

BTA's Public Statement on Horrible Crash at SE 26th and SE Powell Blvd

First and foremost, the Bicycle Transportation Alliance (BTA) is outraged at the failure of our traffic system to prevent loss of life and serious injuries. Another serious crash occurred on the morning of May 10th, when Alistair Corkett was struck by a pick-up truck needlessly and violently, ending in the loss of one of his legs.

Imagine being a young athlete. At 22, on your way to visit your mother for Mothers Day, you get in a crash, nearly die, and lose your leg. That's what happened to Alistair Corkett on Sunday and sparked yesterday's protest. Corkett's life is changed forever. His is not the only life that will change: the driver who hit him will certainly carry this with him; Alistair's mother will never think of Mothers Day the same.

We believe that this crash was preventable. In fact, we believe that all crashes are preventable. We dare to dream that we can live in a society that places safety first over other priorities such as: getting there quickly, saving money on quick fixes, or perhaps worst of all: believing that fatalities and serious injuries are inevitable.

On a crash map, though, this incident will just be another red dot -- another injury. Too often we focus only on the black dots -- fatalities. Between 2002 and 2011, crashes on Powell claimed 7 lives but during that time 1672 people were injured in crashes. 60 of them had their lives changed forever with "incapacitating injuries" like Alistair's.

THESE ARE RADICAL ACTS?

Yesterday, nearly 100 people performed radical acts on SE Powell Boulevard as part of a protest -- acts that tied up car traffic on the street for hours. Here is what they did: they rode bicycles on the street, stood next to it chatting, and walked across it confidently with their kids. These are activities that would be normal on a typical, healthy Portland street but Powell is not one of those. We have become so used to it being dangerous that these perfectly legal activities, along with some signs, attracted police, 2 Oregon Department of Transportation staffers, and news helicopters.

MOST TRAFFIC JAMS ARE CAUSED BY CRASHES, NOT PROTESTS.

Pedestrian-related crashes are disproportionately high and severe on High Crash Corridors like Powell but most crashes are between motor vehicle operators. Even when these crashes don't cause serious injuries, they almost always cause traffic problems. Yesterday's traffic jam on Powell was rare only because it was caused by a protest. Until safety concerns are addressed, though, crash-related traffic jams on Powell will continue to be common.

PEOPLE WANT OPTIONS.

High Crash Corridors force people into cars. For many, the only way to cross them safely is in a car. The only way to move along them is in a car. Want to get to Cleveland High School? Get in the car. Little league practice at Powell City Park? Get in the car. The result? Lots of cars and a focus on moving those cars as quickly as possible to accommodate even more cars. If walking, biking, or taking transit were safer and more realistic options, there would be far fewer cars on the road competing for space.

MAKE BIKE STREETS SAFE.

Sharing space works on slow, low-traffic streets like neighborhood greenways but yesterday's protest perfectly illustrated the need for separate, protected bikeways on our big streets. It was remarkable to see how inefficient a busy street becomes when just a few bikes mix with a lot of cars in the same lane. Anyone frustrated by being stuck behind bicycles in their car, should be quick to see the value of protected bikeways.

WILL POWELL-DIVISION HIGH CAPACITY TRANSIT HELP?

We have an opportunity to fix this. Metro and Trimet are in the early stages of planning a high capacity transit route along inner Powell. It will likely run as far east as 82nd before turning north to run along Division. This project will include millions of dollars of improvements for walking and biking along its path but the current question is: Is it worth the effort and expense to make improvements along the route itself or will improving parallel routes suffice? In other words: bicycle and pedestrian improvements on Powell...or a few blocks over? It is clear to the Bicycle Transportation Alliance that this project presents a perfect opportunity to finally make Powell safe for walking and biking.

ODOT MUST TRULY PUT SAFETY FIRST...NOW.

We cannot wait for High Capacity Transit to address the current concerns at SE Powell and 26th, or on the SW Barbur Bridges, on 82nd Avenue, or any number of other High Crash Corridors. These are all places where the Oregon Department of Transportation has failed to make safety their top priority.

Let's be clear and intentional. As a city, the lesson of this one crash and this one intersection is important. The lesson is that **the whole city needs to be safe for kids, families, pets, people walking, people bicycling, people driving and those in wheel chairs.** It is time for Vision Zero today, and that means real effort on the ground on intersections and roads like this one all across the city.

Sincerely,

Rob Sadowsky
Executive Director