

Commentary

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Even here, a failure to respect cyclists' needs



Bruce Bisping/Star Tribune

The walking and bike paths near Cedar Lake Road and I-394: Elsewhere on the trail, a closure with no detour.

By Kevin J. Krizek

This week the Twin Cities is hosting more than 600 bicycle and pedestrian program specialists, advocates and leaders as part of the international Pro-Bike/Pro-Walk conference (www.bikewalk.org). Many of these visitors are observing firsthand our abundant system of trails and bikeways. Some will head out of downtown Minneapolis onto the Cedar Lake Trail only to be rudely met with a sign that says "TRAIL CLOSED." There is no marked detour from the east and no means for circumventing the construction site. Only a bright orange sign and pile of dirt greet the cyclist from downtown.

The main problem isn't that trail users have been inconvenienced most of the summer. Rather, it is that the Cedar Lake Trail closure is indicative of a planning, engineering and political culture that fails to respect cyclists' needs.

When was the last time you saw a road closed without an adequate detour identified? Unfortunately, cycling detours fall short far too often in the Twin Cities (e.g., recent construction on the East River Parkway bike path in

St. Paul, on Portland Avenue in Minneapolis, on the University of Minnesota campus), sending a message to both existing and potential cyclists that their transportation concerns don't warrant attention.

One reason that there is not an adequate detour route marked along the Cedar Lake Trail is that planning alternate routes wasn't in the specifications when the construction contract for the Royalston Avenue Bridge repair was opened for bids. Poor planning, at best.

What should Minneapolis do? It is a shame that, with hundreds of cycling enthusiasts in town, Minneapolis can't make a better impression. Temporary path construction to circumvent construction projects is commonplace in areas with a stronger cycling culture (e.g., Seattle or Portland) and should be standard practice here, as well.

Perhaps the Minneapolis City Council could devote funds to immediately resolve the situation at this important trail juncture. Doing so would help demonstrate a commitment to addressing bicyclists' concerns, although it probably is moot at this point.

Finally, let's hope that engineering and city offices

will prevent inadequate bike-detour routing in the future. Better yet: Perhaps members of the City Council and public works professionals will embark on planning processes that put bicycle planning on more equal footing with automobile, transit and pedestrian planning.

According to 2000 Census figures, Minneapolis ranks No. 1 among urban areas for bicycle commuting. Politicians revel in the fact that an estimated 5,366 people bike to work daily (at least on nice summer days). A good number of these riders use the Cedar Lake Trail coming, as it does, from the popular southwest quadrant of the city. This makes it arguably the most important urban commuter bike trail in the upper Midwest. Doesn't the city with the highest nationwide per capita bike ridership have a responsibility to promote better bike planning and to be more receptive to the plight of cyclists? I think so.

— *Kevin J. Krizek is an assistant professor of urban and regional planning at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and is vice president of the board for the Minnesota Bicycle and Pedestrian Alliance.*