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## News Release

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# City abandons Nueces Bike Boulevard, but bicycling community pushes on with project

***Goal of maintaining auto capacity and Nueces as a car thoroughfare nixes vision for moving new bicyclists downtown by pedal power***

The League of Bicycling Voters (LOBV) said Monday that it will continue to pursue a bike boulevard on Nueces Street, despite a City of Austin staff recommendation instead calling for new traffic calming on Rio Grande and a watered down mix of bike lanes and sharrows on Nueces.

"First they took the word 'Nueces' out and began calling it the 'Downtown Bike Boulevard Project,' and now with this plan, they've essentially removed the word 'bike' as well," said Rob D'Amico, League of Bicycling Voters president. "What once was a vision for defining a key corridor to move Austinites in and out of downtown by bicycles, has turned into a plan for pushing bikes to side to make sure cars aren't burdened. Luckily we have thousands of bicyclists—including some 2,000 signing a petition for a Nueces bike boulevard—and a lot of momentum in our city leadership and planning to carry on the vision."

The City started its process in December by inviting the public to look at what types of traffic calming and design elements would be best for a Nueces Bike Boulevard, which was already a component of the Bicycle Plan that passed City Council last June, and the Downtown Plan process. LOBV also created its own plan for a Nueces Bike Boulevard that calls for a variety of traffic calming measures—such as traffic circles, pinch points, partial diverters, signage, stenciling and more—to slow auto traffic and make the boulevard more appealing to beginning

bicyclists and families on bikes. Motorists would still be able to access the entire street with all of the plans, but with the understanding that they would need to drive slower.

However, city officials will release a plan today that calls for bike lanes on each side of Nueces, instead of a mix of innovative tools to open up the street to cyclists, after property owners with eyes on future development on the street pressured the city to take a new look at their plans. The bike lanes on the northern segment of Nueces will require removal of all on-street parking on one side of the street.

The city plan also provides for improvements on Rio Grande that will make the street somewhat safer for bicyclists and hopefully much safer for students and pedestrians. "The city plan does have a lot of great things going for it on Rio Grande, but unfortunately, it's at the expense of doing what's right on Nueces," D'Amico said. Plans call for traffic circles, cutouts for car drop-offs at Austin Community College and Pease Elementary, resurfacing the road, speed cushions to reduce auto speed and a bike/pedestrian bridge over Shoal Creek just south of 5<sup>th</sup> Street that will connect to the Lance Armstrong Bikeway, Shoal Creek Trail and Lady Bird Lake. "We love the idea of improving Rio Grande, but it's still a street with hills that will deter many beginning or young cyclists, while the perfectly flat corridor on Nueces, the obvious choice for a great bike boulevard, gets a bike facility that can be intimidating and is definitely less attractive," D'Amico said.

"Much of the debate over the Nueces Bike Boulevard has been the idea that redevelopment at Seaholm and along the western edge of downtown will make Nueces an important thoroughfare for auto traffic when it connects to Cesar Chavez and that auto capacity needs to be preserved for development in that area," D'Amico said. "This runs counter to Austin's rather ambitious goals for climate protection, air quality, mobility and public health."

The fault with the city's plan isn't any one facility or idea, D'Amico said, but that it caters to the wrong path for future mobility. "We feel intense development, downtown events, art museums, libraries and other great destinations are the perfect place to serve with a bike boulevard, so we don't buy the idea that it will hinder development or hurt property values."

D'Amico also said that misinformation campaigns, intimidation and harassment by those opposing the bike boulevard on Nueces also took its toll on city officials trying to coordinate a public process. "Threats to a city official, nasty letters, misinformation printed and spread throughout the area, and threat of lawsuits all have taken their toll," he said. "I think the thought from some in city government is that it's best to just get something done and move on. Our thought is, 'Think big, get big results, follow through on our vision, let our leadership express confidence in what's right, and do not stand for intimidation in civic life.'"

The Austin Bicycle Advisory Council—which reviewed and outline of the city staff plan—instead passed the following resolution at their March 25th meeting: *The Bicycle Advisory Council supports a full and expedient implementation of a bike boulevard on Nueces Street with significant traffic calming, with the specific devices and locations to be discussed at future BAC*

*meetings. The BAC also supports roadway improvements, including traffic calming, on Rio Grande Street to provide safer access to Pease Elementary, Austin Community College and other schools and destinations for cyclists and pedestrians.*

*The League of Bicycling Voters is Austin's voice for bicyclists. LOBV is a nonprofit advocacy organization promoting better transportation policy decisions, justice for bicyclists, and more resources to increase the number of bicyclists in the Austin area.*

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