

# **2024-2025 KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY**



## **THE PROLIFERATION OF BIKE LANES**

**Release Date**  
**May 27, 2025**

# **The Proliferation of Bike Lanes Whose Road Is It?**

## **SUMMARY:**

The 2024-2025 Kern County Grand Jury examined the impact of bike lanes in Bakersfield, focusing on the balance between bicycle use, safety, and automobile traffic. Initially funded by a federal grant for pollution reduction, bike lanes were later justified by safety improvements and reduced road maintenance costs. However, concerns arose about biased urban planning, questionable pollution benefits, and lack of prior bicycle traffic data. Findings included a reduction in motor vehicle vs. bicycle accidents but minimal environmental impact per bike conversion. Recommendations emphasize conducting traffic studies before bike lane installations and requiring conflict-of-interest disclosures from consultants. This report inquired into these questions: Is the use of bike lanes sufficient to justify a reduction in automobile lanes in either width or quantity? Do bike lanes impede other vehicular traffic?

## **PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:**

Under the authority of California Penal Code §925(a), the 2024-2025 Kern County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) looked at the proliferation of bike lanes in Bakersfield (City). This is an effort to determine whether there is a balance between safety, bicycle use, and automobile traffic.

## **METHODOLOGY:**

To answer these questions and others, the Grand Jury interviewed officials from the Bakersfield Public Works Department, Bakersfield Police Department, and the California Highway Patrol. The Grand Jury also studied California laws and regulations regarding bicycle accommodations. The investigation involved interviews with City officials, studies of state laws, and analysis of cost/benefit data.

## **DISCUSSION OF FACTS:**

The City's foray into wide-spread implementation of bike lanes was initially funded by a \$200,000 federal grant made under the guise of pollution reduction. From there the impetus morphed into one of safety and road maintenance cost reduction. It costs ~\$15,000 to install one mile of bicycle lane. Over a five-year period, the City realizes savings of approximately 50 percent, since it costs roughly \$30,000 per mile for automotive lane maintenance but only \$15,000 per mile for a bicycle lane which does not require periodic resurfacing.

The City engaged an urban design consulting firm to draft the "Bicycle & Pedestrian Safety Plan." While the selected firm met all the stated criteria in the Request for Proposal (RFP) including substantial past experience, the contractor's own website expresses a predetermined goal of moving many people from cars to bicycles.

Achieving pollution reduction by taking people out of cars and on to bicycles is nebulous. Moving one person from an automobile to a bicycle saves roughly .5 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually<sup>1</sup>.

According to the National Weather Service, the average daytime high temperature in Bakersfield between June and September ranges from 90 to 97 degrees Fahrenheit. Bakersfield and the southern San Joaquin Valley suffer from some of the poorest air quality in the nation.

The proposed “H Street Corridor” will have one traffic lane in each direction with a center left turn lane between CA Highway 58 to Golden State Avenue (CA Highway 204). Traffic counts on H Street range from ~8,500 to ~19,000 vehicles per day<sup>2</sup>. The maximum recommended traffic count for a metropolitan area is ~1,900 vehicles per hour<sup>3</sup> under ideal conditions.

Motor vehicle vs. bicycle accidents are reduced by roughly 53 percent and injuries are reduced by approximately 40-50 percent, when bike lanes are installed on arterial roadways<sup>4</sup>.

The City did not conduct bicycle traffic counts prior to the installation of its bike lanes. Also, not considered is the fact that the average summer temperatures are nearly 100 degrees.

The “Consultant Proposal Evaluation” form used by the City to select a vendor does not seek to determine if there are any conflicts of interest or biases held by the applicants.

## **FINDINGS:**

- F1. Removing one automobile and replacing it with a bike equates to a reduction of 0.00000119 percent of the Central Valley’s annual CO<sub>2</sub> production of 43,000,000 tons<sup>5</sup>. This brings into question the value of spending \$200,000 of Federal grant money plus substantial sums of local dollars for such a miniscule reduction.
- F2. According to their own website, the design consulting firm is biased toward bicycles and other forms of alternative transportation.
- F3. The weather extremes and poor air quality in Bakersfield do not support a movement toward bicycles from automobiles.
- F4. There are no practical alternatives for relocating traffic from H Street: Chester Avenue is too congested to move traffic to that street; Union Avenue and Oak Street are too far from H Street to be viable options.

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<sup>1</sup> From *Imperial News UK*

<sup>2</sup> KernCOG (Kern Council of Governments)

<sup>3</sup> Simplified Highway Capacity Calculation Method for the Highway Performance Monitoring System, US Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration

<sup>4</sup> Proven Safety Countermeasures, US Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration

<sup>5</sup> California Air Resources Board (CARB)

- F5. The narrowing of automobile lanes to accommodate bicycle lanes often has a positive impact of also tending to compel automobile drivers to reduce speeds.
- F6. Roads in new developments can be designed to accommodate bicycle lanes without inhibiting the flow of automobile traffic.
- F7. A cost of ~\$15,000 per mile for the installation of a bicycle lane is only a reasonable expense if there is a demand for the lanes.

## **COMMENTS:**

The Grand Jury thanks the Bakersfield Public Works Department for their time and valuable information provided for this report.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The 2024-2025 Kern County Grand Jury recommends that:

- R1. By July 1, 2025, the City should consider revising its Request for Proposal (RFP) material to better identify potential conflicts or biases of proposals. (Finding #2)
- R2. Automobile and bicycle traffic counts should be conducted prior to installation of new bicycle lanes on existing roadways starting September 1, 2025. (Finding #5)
- R3. By September 1, 2025, cost/benefit models should be developed prior to the installation of any bicycle lane. (Finding #8)

## **NOTES:**

- The Bakersfield Department of Public Works should post a copy of this report where it will be available for public review.
- Persons wishing to receive an email notification of newly released reports may sign up at: <https://www.kerncounty.com/government/other-agencies/grand-jury>
- Present and past Kern County Grand Jury Final Reports and Responses can be accessed on the Kern County Grand Jury website <https://www.kerncounty.com/government/other-agencies/grand-jury>

**RESPONSE DEADLINE:**

- **REQUIRED WITHIN 90 DAYS FROM:**

Bakersfield City Council

Findings #1 through #7

Recommendations #1 through #3

- **REQUESTED WITHIN 60 DAYS FROM:**

Bakersfield Public Works Department

Findings #2, #4, and #7

Recommendations #1 through #3

**RESPONSES ARE REQUIRED PURSUANT TO PENAL CODE §§933 (c)  
AND 933.05 TO:**

- **PRESIDING JUDGE  
SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA  
COUNTY OF KERN  
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 212  
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301**
- **FOREPERSON  
KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY  
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 600  
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301**

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Cal. Penal Code §929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.
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