



MARIN COUNTY BICYCLE COALITION

Mayor McCauley, Vice Mayor Wickham, and Members of the Mill Valley City Council,

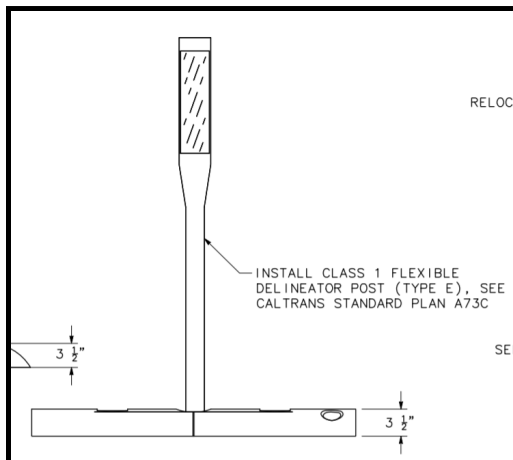
I am writing to express several concerns that MCBC has with the current design of the E. Blithedale Avenue Rehabilitation Project, particularly with regard to the design of the bicycle facilities. My three primary concerns are outlined here.

Bike Lane Separation

From the outset of the project to reimagine E. Blithedale Avenue, MCBC has advocated for the use of physically-separated rather than paint-only bike lanes, given the high-speed traffic and heavy auto volumes on the road. We were heartened when, responding to feedback from the BPAC and the wider community, the City made clear that it would be providing separated (aka Class 4) bike lanes.

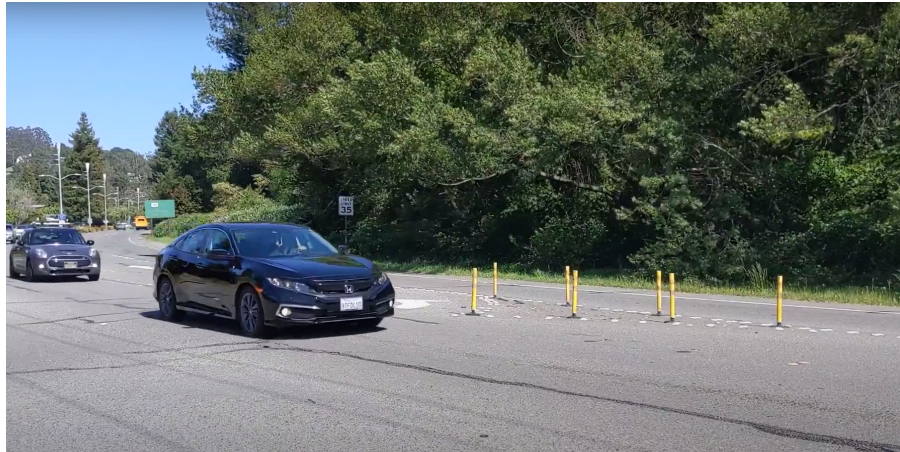
However, not all separated bike lanes are created equal. The term is used to refer to on-street bike lanes with *some* type of physical separation between cars and the bike lane, which can cover quite a range. Here are the types of separation that may be used to separate bike lanes from automobile traffic:

- Concrete curbs
- Jersey barriers (aka “k-rail”)
- Planters boxes
- Parked cars
- Plastic bollards
- Flex posts



This week we learned that the City plans to delineate the bike lanes (they can hardly be called “separated,” much less “protected”) with flex posts. This is very disappointing to us at MCBC, because we feel that such a treatment would be a far cry from achieving an “all ages and abilities” standard that the towns and cities of Marin County should aspire to when creating bike facilities, especially those intended for use by children traveling to and from school.

One does not have to look far and wide to see broken or flattened flex posts, which are so-named because they are intended to yield to car bumpers rather than damaging them. It should go without saying that a barrier designed to protect car paint *will not protect vulnerable riders* from an errant driver crossing into the bike lane. Whatever is used, it should be highly visible and not be easy to run over without noticing. Below is a photo of existing flex posts used on E. Blithedale. Would those posts make anyone feel safe from the passing cars?



MCBC urges Mill Valley to separate the planned bike lane with something more substantial than flex posts. Ideally this separation would be something that would actually prevent a car from entering the bike lane, such as concrete barriers or planters. Barring that, we feel strongly that the bike lane should be separated with K-71 plastic bollards and/or rubber barriers, the more modern standard used in new bike lanes in cities as diverse as San Rafael, Fremont, and San Jose.

While this will represent an increase in cost on this admittedly constrained project, the change would be minimal. The 188 Class 1 Flexible Delineators currently planned cost ~\$45/unit, roughly \$8,500. To install K-71 bollards would roughly double that, representing an increase of just 0.2% to the overall project.



Bike Lane and Buffer Width

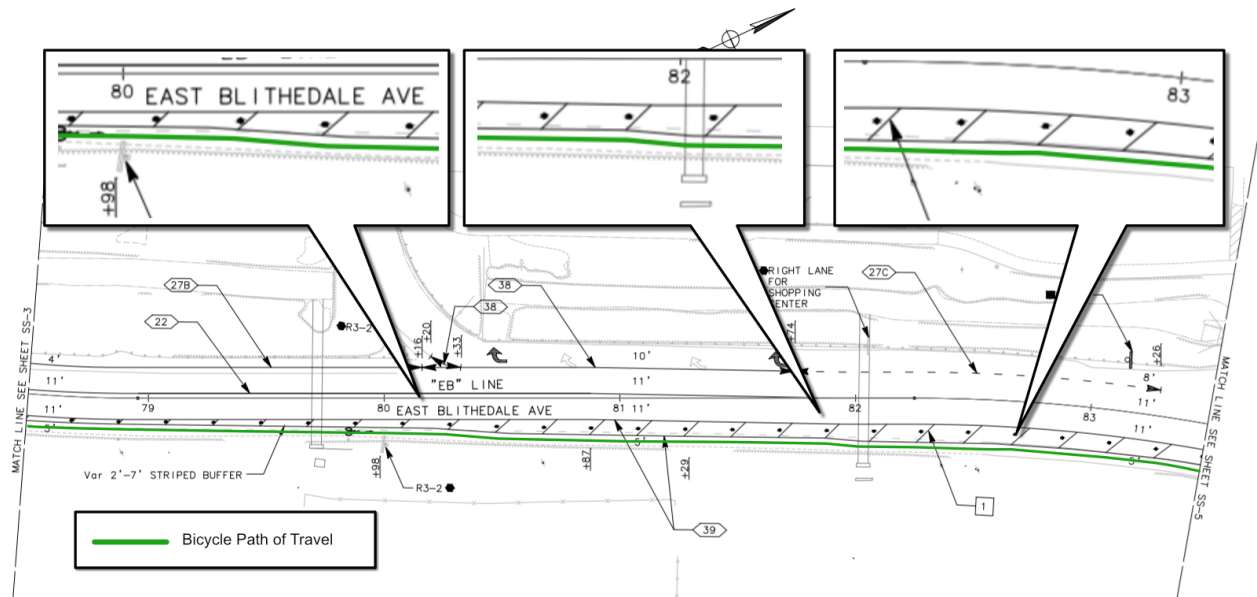
A Class 4 separated bike lane must be at least 5' wide with a 2' buffer, the area in which the vertical separators are located (e.g. bollards, flex posts, etc.). While these represent the *minimum* allowable widths, those areas may be wider. In fact, the preferred width of a protected bike lane, per the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) is 7', especially in an uphill direction or on a busy bike lane.

As shown in the plans below, the proposed design maintains the eastbound bike lane at a minimum 5' width throughout, while the buffer ranges from 2'-7'. The westbound lane also maintains a minimum of 5' with the buffer ranging between 2'-13'. To analogize, this is like designing a 10' car lane even while the roadway shoulder is as wide as 15'.

This choice is perplexing, as it squeezes riders into a small space over the whole corridor, rather than only in the maximally-constrained areas. Faster riders will have a difficult time passing those traveling more slowly, and children biking to school will not be able to ride next to one another.

Additionally, this strict adherence to the 5' minimum bike lane results in an awkward path of travel for riders, as the striping veers sharply back and forth to follow the edge of the road, as shown below.

MCBC recommends that, in the areas not maximally constrained, the buffer first be increased to 3', at which point the bike lane should be widened to allow easy passing, up to a width of 8'. Attention should be given to ensuring that the 'bike path of travel' remains a gentle curve, like that for automobiles, rather than jerking back and forth.

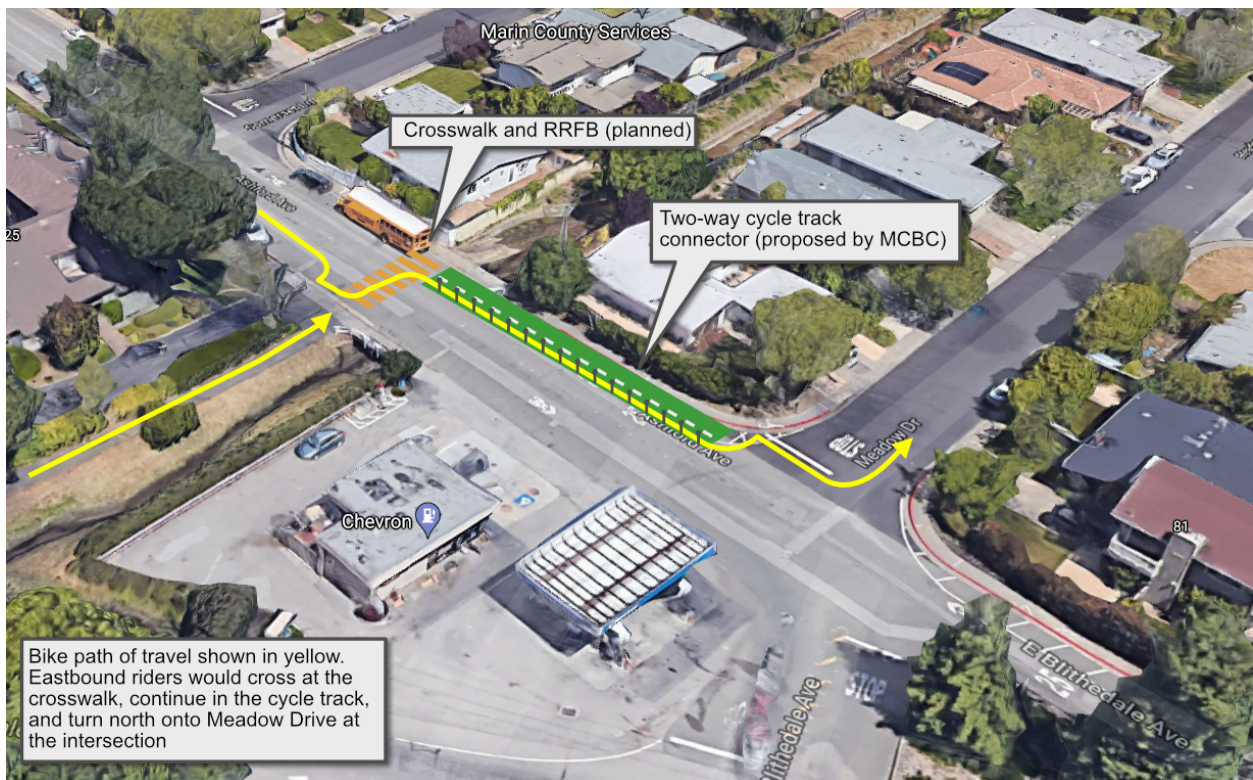


Eastbound Ashford Avenue left onto Meadow Drive

As a result of feedback from the BPAC, the City decided to provide a crosswalk across Ashford Avenue connecting Meadow Drive to the creek path immediately west of the Chevron station. This is a welcome addition. However, additional feedback provided by MCBC and seconded by members of the BPAC noted the lack of an accommodation for cyclists traveling eastbound on Ashford Avenue turning left (north) onto Meadow Drive (a Class 3 bicycle route, as described by the Bicycle/Pedestrian Master Plan).

Because westbound drivers coming off of E. Blithedale will have the right-of-way while navigating an s-curve, there is no clear place for a rider turning left onto Meadow Drive to wait. Do they sit in the middle of the intersection? Do they pull into the Chevron parking lot and try to cross the street perpendicularly?

At the 3/31 BPAC meeting, I urged city staff to address this issue. One potential solution would be to create a two-way cycle track connector on the north side of Ashford Avenue between Meadow Drive and the proposed crosswalk (as shown below). Eastbound riders could cross at the crosswalk before continuing to Meadow Drive. This design may not prove feasible, but no other alternative was offered, and the plans before the council do not include an easy path of travel for eastbound riders turning from Ashford onto Meadow. I recommend that the final designs address this existing deficiency.



Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Warren Wells

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