



December 12, 2006

Mr. Howard Wood  
ODOT Deputy Director of Planning  
1980 W. Broad Street  
Columbus, Ohio 43223

**Re: Cleveland Central Viaduct Bridge bike/pedestrian path – Round 2**

Dear Deputy Director Wood:

Thank you for your letter of November 17, which responded to our request that a bike/pedestrian facility be included on the rehabilitated Innerbelt Central Viaduct Bridge in Cleveland. While I appreciate the time you took to provide a detailed response, I still don't think that you took our request seriously. Instead of thinking seriously about how it might be possible to accommodate non-motorized travel on the bridge, you seem to have been instructed to rule out the possibility from the start. Thus, your letter displayed ODOT's unfortunate and unfounded prejudice that cycling and walking are not legitimate means of city travel and will never be a significant part of urban transportation in Ohio.

I would like to respond to your points one by one.

**Requirements for accommodating bicycles and pedestrians**

In your letter you say, "Federal law and policy, and ODOT policy, compel us to consider bicycle and pedestrian facilities on bridges, where they can be accommodated at a reasonable cost." We agree on this requirement, but it seems we disagree on whether such accommodation can be achieved on the Central Viaduct at a reasonable cost.

What is a "reasonable cost" in this case? Federal policy says the cost is reasonable if it's less than 20 percent of the total cost of the project. Therefore, if the Central Viaduct Bridge is a \$300 million project, Federal policy says that ODOT should budget up to \$60 million to accommodate bicycle and pedestrian travel.

That's a lot of money, and I would not advocate spending all \$60 million on a single bike lane on the bridge (see our cost estimate below). But this number provides a sense of the scale of investment ODOT should be routinely considering to develop a more multi-

modal transportation system. In this case, perhaps ODOT should consider a package of alternative transportation facilities on and around the bridge, including a bike/pedestrian facility on the bridge, completion of the Towpath Trail in the Flats, improved pedestrian environments in Tremont and downtown, transit improvements, etc.

The important point is that ODOT needs to expand its view of reasonable accommodation. Non-motorized travel facilities are not afterthoughts to tack onto a project if there's a little funding left over. They should be integral parts of all projects and funded appropriately.

### **Cost of accommodating bicycles and pedestrians on the Central Viaduct Bridge**

Your letter states that the cost of adding a bicycle/pedestrian facility to the bridge would be \$21-23 million, including the cost of approach ramps at each end. But your estimate seems to assume the construction of a totally new facility on a new bridge. That's **not** what I recommended.

Since ODOT is proposing to rehabilitate the existing bridge for eastbound traffic (in addition to building a new, westbound bridge alongside), I recommended incorporating a bike facility into this existing bridge. There would be plenty of room, since the one-way bridge will need to carry fewer traffic lanes. And the bike/pedestrian lane could re-use the existing E. 9<sup>th</sup> and Abbey ramps, which would no longer be used by motorized traffic.

A ballpark estimate for constructing a new deck on an old bridge is \$75/sf (much lower than the \$350/sf estimate you provided for a new bridge). If the bike/pedestrian lane is roughly 4,000 feet long and 15 feet wide, then the cost would be \$4.5 million (assuming you can re-use the existing ramps).

This seems like a reasonable cost in the context of the huge Innerbelt project, and the concept certainly merits further study.

### **Existence of alternative travel routes for bicycles and pedestrians**

You state that there is not a compelling need to accommodate bicycles on the Central Viaduct because there are other bike facilities over the Cuyahoga Valley, such as the Lorain-Carnegie Bridge and Detroit-Superior Bridge. It's true that there are alternate routes, but these routes force you to go out of your way and are not connected to other non-motorized travel facilities. In contrast, the Central Viaduct route would be connected directly to the busy Towpath Trail in Tremont (once it's completed), offering several million cyclists a year the opportunity to go straight downtown instead of descending into the Flats where they would confront large trucks, steep hills, and broken pavement. In addition to providing this direct linkage, this is a unique opportunity to create a visitor attraction for the city.

While the quantitative distances of your proposed alternates may not require significant additional travel time for a cyclist, they are certainly a burden for pedestrians and those in wheelchairs. And the travel experience on your proposed alternative routes is qualitatively inferior to a separate pedestrian/bike facility, with narrow bridge roadway

and complicated intersections that mix non-motorized travel with high car and truck traffic volumes.

You also say that the highway bridges with bike lanes that I offered as examples (the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco and the Cooper River Bridge in Charleston) are not good analogies for our situation in Cleveland because they are the only water crossings for many miles. First of all, I offered these examples not to argue about need but as design examples—illustrations of how bike lanes could be easily integrated onto a bridge carrying high volumes of traffic. And second, I could cite other examples, such as Pittsburgh, where there are multiple water crossings for non-motorized travel.

### **Winter maintenance of bicycle/pedestrian facility on the Innerbelt Bridge**

Your letter expresses concerns that: a) ODOT does not have the equipment or staffing to de-ice and plow a bicycle/pedestrian lane on the bridge; and b) snow plows clearing traffic lanes would throw snow and ice on to the non-motorized facility, creating a dangerous situation for cyclists and pedestrians.

My response to the first concern is to ask, why doesn't ODOT have equipment and staffing to maintain such bike lanes? Bicyclists and pedestrians deserve the same high level of service that ODOT provides to automobiles. Every winter, bridges over highways throughout Northeast Ohio are impassable to bicyclists and pedestrians because the berms and sidewalks are not cleared (or they are used to store piles of snow plowed from the road). ODOT and local governments that plow roads need to address this.

The solution to the second concern is easy. Just tell the drivers of snow plow trucks to slow down when crossing the bridge so they don't blast snow and ice across the bike lane.

Regarding winter and bicycling: It's a myth that Great Lakes weather prevents widespread cycling for transportation. Cities such as Minneapolis and Toronto, with colder weather than Cleveland, achieve high levels of cycling year-round.

### **Police patrol and emergency medical service concerns**

You also have a concern about policing and emergency medical response for a bicycle/pedestrian facility on the bridge. This is really a matter of design. You seem to envision the facility as a long cave of vandal fencing running the length of the bridge, so one would be trapped and isolated once entering at one end.

In contrast, I envision an open facility without ugly fencing, similar to the designs I have showed you. Users would be visible to all the passing traffic and police, so the facility would be a busy, public place not at all conducive to criminal activity. The barrier separating the bikeway from traffic lanes (like a jersey barrier) could have small gaps at intervals to allow emergency personnel to access the facility from the breakdown lane of the bridge. Or the bikeway could be wide enough to permit emergency vehicles to drive on it.

Moreover, if your logic about the danger of long bike facilities were followed, we would never have non-motorized trail facilities at all. Instead, we have found that it's okay for trails to run through remote places. The facilities don't attract criminals, and emergency services are accommodated successfully.

### **Homeland security considerations**

To prevent terrorist attacks on critical parts of the nation's infrastructure like the Innerbelt's Central Viaduct Bridge, you say that the Department of Homeland Security has advised ODOT to minimize access of people around the bridge. You conclude: "The position of a bicycle/pedestrian facility on this structure is in almost direct contradiction to this guidance..."

Let's be serious. If terrorists really want to blow up the bridge, it's rather unlikely that they will transport the explosives on a bike across the top of the bridge in full view. Moreover, the presence of a non-motorized facility would probably enhance security by enabling more law-abiding citizens to be out on the bridge watching for terrorists.

If there can be a bike/pedestrian path on the Golden Gate Bridge, perhaps the most iconic bridge in America, or on Charleston's Cooper River Bridge over a major seaport, then I'm sure the security issues can be worked out for our bridge in Cleveland.

### **ODOT assistance to other Cleveland-area bike facilities**

Your letter claims that "ODOT has been very supportive of other bicycle and pedestrian projects in the region," such as the Detroit-Superior Bridge Promenade, Euclid Corridor bike lane, West Shoreway bikeway, and the Towpath Trail extension.

Are you joking?! ODOT fought the first two projects every step of the way. It took extraordinary efforts by the City of Cleveland, nonprofit organizations like Cleveland Public Art and EcoCity Cleveland, and others to overcome ODOT resistance and get these important projects done. Regarding the Euclid Corridor bike lane, ODOT simply could not imagine how bike lanes could ever work on an urban street, even though such lanes are in routine use in cities throughout North America. The ODOT attitude seemed to be: "We've never done this in Ohio, and we're not going to start now."

On the West Shoreway, ODOT has been supportive and deserves credit for implementing the transformation of a highway into a city boulevard. This is a major step forward. But it is not something that ODOT would have done on its own initiative. It was a top economic development priority of the Cleveland business community and the City of Cleveland. And it was a bargaining chip: the city got the West Shoreway in return for not demanding much out of the larger Innerbelt rehabilitation project.

On the Towpath Trail extension, ODOT is assisting with several small segments of the trail where it is convenient to do so in the context of other road projects. But I see little evidence that ODOT is a champion of this important regional initiative. The Towpath Trail is taking forever to complete because supporters have to piece together funding

from small grants from numerous local, state, and federal sources. If ODOT were a champion of transportation alternatives, the trail could have been completed years ago.

Overall, ODOT has a weak record of supporting bike and pedestrian projects in urban areas. In some cases, ODOT is the main obstacle to progress. So it's not just the Central Viaduct bike facility that you oppose. There is a general antipathy toward non-motorized travellers. ODOT doesn't want to acknowledge them as a legitimate part of our urban transportation system.

### **Summary**

Thanks for allowing me to discuss this Central Viaduct Bridge project with you. I still hope that ODOT will take a positive approach and really try to make a bike/pedestrian facility work as part of this big project. A well designed facility could be affordable and would become an exciting asset for the region.

In addition, I'd like to say that our exchange has been interesting to me because it illuminates larger issues about ODOT's culture and the future of transportation in Ohio. For 50 years, ODOT has made Ohio less and less sustainable by building a transportation system that forces people to drive cars more and more. In order to respond to climate change, the end of cheap oil, and air pollution problems, we need to rethink transportation in fundamental ways. In large part this will mean re-allocating transportation funds to promote the redevelopment of cities and town centers where people can access what they need without having to get on the highway. ODOT's mission will have to be less about increasing mobility by motor vehicles and more about supporting the development of sustainable communities.

Recently, I have been encouraged by policy statements about infrastructure and the redevelopment of cities coming out of the Strickland transition process. Perhaps we can hope for a different set of priorities to emerge from ODOT in the coming years. I would be happy to provide more information about what a 21<sup>st</sup> century vision of sustainable transportation could be like. Thanks again for your interest.

Sincerely,

David Beach  
Executive Director

cc: Craig Hebebrand, Robert Brown, Cleveland City Planning Commission members,  
Paul Alsenas, Steven Litt