Traffic calming makes streets safer

As time passes, more and more people will use the new bike lanes installed this summer in Pottstown.

Regardless, bike lanes make streets safer for everyone no matter how many bicyclists use them.

Studies have shown that motorists slow down on roads with bike lanes simply because they narrow the street.

The faster cars go in urban areas, the more likely they are to crash into walkers, bicyclists and other cars. Injuries are likely to be more severe.

Lowering speed limits is legally necessary to require motorists to slow down, but it doesn’t guarantee motorists will actually do so.

In recent decades, traffic engineers have recognized that physical changes to the streets are needed to force motorists to slow down.

These changes are known as traffic calming, defined by the Institute of Transportation Engineers as “mainly physical measures that reduce the negative effects of motor vehicle use, alter driver behavior and improve conditions for non-motorized street users.”

Traffic calming devices include physical barriers in the street like road humps and bumps, concrete islands, roundabouts, chokers and neckdowns (where the curb protrudes into the street at certain places to narrow its width) and diverters (where the curb extends into the street at an intersection, forcing motorists to go left or right, but not straight.

But the least expensive way to calm traffic is narrowing the street by simply painting lines — especially if enhanced with upright plastic “delineators.” This has the proven psychological effect on motorists to slow down.

PARKING LOTS are the most common example of traffic calming. Because motorists and walkers share the same space, cars drive slowly before parking.

PennDOT adopted its first traffic calming manual in 2001. It lists various methods — including physical barriers — to induce motorists to slow down.

PennDOT

NARROWING JACKSON STREET with bike lanes and plastic “delineators” makes travel safer for everyone, not just bikers. Studies show motorists slow down on streets with bike lanes, and speed is the No. 1 contributor to car crashes. Jackson Street has the same car capacity — one lane in each direction — as it did before the bike lanes were installed.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chance of a pedestrian receiving a fatal injury from being hit by a car</th>
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<tr>
<td>Speed (mph)</td>
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<td>20</td>
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Commentary by Thomas Hylton

PennDOT's Traffic Calming Handbook

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