

Portland Bicycle Advisory Committee

Working to Make Bicycling a Part of Daily Life in Portland

1001 SW 5th Avenue, Room 1300
Portland OR 97204



March 13, 2026

To: Millicent Williams, Director Portland Bureau of Transportation
Jody Yates, Manager Maintenance Operations
Scott Cohen, Manager Small Capital Project Delivery

Cc: Roger Geller, Bicycle Coordinator

From: City of Portland Bicycle Advisory Committee

RE: Removal of Slow Streets infrastructure on Neighborhood Gateways

The City of Portland Bicycle Advisory Committee (BAC) is writing to express disappointment and concern regarding the removal of the concrete planters that established the city's Slow Streets program. We advise the city to either replace them, propose a redesign, and/or build permanent treatments that are equivalent or better. Treatments should be substantial, highly visible, and provide the same benefits as described below.

The Slow Streets program deployed during the pandemic was a popular initiative that focused on improving the safety and comfort of our streets, particularly on neighborhood greenways. The program invited residents to connect with their streets while raising awareness of bicycling and walking. While evaluation of the Slow Streets installations suggested they did not produce lower speeds or car volumes, the planters did provide important and encouraging benefits that we would like to see retained. They improved safety, comfort, and visibility for people bicycling. These unmeasured benefits improved the confidence of people bicycling. These benefits disappeared when the planters were removed.

1. Improved intersection visibility and comfort

The concrete planters provided large and visible vertical elements that empowered bicyclists to approach an intersection while being protected from cross traffic. They shortened the crossing distance. Both these benefits made bicycling safer and more comfortable. This was especially true at night and in the rain. The absence of planters has already resulted in reported crashes with cars.

2. Increased left turn calming and reduced dangerous passing

Related to the above, the placement of planters forced drivers to make slower and wider left turns and slower right turns when entering the greenways, which created slower and calmer traffic conditions. The planters prevented drivers from passing bicyclists in the intersection. Members of our committee have raised concerns and have personally experienced being passed too closely and almost hit by drivers cutting corners and turning onto greenways where planters have been removed.

3. Indication that “these streets are for biking” and priority is given to people biking and walking

The bright yellow planters, together with their accompanying signs, provided a visible, intuitive, and clear message to people driving that they are entering a street where they are guests and the primary intended users are people biking (or walking). This indicator encourages drivers to be more aware of their surroundings as they navigate the street.

4. Improving wayfinding by creating a visible gateway to the greenways

These highly visible treatments provided clear indications to people biking that they were entering a bike street (greenway) and continuing on a calmer path to their next destination. Although greenways have other wayfinding elements such as painted shared lane markings and directional signage, the planters and signage can be seen from several blocks away and are therefore much more visible. Without these helpful indicators, wayfinding is not as clear and reduces accessibility.

5. Signaling to people on bikes that PBOT cares about bicycling and safety

Residents need to feel that their city prioritizes safety as it works to improve our streets and these installations clearly and strongly communicated that message to individuals passing through via car, bike, and on foot. Perception of safety matters when encouraging newer or more concerned bike riders to adopt cycling for 25% of their trips, and the planters contribute significantly to the perception of safety on cycling routes.

The planters improved conditions for bicycling in ways unforeseen by city staff and their removal has resulted in worse conditions.

In addition to concerns from individual BAC members, we have heard from the community members about the problematic conditions that people biking on greenways have experienced since these installations were removed. We have heard:

- “The first time I rode through 20th and Salmon after the planters were removed, a driver chose to accelerate and pass me in the intersection, which felt unsafe and would have been impossible when the planters were still in place. My neighbor, who is newer to biking, also told me that she has felt less safe biking on Salmon since the planters were removed. I regularly bike on Salmon with my kids, as do other families that we know, and it’s mind-boggling to us that PBOT would choose to remove safety infrastructure without immediately replacing it with something better.”
- “We need to increase the visibility of the greenway system. Planters were doing that—they’re big and yellow. The gateways need to be true gateways.” (BAC comment)
- “The fact that these have planters, which I ride by frequently and have not had problems, are being removed, casts doubt on the legitimacy of this whole “temporary materials” replacement ideology.” (BikePortland comment)
- “I think the planters are some of the best traffic calming devices in the city, and I would like to see a lot more of them. My (cynical) prediction: the permanent treatments will be

uglier, less adaptable, less effective, and more expensive than the planters that are being replaced.” (BikePortland comment)

- “I don’t see how the removals help anyone, and as someone who lives near the Salmon and 20th intersection, it makes my commuting actively more dangerous.” (BikePortland comment)
- “The planters worked! They kept me and my family safe. Now I feel unsafe.” (BikePortland comment)

While we understand some of the limitations and challenges presented by the temporary materials used, we advise PBOT to install permanent structures that provide the same or better features as listed above. Physical infrastructure should be secured permanently to the road to reduce ongoing maintenance needs. They need to be massive and highly visible. Some of the options presented by PBOT staff during the February 2026 BAC meeting did not meet these criteria.

At a time when riding conditions of neighborhood greenways are a focus for several advocacy groups (BikeLoud PDX and Bike Bus PDX) and individuals, we advise PBOT to do everything within its authority to provide inexpensive, effective treatments that make people feel safer and more comfortable when riding on these bikeways. The yellow planters accomplished that and any replacements need to offer those same feelings. In trying to do one thing, you hit on an effective treatment that improved conditions for bicycling. If maintenance is the only issue prohibiting their remaining in place, then we have confidence in your ability to devise a solution that is simple, elegant and effective.

Please return to the committee with your suggestions for an equally effective or improved installation.

Please provide a response to this letter.

Sincerely,



Jim Middaugh, BAC Chairperson



Joseph Perez, BAC Vice chairperson