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I want to remove Phoenix's reverse lanes. Why I voted to study them instead | Opinion

Voting to launch a comprehensive new study on Phoenix's reverse lanes was not about delay for delay's sake. It's about understanding the true impact of the change.

Laura Pastor opinion contributor

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Key Points AI-assisted summary ⓘ

Phoenix City Council member Laura Pastor explains her vote to study the impact of removing reverse lanes on Seventh Avenue and Seventh Street.

Concerns exist regarding the cost of removal, estimated at over \$10 million, and potential negative impacts on traffic flow and safety.

Data from before the pandemic suggested removing the lanes could increase travel times by 40%, but an updated study is needed to make an informed decision.

I favor [removing the reverse lanes](#) that run along Seventh Avenue and Seventh Street, two of the busiest surface streets in Phoenix.

These lanes debuted in 1979 and 1982, before the construction of Arizona 51, to ease traffic into and out of downtown. They alternate the direction of traffic during peak hours with a system of overhead signals and signage that many find confusing or outdated.

In the decade that I have represented this area on the Phoenix City Council, many residents, business owners, bicyclists and pedestrians have [raised concerns about the hazards](#) that these lanes pose.

The complexity of turning restrictions, the frequency of collisions and the difficulty of navigating these corridors all speak to a system that may have outlived its usefulness.

So, why did I [not press for a vote to remove them](#) on May 21?

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Because good policymaking demands that we balance vision with reality.

Phoenix needs current data on reverse lanes

Preliminary studies show that signage changes to improve these lanes [would cost at least \\$2.6 million](#), while construction changes could easily push the total cost above \$15 million. Those are significant numbers, especially as our city faces a shaky economic forecast and a budget in flux.

And it is not just the price tag.

Data collected in 2020 — before the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped commuting — suggested that eliminating reverse lanes would increase travel times along these roads [by as much as 40%](#). If that's still the case, such congestion would ripple out to parallel streets like Central Avenue, 12th Street and 15th Avenue.

It could also increase accident rates, not decrease them, if drivers become more frustrated or tempted to cut through neighborhoods.

We cannot afford to get this wrong.

Our vote on May 21 to launch a comprehensive new study was not about delay for delay's sake. It was about gathering current, post-pandemic data and modeling the true traffic, safety and cost impacts of any change.

The votes weren't there to push a losing measure

Removing the lanes requires five affirmative council votes. We simply did not have those votes.

Rather than push a losing measure, I supported commissioning this deeper analysis. It is the only way to arm all council members and city staff with the facts needed to make a smart, safe, cost-effective decision.

I understand the frustration that this choice has caused. In recent weeks, some activists have taken to social media to criticize me, even going as far as to threaten a recall election.

That is certainly their right. I will never discourage civic engagement, even when it takes a painful form.

Opinion: [Phoenix's reverse lanes are a hassle. Remove them now](#)

But leadership is not about pleasing everyone. It is about serving all 200,000 residents of District 4 and the more than [one million people](#) who call Phoenix home.

It is about working closely with my colleagues in District 3 and District 6 — which also are directly impacted by this issue — and taking into consideration our city's significant growth and evolving traffic patterns.

The goal is to improve safety and traffic flow

My responsibility is to the entirety of Phoenix.

That means approaching the reverse lane issue with careful consideration, prudent use of taxpayer funds and a fierce commitment to the safety of every pedestrian, cyclist and driver on our roads.

I have always led with integrity, and I will not be shaken by personal attacks.

Instead, I remain focused on the goal: delivering a solution that improves traffic flow, enhances safety and reflects the reality of how Phoenix moves in the 2020s — not the 1980s.

We will get this right. Together.

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