

Madalyn Letellier

From: Jeff Byrnes [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, August 17, 2023 9:57 AM
To: Mayor; All City Council
Cc: City Clerk Contact
Subject: In support of "Idaho Stop" city council resolution 23-1162

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Dear Mayor Ballantyne and esteemed members of the Somerville City Council:

We write to you today in support of Councilor Ewen-Campen and Wilson's July 13, 2023 council resolution requesting that Somerville Police de-prioritize enforcement against cyclists who treat red lights as stop signs when it is safe to do so, commonly called the "Idaho Stop".

We are pedestrians, cyclists, and residents of Somerville, and we agree with the councilors that the current enforcement of traffic laws can make traveling in Somerville more dangerous for cyclists. Enforcing that they must wait alongside or in front of cars at red lights increases the number of situations where cyclists and motorists come into conflict. These situations include motorists making a right turn around cyclists (commonly referred to as a "right hook"), and cyclists making a left turn in front of traffic. There is a gendered component to this; a study in the UK found that because female cyclists were more likely to follow rules and wait for a green light, they were getting killed by turning trucks at higher rates due to blind spots.

Allowing cyclists to treat red lights like stop signs reduces the possibility of these and other conflicts, in part by making themselves more visible to motorists. This in turn creates a less frustrating experience for drivers. The increased protection is particularly important when adult cyclists have children in tow, such as on a cargo bike and when riding to/from school.

Deprioritizing enforcement against cyclists practicing an Idaho Stop makes our streets safer for cyclists, and no less safe for pedestrians. Even with the maneuver legalized, cyclists still have a responsibility to yield to pedestrians before crossing an intersection. There is little reason to think cyclists won't do so, as studies have found that they highly comply with traffic rules. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, there is no evidence showing that the Idaho Stop increases conflicts between bikes and pedestrians, which are already uncommon.

The Idaho Stop is currently legal in eight states across the U.S. including, as you might imagine, Idaho, but also Arkansas, Minnesota, and Delaware. Not all these states are bastions of progressive policy or friendliness to cyclists, but they have each realized that legalizing the Idaho Stop is a commonsense, inexpensive, and immediate way to reduce the number of people getting hurt and killed on our streets. This is a rare case where without pouring any concrete or changing the structure of our streets, we can make them safer overnight.

We urge you and the Somerville Police Department to follow the data and adjust enforcement to give residents and visitors of Somerville a de facto Idaho Stop. This would make Somerville a safer city for cyclists, and it would also be a progressive and people-friendly policy.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jeff Byrnes, Somerville YIMBY, Ward 5

Alessandra Seiter, Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC), Ward 5

Tom Lamar, Somerville Bicycle Advisory Committee, Ward 1

Klaus Schultz, Ward 5

Aaron Weber, Somerville YIMBY, Ward 3

Devin Matté, Ward 5

David Hattis, Ward 5

Stephanie Galaitsi, Ward 6, on behalf of the Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets

Christopher Schmidt, Ward 6

Natalie Podrazik, Ward 3

Luc Schuster, Ward 5

Paul Morgan, Ward 5

Peter Kim-Santos, Ward 2

Marion Davis and Sean Erickson, Ward 1

Jesse Victoroff and Xiaoxiao Liu, Ward 1

Ted Alexander, Ward 2