



BIKE LANE BACKLASH PUSHES CAMBRIDGE TO CONSULT WITH SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS



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BY MACKENZIE FARKUS

After facing backlash from North Cambridge business owners over bike and bus lane installations along Massachusetts Avenue last November, City Councilors unanimously passed new policy orders on Monday that would allow more consultation with local business owners on their transportation concerns.

Cynthia Hughes, co-owner of North Cambridge barbershop Fast Phil's, joined *Boston Public Radio* on Tuesday to share her frustration over a lack of communication from city officials on the bike and bus lanes, some of which she says have tanked her business on Massachusetts Ave.

"We were blindsided, because apparently [the bike and bus lanes] have been in the works for years," Hughes said. "But how [does the City Council] not reach out and talk about it, tell us, give us a warning or even let us have a say in the matter?"

Under one new Cambridge policy, the city manager will convene a "committee on committees" to analyze bike lane installations, gathering insight from already existing commissions and boards such as the Pedestrian Committee, the Council on Aging and the Small Business Advisory Committee. The second policy order focuses on outreach to small businesses, residents and cyclists affected by the newly installed bike lanes on Massachusetts Avenue in an attempt to improve future bike lane installations across the city.

Cambridge plans to install nearly 23 miles of bike lanes by 2026.

Hughes said that while small business owners are not against the bike lanes themselves, they are worried about business going down when new lanes take over parking spaces. Business at Fast Phil's, she says, has gone down over 70% in the last few months.

"People call all day long," Hughes said. "I'm sick of answering the phone just to say, 'I don't know where you can park.'"

During the segment, Cambridge City Councilor and former president of the Massachusetts Teachers Association Paul Toner called in to share his thoughts on the city's communication shortfalls on the new bike lanes.

"I think the city hasn't done a great job in terms of reaching out and engaging the community as they implement this," Toner said, adding that the owners of Cambridge restaurant Waypoint recently wrote to the City Council claiming that they were down 40% in business. "I'll be working with the city staff and the businesses to make sure that we try to reverse some of the negative issues that have happened."

Transit advocates have pushed back against claims that the bike and bus lanes are hurting local businesses. Nonprofit Livable Streets' executive director Stacy Thompson said on *Boston Public Radio* last week that bike- and bus-focused projects typically boost business.

"The data shows that two-thirds or more of people going to these businesses live in that community, walk, take bikes there or take transit," Thompson said. "Where we've put down bus priority projects and bike projects, business has gone up for a lot of folks, because you have more people who can get to that business."

"I don't know this business owner, but it's also January," she added, referring to Hughes and her barbershop. "The project actually hasn't been down that long, so it's a little tough for me to comment on that specifically. But the data by and large shows across projects in the whole region that it's actually better for businesses."

Although Hughes wants to keep her business in North Cambridge, she told hosts Jim Braude and Margery Eagan that she's started looking for new locations that can accommodate clients travelling by car.

"I have people that come from the Cape, from Medford, Somerville," Hughes said. "We cannot survive on Cambridge residents alone, or bikers alone."



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