

**The Stranger Slog, 9/10/08**

## **25 Road Diets? Yes and No**

posted by [Erica C. Barnett](#) on September 10 at 10:15 AM

Last week, when I heard city of Seattle bike planner Peter Lagerwey tell a crowd at the Pro Walk/Pro Bike conference that the city had “started on 25 road diets, and we’re working on the 26th now,” **it sounded too good to be true**. As the city employee who headed up the development of 2007’s Bike Master Plan, Lagerwey was tapped to head up a panel called “How to Develop and Implement A Successful Bicycle Master Plan”; the particular aspect of Seattle’s plan he was referring to was **narrowing roads by removing lanes of traffic and converting them to bike lanes or other bike facilities**, such as sharrows. (Sharrows are road markings in traffic lanes that let drivers know to look for bikes.) Such “diets” tend to be controversial, because they reprioritize streets for bikes and pedestrians instead of cars. So it struck me as odd that there could’ve been so much progress in so little time.

Turns out, there hasn’t been. A list of “road diets” provided by the city’s Department of Transportation (SDOT) shows that of the 25 Lagerwey was referring to, only four—or, really, two, given that three of the diets listed are actually contiguous sections of Stone Way—have occurred since 2007. The rest are older—in some cases, much older: The first road diet on the list, the narrowing of N. 45th Street between Latona Ave. NE and Stone Way from four lanes to two, dates back to 1972. **Only nine of the road diets on the list took place this decade**. And the three most recent ones were controversial—so controversial, in fact, that SDOT attempted to eliminate them at the instigation of area business owners. Only massive pushback from cycling advocates, who organized a protest and commissioned an independent traffic study to prove narrowing Stone Way wouldn’t harm nearby businesses, convinced the department to narrow the road as planned.

That’s certainly not to say that Seattle’s bike master plan is a failure—just that, like every political process in Seattle, it remains open to discussion and outside influence. According to Cascade Bicycle Club’s David Hiller, who also spoke on the Pro Walk/Pro Bike panel, SDOT’s progress is “tracking really well” with the adopted bike-plan schedule. In the weeks leading up to the conference, the largest such event in the nation, **spray-painted temporary markings for bike lanes and sharrows appeared on streets all over the city**. Hopefully, cyclists won’t have to wait until next spring—the next time the city will be able to paint once the winter rain sets in—to see those promised bike facilities made permanent.