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Advocates Praise ConnDOT “Road Diet” Plan for East Hartford

Call for state to fund more traffic calming projects

Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a regional transportation watchdog group, applauds reports that the Connecticut Department of Transportation is planning a “road diet” on a section of Route 44 in East Hartford to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists, and calls on the state to make this the first of many road diets dedicated to pedestrian and cyclist safety.

“This is an innovative and exciting project that will save lives, but it shouldn’t be an isolated case. Numerous roads across the state lack the needed infrastructure to ensure that walking and cycling are safe and viable forms of transportation,” Tri-State Transportation Campaign Executive Director Veronica Vanterpool said.

ConnDOT reportedly plans to narrow a 3-mile section of Route 44/Burnside Ave. The road currently has two automobile lanes in each direction. It will be resurfaced and restriped to provide one automobile and one striped bicycle lane in each direction, along with additional on-street parking and left-turn lanes at some intersections. Pedestrian improvements will be installed to shorten the crossing distance at key intersections. Construction would take place next year. Three cyclists have been killed on Burnside Avenue since May, 2010. There were more pedestrian fatalities in Hartford County than any Connecticut county besides New Haven between 2008 and 2010, according to Tri-State's analysis.

“Where road diets have been implemented elsewhere in the region, cyclist, pedestrian, and motor vehicle crashes have all gone down. We have no doubt that this will be the case here,” Vanterpool said.

Tri-State calls on ConnDOT to take a comprehensive look at where safety improvements, like the ones to be implemented along Route 44, could take place. The state’s complete streets law, passed in 2009, requires that “accommodations for all users shall be a routine part of the planning, design, construction and operating activities” of all state roads.

While the Burnside Avenue improvements will be built next year as part of a resurfacing project, ConnDOT has the ability to address safety issues sooner. In 2010, ConnDOT announced a “Quick Fix” program that uses existing DOT funding to support inexpensive safety improvements aimed at calming traffic and providing more space for pedestrians and cyclists. This program should be a possible funding source for further improvements.

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Tri-State Transportation Campaign is a non-profit organization working toward a more balanced, transit-friendly, and equitable transportation system in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.