**Feedback on the Somerville Bicycle Committee   
March 2014 Transportation Improvement Proposal**

The Somerville Bicycle Committee [March 2014 Transportation Improvement Proposal](http://www.somervillebikes.org/uploads/1/7/6/6/17660777/interdept_mtg_mar_2014_final.pdf), linked from the Somerville Bicycle Committee “[Documents” page](http://www.somervillebikes.org/documents.html), is an excellent document describing in detail many proposals to improve cycling in Somerville.   
  
This document is meant to suggest further improvements to the plan consistent with the objective, considering foremost that infrastructure improvements – even improvements in paint alone – are expensive and often come along once every several years (if not once every several decades). As such, we should aim for the best improvements possible on every street rather than take an evolutionary or incremental approach.

From page 9 of the March 2014 proposal:

* **Objective  Expand and connect our fragmented bicycle route network**

**Somerville’s fragmented bicycle network**:

To start with a common baseline, we must ask ourselves two questions:

1. Does Somerville indeed have a fragmented network?
2. If so, are there systemic reasons why?

Let’s look at the network. For convenience the 2012 version of the [Somerville Bicycle Map](http://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/CityColorBikeRoutes2012_0.pdf) is shown below (it is linked from the [City of Somerville web site](http://www.somervillema.gov/departments/ospcd/transportation-and-infrastructure/bicycle-and-pedestrian)):

Macintosh HD:Users:mattyciii:Documents:Advocacy:Somerville CityColorBikeRoutes2012_0.pdf  
Notice, a substantial portion of the bike routes shown – perhaps 20% or more - are one way. These bike routes are one way because the streets themselves are one way for automobile traffic. I question whether we can improve cyclist mobility without compromising safety by installing counter-flow bike lanes on key one-way streets.

**Improved mobility via counter flow bike lanes**:

First, let’s look at a proposal from the March 2014 proposal:



The Webster Ave proposal, if implemented as-is, should improve safety of all road users by:

* Narrowing of the automobile travel lane
* Designating space for cyclists, managing expectations of drivers, cyclists and crossing pedestrians.
* Clearly marking space set aside for parking.

What this plan does not do is improve the Somerville Bicycle Network. A cyclist at the corner of Webster and Prospect needing to get to Union Square must take the long way around. For cycling to be adopted by more people to increase mode share, cycling has to be safe and efficient – making bikers take the long way just because we’ve made streets one-way for automobiles does not support an increase in mode share.

Let’s look at a different proposal for this section of Webster Ave:

Parking  
8’

Shared car & bike  
9’8” – 11’8”

Parking  
8’

Cycling  
6’







This arrangement should feature the same benefits of the SCB proposal:

* It narrows the automobile travel lane
* It clearly designates space for cyclists, managing expectations of drivers, cyclists and crossing pedestrians.
* It clearly marks space set aside for parking.

However it also provides additional safety and mobility enhancements:

* It makes the entirety of the street easier to cross. Pedestrians’ greatest crossing distance is between the two parking lanes, a distance no greater than 12’.
* It promotes safe equitable sharing of the southbound travel lane by drivers and cyclists.
* It provides a parking protected counter-flow bike lane, vastly improving bicycle mobility and closing gaps in the cycling network.

**Extrapolating from the example**:

The streets we have are often narrow and in most cases lack sufficient right of way to be widened. We have to do the best with the streetscape we have. Notwithstanding the proposal and the example above, I do not thing every one-way street in Somerville should be re-striped to include parking protected counter flow bicycle lanes. Rather, what we should be doing is taking a very close look at every one-way street and *strongly consider* finding a way to include counter-flow and parking protected counter flow lanes. Given how many Somerville streets are one-way, doing so is a way to rapidly improve the safety and connectedness of our cycling network.