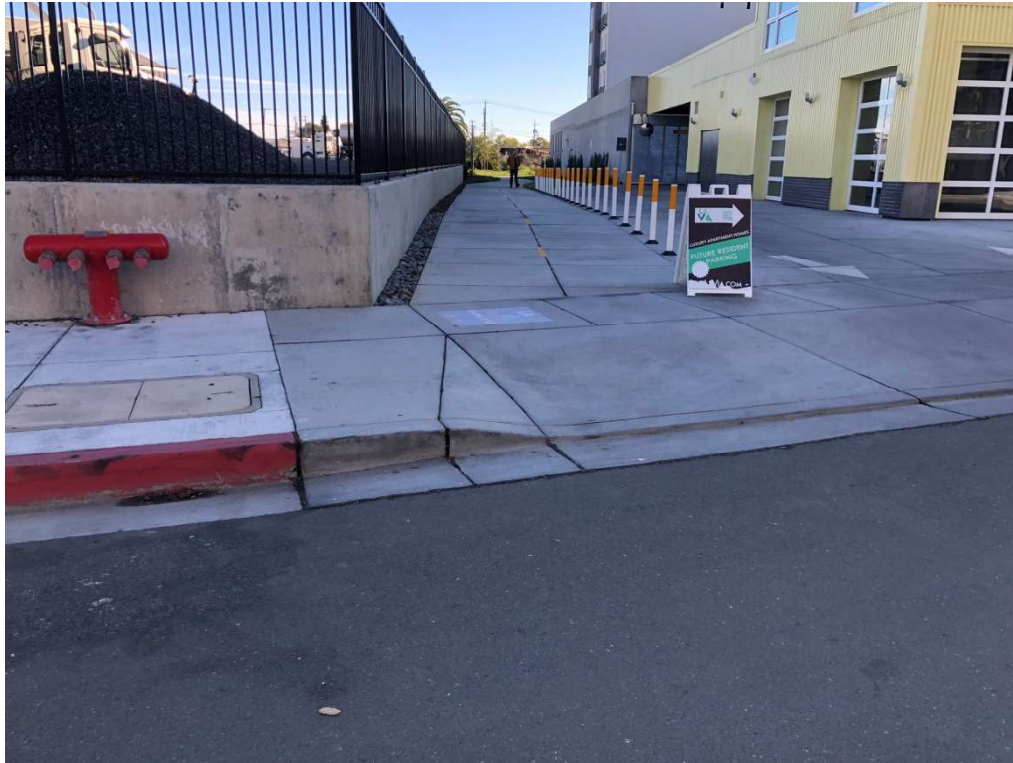


Yikes! No curb cut, so I have to cut onto the sidewalk via a neighbor's driveway. Even worse there are four new bollards installed when the path was recently repaved. This makes the 90 degree turn I have to do from the sidewalk impossible to navigate on my bike without stopping and walking. I've gone less than 200 yards and I already have to dismount from my bike because of hostile infrastructure.

When I exit the path about a quarter mile later, there are four more bollards and a very steep curb cut to navigate.



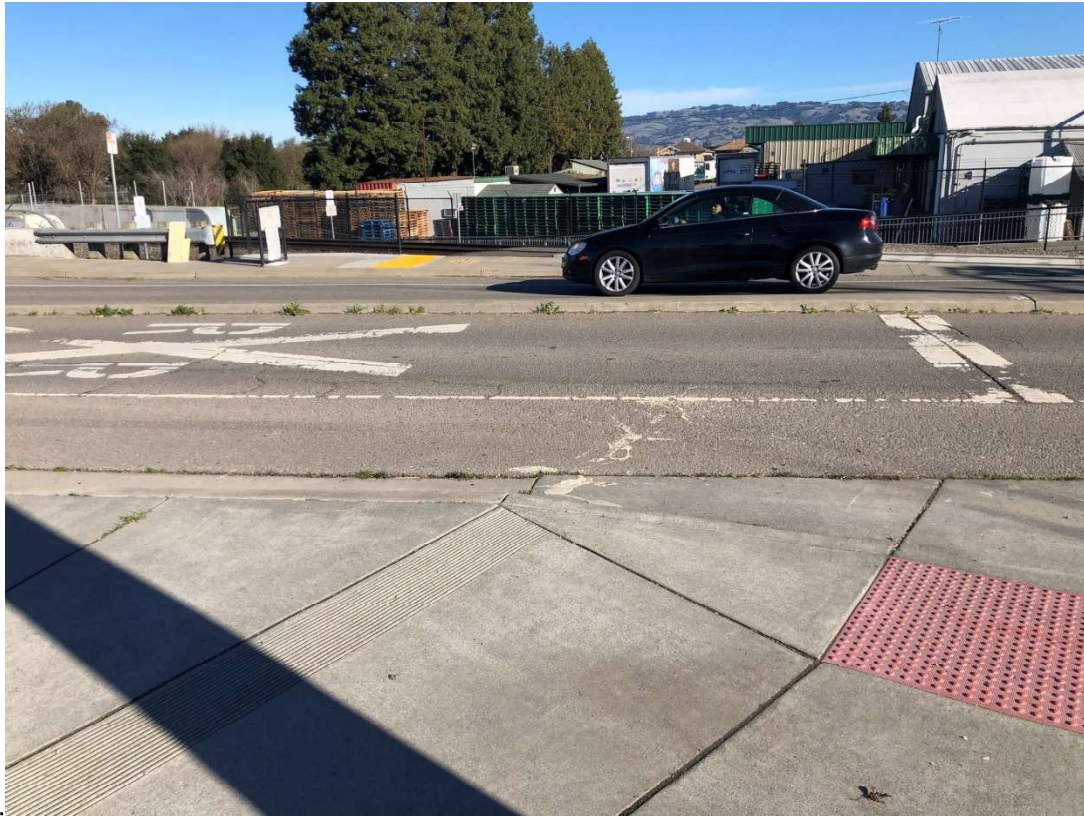
From here I navigate through city streets to get on the new bike path off Oak St behind the new apartments.



The curb cut doesn't match the bike path, so again, getting onto the path is tricky.

One hundred yards down the path, I have to navigate a difficult narrow turn (sharper than 90 degrees) onto the bridge. Once again I again need to dismount to safely navigate.

I then take the short ride to Lakeville Rd, where I want to take a left to get to the new SMART trail.



Unfortunate, it is impossible to make a left turn. There is a pile of “bike infrastructure” that zigs and zags to get cyclists to the Lynch Creek trail, but I don’t want that trail. There is no easy way to make a left turn to go the short distance to the SMART trail, so I have to illegally ride on the sidewalk and then cross where I can. This should be a four way stop.

After less than a quarter mile on Lakeville, I need to get onto the SMART path, but once again, the entrance is incredibly hostile to cyclists.



Yet again, I need to dismount to make a narrow sharp turn from a sidewalk onto a bike path. At least I don't have to dodge a telephone pole in the middle of the path like those that come from the other direction. Why are all these entrances and exits made so difficult for cyclists? Have the managers and designers ever ridden a bike? Do they even want people to use this path?

I do the short ride on the new path (yeah!) to W Payran St, and fuck me, there's more hostile "bike infrastructure" that means I have to get off my bike yet again to navigate the maze that is set up just to cross Payran.





Why is it setup like this? It seems SMART/Petaluma is actively trying to discourage cyclists. Again this should be a four way stop.

I then ride the wonderful path (yeah!) to Southpoint Blvd, where, of course, there is more hostile infrastructure making the exiting onto Southpoint difficult and dangerous.



In addition to the fences and posts in my way there are no curb cuts anywhere near the end of the path. This forces me to, once again, either (illegally) ride on the sidewalk until there's a driveway, or dismount and walk over the curb to get on the street.

For some insane reason, the SMART path ends here, so I bike Southpoint to N McDowell Blvd. I'm excited to travel on the new bike lanes that were installed as part of "complete streets". My initial impression though is disappointment – while McDowell's car lanes have been repaved, much of the bike lane has not. I proceed cautiously over the gravel strewn bad pavement jealous of the nice new pavement for cars. I do notice that parts of the bike lane are "protected" by plastic bollards, which provide a psychological barrier but not a physical one. It appears that all the money spent on "complete streets" was for the car infrastructure and next to nothing on the bike infrastructure.

In less than a mile I make it to where the SMART tracks cross McDowell.



OMG!

This section is unbelievably dangerous for a cyclist. First there is the fact that the tracks are at an acute angle so cyclists have to swerve into the traffic lane to cross the tracks at a safe angle. Otherwise they risk getting a tire caught in the rail groove and crashing. This dangerous challenge is made even more difficult because one, there are huge gaps, gravel, and lips in the old pavement before you even hit the hard plastic around the tracks. And two, the plastic around the tracks is incredibly slippery if there's even a hint of moisture. On my ride, I swung my bike to the left as I approach the track but it's a foggy morning, the plastic is slick so I go down. I land hard, bloody and angry. I'm down in the car lane as I was trying to cross the tracks at a safe angle. The only reason I'm alive to write this is because there was not some driver bombing down McDowell at that moment.

BTW, I mentioned my accident to the president of the Petaluma Wheelmen Cycle Club and he immediately said that he's heard of three other cyclists who have crashed at that spot. None of whom will presumably ride on this again, and will tell all their friends not to ride the new McDowell bike lanes as they are not safe.

I'm not a traffic engineer but a simple idea to improve this section include repaving and painting the bike lane to curve wide to the right before the tracks and then curve back left at the tracks (without going into the car lane) so cyclists don't hit tracks at an acute angle. An even better solution is *to finish building the SMART path so cyclists don't have to take this dangerous crossing.*

After the accident I limp home with my broken bicycle and vow to never ride my bike for Petaluma errands anymore. It is simply too dangerous, too painful, too stressful, and too filled with hostile infrastructure. I get the strong sense that the City of Petaluma, SMART, and the County of Sonoma do not want me or anyone else to bike in town. It's hard not to come to the conclusion that the City Councilors, Board members, officials, managers, and designers of all of this "bike infrastructure" ***actively hate people that cycle. In my short ride of a few miles I've had to dismount numerous times and dodge infrastructure that seems designed to seriously hurt me.*** There is obviously no serious commitment by any local agency to make cycling a priority.

Until bike infrastructure is built that is safe and pleasant, bike ridership will not increase and we will not reach any goals set by all the well-meaning committees and official pronouncements. At the very least I'm begging SMART and the City of Petaluma to stop adding bad cycling infrastructure to the Petaluma streets.

Finally, I'd like to quote from the Official City of Petaluma website:

"Petaluma is dedicated to improving the quality of life for residents by making walking, bicycling and rolling safe and convenient methods of transportation and recreation."

This is patently false and should be removed until such time an average person can safely cycle across town with ease and confidence. The City of Petaluma and SMART should be ashamed, not proud, of the local "bike infrastructure".

Ken Cushman
Petaluma, Jan. 2024