

After a horrific crash killed a cyclist, city and state are again pushing for barriers between bike lanes and cars

Most of Philadelphia's protected bike lanes are separated from traffic by flexible plastic posts.



The parking protected bike lane on the north side of the Chestnut Street Bridge in Center City.

Tom Gralish

by Thomas Fitzgerald

Published July 19, 2024, 5:08 p.m. ET

Bicycle advocates and urbanist groups say that pediatric oncologist Barbara Friedes would be alive now if the Spruce Street bike lane had been protected from motor vehicle traffic by concrete bollards or curbs, instead of mere flexible posts.

Friedes, 30, was struck from behind and killed Wednesday night by a speeding vehicle that ran over the plastic pylons and veered into the bike lane, a violent crash that stunned witnesses and cyclists. The impact threw her body 20 feet in the air.

Based on a [video of the moments before the crash](#), broadcast by NBC10, it appears that the driver was swerving to avoid another car in the traffic lane.

“If there was a bollard, the driver would not have tried to go around and into the bike lane,” said Nicole Brunet, policy director for the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia. “He’d have had to stay and honk the horn.”

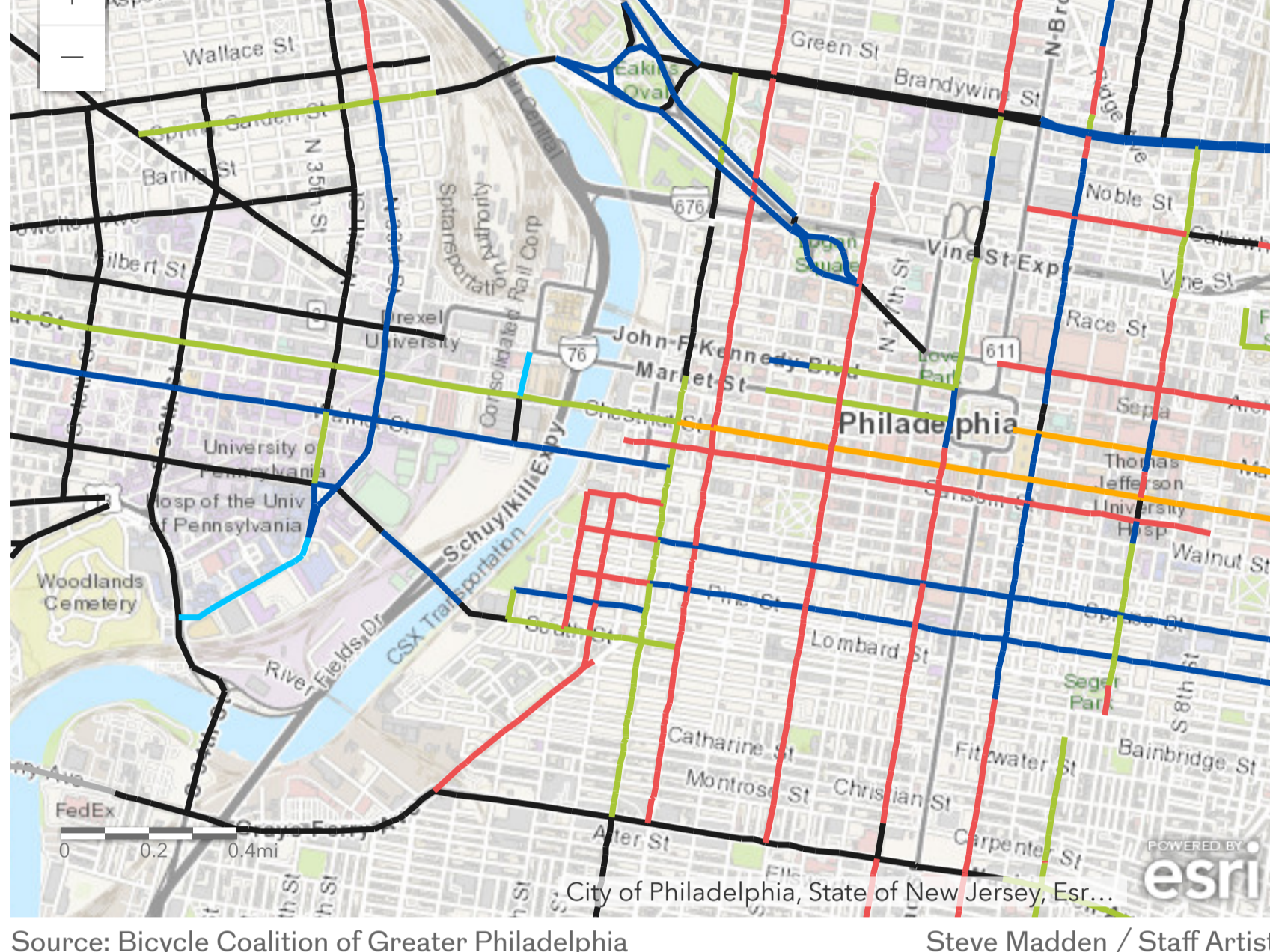
ADVERTISEMENT

Philadelphia has about 30 miles of designated bike lanes, relatively few protected by parked cars or hardened barriers.

Philadelphia's Bike Lanes

Philadelphia has about 30 miles of bike lanes. But very little of those lanes have a significant barrier from cars. Below are the types of bike lanes throughout the city.

- Conventional
- Separated
- Other
- Sharrow
- Bus bike lane
- Painted buffered
- Contraflow



Source: Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia

Steve Madden / Staff Artist

“We’re all scared. I used to feel safe in the bike lane, but not anymore,” said Amy Krauss, 57, a cyclist who supports ending the city’s long-standing practice of allowing [parking in Center City bike lanes for houses of worship](#). She also supports stronger barriers. She said it’s not clear how to get that accomplished in a city that prioritizes driving.

The Bicycle Coalition and allies Bike Action Philly and 5th Square are demanding that city officials install permanent hardened barriers to protect bike lanes, end the weekend parking on Spruce and Pine Streets, and make bike lanes no-stopping zones.

ADVERTISEMENT

LUMBER
Modern Style
For Your Home With Decorative Outdoor Privacy Screens
[LEARN MORE](#)

» [READ MORE: Police charge two drivers in pedestrian crashes, await toxicology results of driver in bicyclist's death](#)

A vigil scheduled for Sunday

On Sunday the groups are holding a vigil to remember Friedes, and other victims of traffic violence from the 1700 block to 1900 block of Spruce Street, between 8 a.m. and 11 a.m. They plan to highlight what they say are inadequate bike lanes.

“Infrastructure saves lives,” Brunet said. “Paint and plastic posts I can push over with my foot are not infrastructure.”

ADVERTISEMENT

LUMBER
Lighting for Life
Deck Lighting, Stair Lighting and Outdoor Accent Lighting
[LEARN MORE](#)

Several bike lanes are protected by a layer of parked vehicles between the bikeway and the sidewalk, including a two-way double lane along South 11th Street in South Philadelphia. Some cyclists say the setup there is dangerous because the angle-parked cars render them invisible to drivers who want to make right-hand turns. (The bikers have the right-of-way.)

Parking-protected bike lanes also run along parts of Market and Chestnut Streets, with the vehicles parallel to a curb and the cyclists riding between the reconfigured parking spots and the sidewalk.

PennDot has allowed the lanes on those roads, which are state highways, as pilot projects. The city cannot expand this kind of bike lane because they are illegal, based on a legal interpretation of a 1926 section of the Pennsylvania Vehicle code regulating curbs.

A bill to [authorize parking-protected bike lanes statewide two years ago failed](#) in the legislature because opponents were concerned about the needs of merchants for loading zones. It also was caught up in politics, as it was amended to remove Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner from prosecuting crimes on SEPTA, a goal of GOP lawmakers, [prompting a veto](#) from then-Gov. Tom Wolf.

Though the city can build parking-protected bike lanes on their own roadways, the politics can be fraught and officials have said they’re too expensive to create.

Hardened barriers offer more protection

Any kind of bike lane can be an improvement, but those with hardened barriers protect cyclists better and deter motorists from driving in them because they don’t want to damage their cars, said Arash Tavakoli, assistant professor of civil and environmental engineering at Villanova University. His research focuses on how to make cities safer for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as the psychological effects of urban infrastructure.

Ideally, he said, strong bike lanes would be paired with some stepped-up enforcement against speeding as well as design elements that slow vehicles in densely packed areas, such as “road diets,” narrowing the traffic lanes, and the use of traffic-calming devices like speed tables.

“It’s a system. They all work together,” Tavakoli said, noting that barriers such as bollards help narrow driving lanes.

But “you can’t just add a pylon and think you’ve solved the problem,” he said. “All of this is an artifact that we’ve designed, a system for cars, getting people rapidly from one place to another. But why are we thinking about just cars and not other road users?”



Thomas Fitzgerald

I'm the transportation reporter, covering how Philadelphians get around town (and beyond).