

Madalyn Letellier

From: Aaron Kaplowitz [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, July 10, 2023 7:00 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Support for Proposed "Idaho Stop" Resolution

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Hi Council,

My name is Aaron Kaplowitz, and I live on [REDACTED] (Ward 6). I want to express my strong support in favor of the resolution to direct SPD to de-prioritize enforcement against the traffic pattern known as the Idaho Stop. The resolution as written references all the data, provided by the federal DOT, that you should need to draw the correct conclusions on safety.

The vast majority of my trips around Somerville and Cambridge are by bike or on foot, because car traffic (as you know) is awful and no fun to sit in. I drive my car to the highway and back, and that's it.

Last week, I was biking to Market Basket on Somerville Ave, coming from Porter. At the Elm/Somerville intersection, I slowed to a stop while the light was red and then continued through the intersection, like I always do, during the crosswalk phase. The intersection was devoid of anyone else but me.

If you've ever biked on Somerville Ave, you know that it's one of the worst streets in the city for doing so, despite being one of the most important routes. Door zone bike lanes, double parking, speeding cars, cars nearly plowing into you to turn, construction zones (599 Somerville) with no accommodation for the bike lane closure, the list goes on.

I do whatever I can to lower my chance of getting run over, maimed, and killed on my way to get some bananas. Continuing through intersections with the crosswalk phase of the light cycle (aka the Idaho Stop) is a primary way I feel safe. So, imagine my surprise and aggravation when a Somerville Police officer decided to stop me, and write me a ticket. While I sat there waiting for him to run my vehicle driver's license, I watched as cars made rolling rights on red while the crosswalk phase was active.

Getting even the slightest head start on car traffic means that I may have room, before cars catch up to me, to go around the guy parked in the bike lane "just for a minute," or to navigate the construction zone that forces me into the car lane.

Alas, it's well established that cars are threats to bikes and peds, so you certainly understand why it's much safer for cyclists to do this. But some among you may say, or hear, "but what about pedestrian safety? Cyclists blowing through red lights is a threat to them." To that, I ask you to think about Somerville's crown jewel, the Community Path. If cyclists are such a threat to pedestrians, how does the Path function? How are fragile old ladies not being run over every minute of every day? When you put it into perspective, cyclists and pedestrians are one and the same. The same strategies that protect people from cars (daylighting crosswalks, raised intersections, etc) can reduce or eliminate any perceived conflict between different categories of our vulnerable road users. Picture a Dutch city, where most streets are "shared streets" and pedestrians walk down the middle of the road while cyclists maneuver around them. Everyone is safe, and everyone is happy. Cars are the threat. Remember that.

I'll close with a note on efficiency and our long term goals. We want to prioritize efficient, green modes of transportation. Making bikes sit and wait at traffic lights, which can be remain red for close to a minute, when the intersection is otherwise clear, makes cycling less efficient. If it's not efficient or enjoyable/safe, why would anyone cycle in Somerville?

Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to get in my car and drive to Market Basket. Please approve this resolution.

Respectfully,
Aaron Kaplowitz