

Trump administration strips bicycle lanes, pedestrian protections from proven safety list

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The Federal Highway Administration has removed bicycle lanes, lower speed limits and measures that protect pedestrians from its list of best safety practices, saying that it is eliminating "social initiatives" that increase congestion.

Long Island traffic experts and advocates criticized the move, arguing the changes aren't based on data and could affect what projects are funded.

Safety advocates first noticed the removal of five of 28 "proven safety countermeasures" - "bicycle lanes," "road diets," "appropriate speed limits for all road users," "speed safety cameras," and "variable speed limits" - from the FHWA website earlier this month.

It was not immediately clear how federal transportation spending would be affected.

The changes, according to a statement from a highway administration spokesman, were made to ensure alignment "with USDOT policies and the Administration's priorities" and "reverse the last administration's policies that decreased lane capacity and increased congestion."

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, who has derided what he calls "DEI bike lanes," is "putting safety first," according to the statement. The agency did not answer a question from Newsday about whether it has safety data to back up its changes.

Earlier FHWA guidance justified each best practice with data; for example, a multistate study showed bicycle lanes can reduce total crashes by 49% on certain four-lane roads and 30% on two-lane roads.

Michael Shenoda, a professor of traffic engineering at Farmingdale State College, called the FHWA's changes "complete ignorance."

He said he was disturbed by the FHWA's apparent attitude that "our only job as transportation engineers is to provide as much road as possible for vehicles, and not make any other considerations."

Adding a bicycle lane to a road, implementing a "road diet" by removing a vehicular lane to slow traffic down, or lowering the speed limit to protect pedestrians isn't appropriate in every situation, Shenoda said. But just like the other 23 safety measures that remain on the best practices list - ranging from roundabouts to rumble strips, lighting and walkways - when implemented in the right place, each can be an important safety tool.

"The answer is to examine the situation, see what the problem is, try different strategies," he said. "I'm wary of taking options off the menu."

The federal agency's statement said, "drivers paying taxes and vehicle fees expect their dollars to be reinvested into our roads, not social initiatives that burden their commutes."

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Eric Alexander, director of Vision Long Island, which advocates for walkable and bike-able downtowns, told Newsday the changes "do not reflect what the needs are on Long Island."

"Roadways are public spaces created and subsidized by all resident and business taxpayers," he added. "We need to continue to invest in successful, proven traffic calming solutions to reverse the conditions on the many dangerous roads on Long Island."

Between 2021 and 2025, at least 41 cyclists and 320 pedestrians were killed on Long Island, while over 300 cyclists and 780 pedestrians were seriously injured, according to official data compiled by the Institute for Traffic Safety Management and Research.

Biking advocates have long lamented the lack of bike infrastructure. In Nassau County, there are under six miles of on-street bike lanes.

The FHWA's recent change comes after the Trump administration last year clawed back previously awarded grants for bike lanes and recreational trails in six states, calling them "hostile to motor vehicles" and saying it wants to focus on "projects that promote vehicular travel."

Still, most federal road funding is allocated to states, which then decide how to spend it.

Alexander said he was concerned the FHWA's changes could set the tone, even if the direct impact on funding remains unclear.

Congress is in the process of drafting a surface transportation reauthorization bill to replace 2021's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which expires in September. The new law will guide how traffic dollars are allocated over the next five years.

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