

April 17, 2026

RE: Solano Avenue cycle track option for the Active Transportation Plan

To the members of the Albany City Council:

Greetings, Michael Barnes here. For the record, I served on the Albany City Council from 2012-20, and before that on the AUSD school board from 2002-06. I am currently a member of the city's Transportation Commission.

However, I am writing to you not in any official capacity, but as a fellow resident of Albany. Most of my political work these days is directed to countering (somewhat futilely) the state's power grab of land-use authority from cities and counties, but I have enough qualms about a local issue that I thought I should reach out.

I'm tired of seeing my town subjected to ill-conceived cycling projects. Here are two examples: The first is the ugly and seldom used cycle track in front of the UC Village mixed-use project on San Pablo Ave. The result of a settlement of a dubious CEQA lawsuit, this asphalt white elephant is redundant now that the initial Complete Streets plan for a cycle track along Jackson St. is underway.

The second is the attempted Kains/Adams bikeway, which converted these two one-way streets that parallel San Pablo Avenue into hybrid one-way/two-ways streets, with barriers at intersections that allowed only bicycles. This convoluted plan was effectively vetoed by the residents of the two streets who ignored the plan and continued to use the Kains and Adams as one-way streets. The city next substituted a better plan for more rational counterflow cycle paths, but this plan is still incomplete due to lack of funding.

Now a third ill-conceived plan is under consideration, this time for Solano Avenue. The proposal for the city's updated Active Transportation Plan would create a protected uphill-only cycle track running from the BART tracks at Masonic Ave. to the Albany/Berkeley border at Tulare Ave. Here the term "protected" means the cycle track would run next to the curb and the cars would park outside the cycle track, separating the cycle track from the flow of traffic.

There are four main problems with this proposal, given the narrow 60-foot curb-to-curb width of Solano Avenue. Any one of these four problems should have made this proposal dead on arrival:

1) Building this cycle track would be exorbitantly expensive. The cost is estimated to be between \$30 to \$50 million. It is unlikely that funding in those amounts could be found, and if it was, there are many other more worthy projects the city could fund with that money.

2) The cycle track would cover only about one-quarter of Solano Ave. The distance between San Pablo Ave. (to the West) and the Alameda (to the East) is 6,250 feet. The combined distance in both directions is 12,500 ft. The proposed cycle track is 3,150 ft, or 25.2 percent of the total distance. If cycling on Solano Ave is dangerous, why build a cycle track and encourage people to ride there if they are exposed to danger along three-quarters of the street?

3) The 60-ft curb-to-curb width of Solano is typically divided into two 15-foot parking zones with 45-degree angle parking at the curb. (There are some locations with parallel parking or 60-degree angle parking.) This leaves room for two travel lanes, each 15 feet wide. The cycle track proposal substitutes parallel parking for the existing diagonal parking on the westbound lane of Solano Ave. The average daily traffic (ADT) on Solano is estimated to be 8,000 to 10,000 trips, according to consultants. Parallel parking is not recommended for streets with traffic volumes this high.

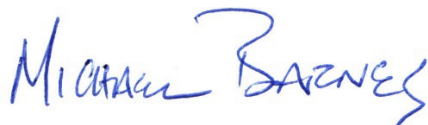
The plan also reduces the downhill westbound lane from a width of 15 feet to 11 feet, even though the Albany fire department has stated that its first responders require a lane width of 15 feet. That width is necessary for first responders to access medical equipment stowed along the side of the fire trucks without having to work in the middle of the street and blocking traffic (and putting themselves at risk). This is a known issue, explored during council deliberations at the May 5, 2025, council meeting.

4) Bicycles are rapidly being replaced by e-bikes. When I cycle in Marin County, I hardly ever see a conventional bicycle. Even preteen kids are riding e-bikes. On Solano I have seen a variety of e-bikes, including large cargo bikes that are as big as a touring motorcycle. Although these large bicycles weigh much less than a motorcycle, they weigh much more than a conventional bicycle.

Today's conventional bicycle paths were not designed for e-bikes, which can travel much faster uphill than conventional bicycles. Although the cycle track is designated for uphill use only, bicycles and e-bikes may attempt to use the track to travel downhill, an activity it was not designed for. Because the path abuts the sidewalk, pedestrians will use it if the sidewalks are crowded. The planned one-way cycle track may become a two-way multi-use path with e-bikes zooming past bicyclists and pedestrians. In addition, seniors and others with limited mobility who park in the eastbound lane will have to run the gauntlet of bicycles and e-bikes traveling on the cycle track between the parked cars and the sidewalk.

For all these reasons, and more that I don't have space to discuss, the idea of a cycle track on Solano Avenue should be abandoned. The existing plan calls for parallel cycle tracks along Washington St. and Marin Ave. That is the wiser choice.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael Barnes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.