

Planners:

I recently gave up walking and biking in Knoxville. It is too dangerous. I live near the Western Ave/University Ave intersection and I challenge anyone in the planning department to attempt that crossing on foot during rush hour or at any time in the dark. Same with the crossing on Western at Broadway/Henley. Tell me, planners, what age do you believe a person needs to be in order to cross that intersection safely? Because I wouldn't allow my son on those sidewalks for anything. I don't think an in-town intersection should be so perilous that a person needs to be a fit adult, prepared to run if needed, in order to use a crosswalk. Have you ever attempted to walk to the UT from Western Ave? It can only be done at great risk and it's not pleasant in the least.

The reason for this is that, for decades now, the planners have sacrificed the safety of pedestrians for the convenience of motorists in just about every instance that has come across their desks. Every corner in this city is curved to facilitate speedy turning in a car -- and every instance means a longer, more blind, more dangerous crossing for a pedestrian. In addition, freeways saturate our city along with their tremendous footprints, rendering non-motorized access difficult, unpleasant, and dangerous. Many dangerous intersections do not even have crosswalks, such as the one at Western and College Drive, and this despite an expensive and time consuming study that found Western Ave to be one of the deadliest corridors in the entire city for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Now once again you ask people who walk to make a sacrifice without any return. Perhaps one problem for the planners is the obvious fact that, anymore, there really aren't that many pedestrians in town. I rarely encounter another pedestrian who is not homeless and, therefore, without a choice in the matter. There is hardly even a pedestrian constituency any more, so why should planners care about us?

But the reason there are so few pedestrians is that walking in this city has been rendered so difficult, so unpleasant, and so dangerous that few are willing to do it. Your new plan only furthers this depressing result. As other commenters have noted, people are growing weary of this car-centric culture, and want other options. We want to be outside sometimes, we want to encounter our neighbors, we want to be free of the car once in a while. And if you look at cities that have taken steps to improve, rather than, as here, degrade their walkability, you can see what benefits accrue. Nobody wants to live in a sea of concrete and traffic. No one walks on Kingston Pike by choice because it is so awful. Now you plan to increase the awfulness. Thanks a lot. This plan is horribly short-sighted, but compared to the neglect and even hostility this city has shown, for many decades, to pedestrians, it's not really that bad or even that surprising. Any city that permits its intersections to be as dangerous as ours are has livability problems that run deep and that won't be solved by zoning.

Even so, it would be a nice start to retain what meager efforts have been made to accommodate the dwindling numbers of people still willing to walk. I hope you do.

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