



September 9, 2008

Mr. John Barton, P.E.
Assistant Executive Director for Engineering Operations
Dewitt C. Greer Bldg.
Texas Department of Transportation
125 East 11th Street
Austin, Texas 78701

Re: Texas Bicycle Coalition request for research into options for road surfacing to more effectively accommodate bicyclists

Dear Mr. Barton,

We are well aware that the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is charged to provide safe and effective transportation across Texas to a wide variety of legal vehicles, from commercial and private trucks and cars to school buses, recreational vehicles, farm equipment, motorcycles and bicycles. We also understand that technical and cost factors are driving the increasing use of the "seal coat" method of resurfacing to extend the life of TxDOT "On-System" roadway surfaces in the state.

The Texas Bicycle Coalition (TBC) is concerned about the impact that such resurfacing projects are having on the safe and effective operation of bicycles during and in the period following these projects. We are very interested in working with TxDOT to determine if modifications in the process can be made that would address these concerns while still enabling TxDOT to meet its commitments to safety and cost-effective transportation.

TBC requests that TxDOT review and research modification options for the seal coat process. We believe this effort could result in usable guidance to TxDOT Districts for carrying out seal coat projects that result in more suitable road surfaces for bicyclists. We request that the review include but not necessarily be limited to the three following areas.

1. Consistency of Final Surface

We understand there is a range in variables such as size and consistency of materials (asphalt, oil, rock, emulsifier, etc.) that affect the final product. We also understand weather conditions during roadwork and varying annual climate conditions in different parts of the state affect the road surface as well as decisions on parameters of the mix to be applied.

TBC requests research into reasonable procedures that would better result in the most effective seal coat to accommodate cyclists and other road users.

2. Options to Affect Post-Construction Transition Phase.

On many seal coat projects, loose aggregate can persist for months, especially on the shoulders, which most cyclists use if available. Hazards to bicyclists in this environment are unstable traction and flying aggregate from passing motor vehicles. Some roads are, for all practicable purposes, impassable for cyclists for long periods after roadwork.

As you are aware, Texas Transportation Code Section 551.103 requires bicyclists "shall ride as near as practicable to the right curb or edge of the roadway" unless "a condition on or of the roadway, including a...surface hazard prevents the person from safely riding next to the right curb or edge of the roadway."

TBC requests research into reasonable procedures that can more quickly bring the road to a condition suitable for use by bicyclists.

3. Options to Preserve Smoother Surfaces on Shoulders

If the main vehicle lanes typically need maintenance before shoulders, the potential to save in maintenance costs while continuing to provide cyclists with a safe area of travel may be possible.

TBC requests research into reasonable procedures for seal coating the main lanes while leaving shoulders with the original surface coat, taking into consideration safety, surface transition and other factors.

Bicycles are an important resource that provides proven economic benefits to Texans through transportation use, reduced health care costs via improved fitness, tourism and quality-of-life attractions for newcomer businesses and residents in Texas communities. TBC looks forward to working with TxDOT to improve the efficacy of this resource while promoting safety for all vehicles using Texas roadways. We would be glad to provide additional information as needed.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please contact me anytime if I can be of any assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,



Robin Stallings
Executive Director
robin@biketexas.org
Cell: (512) 694-9158

cc: Mr. Paul Douglas
Statewide Bicycle Coordinator
Texas Department of Transportation
Austin, Texas