



1017 L Street, #288  
Sacramento CA 95814  
[www.calbike.org](http://www.calbike.org)

June 24, 2025

Mayor Karen Goh  
Vice Mayor Manpreet Kaur  
Bakersfield City Council Members  
Via Email

Re: Civil Grand Jury Report: The Proliferation of Bike Lanes: Whose Road Is It?

Dear Honorable Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Members of the City Council,

On behalf of the California Bicycle Coalition (CalBike), I am writing to express my deep concern in response to the [May 27, 2025, Kern County Civil Grand Jury report](#) examining bike lanes in Bakersfield. As a professional planner and member of the American Institute of Certified Planners, as well as the Executive Director of California's leading organization working to make it safe and convenient for people to choose to bicycle, I find the grand jury's findings and recommendations troubling and lacking in evidentiary support.

The grand jury requests a response on its findings and recommendations from the City Council by September 27, 2025. The grand jury's report is based on incomplete and inexpertly evaluated information about the installation of bike lanes in Bakersfield and other California cities. We believe you should have all the facts before you formally respond. Below, we provide a discussion of each of the findings and recommendations in the report.

**Finding 1: Removing one automobile and replacing it with a bike equates to a reduction of 0.00000119 percent of the Central Valley's annual CO2 production of 43,000,000 tons. This brings into question the value of spending \$200,000 of Federal grant money plus substantial sums of local dollars for such a miniscule [sic] reduction.**

This finding is an excellent example of cherry-picking data and presenting it to support a predetermined conclusion. The fact that the Central Valley produces an overabundance of CO2 makes replacing a single car with a single bicycle small by comparison, but the comparison is not apt.

This finding assumes that Bakersfield's bike infrastructure doesn't provide enough incentive for people to get around by bike rather than driving a car, and, therefore, the amount of bike traffic is too small to make a significant impact on the Central Valley's air quality without presenting information about bicycle traffic or demand to support this conclusion. Even if true, the lack of

use points to the need for more bike lanes, not fewer. A built-out bicycle network with protected bikeways will attract more riders than scattered, disconnected bikeway segments.

In addition, the finding assumes that the only purpose of bike lanes in Bakersfield is to convert car trips to bike trips. What it fails to consider is that some Bakersfield residents already travel by bicycle, whether by choice or necessity. The finding ignores the rights of people who don't own or can't use cars to travel safely within Bakersfield.

Finally, the finding doesn't consider the safety impact of bike lanes for all users. Studies have found that [protected bikeways](#) (separated from traffic by bollards, planter boxes, parking, curbs, or other means) reduce injuries and fatalities for all road users. Bike lanes provide a safety benefit that extends to pedestrians and people in motor vehicles.

**Finding 2: According to their own website, the design consulting firm is biased toward bicycles and other forms of alternative transportation.**

Though it isn't named in the report, we assume this finding refers to Alta Planning + Design, which prepared Bakersfield's last two bicycle plans and has prepared biking, walking, and active transportation plans for many cities. Alta Planning + Design is one of several consultancies that specialize in active transportation modes. As such, its employees are familiar with best practices and current design guidance for safe biking and walking infrastructure. As a prior employee of Alta, I can attest that the planners and engineers working at the firm have a deep knowledge of — and are often at the leading edge of developing — bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure solutions for communities of varying sizes, geographies, and needs.

The grand jury equates specialization with bias, which is an odd conclusion. Presumably, if Bakersfield wanted legal advice related to human resources, it would hire a law firm that specialized in that segment of the law, instead of a family law firm, for example. Would that constitute bias against families? The grand jury appears to imply that the city should, in future, hire a firm to develop active transportation plans with no experience in the field or perhaps active hostility toward bike facilities. That would be counterproductive and a waste of the city's resources.

**Finding 3: The weather extremes and poor air quality in Bakersfield do not support a movement toward bicycles from automobiles.**

The civil grand jury, in this finding, appears to have substituted its own biases for the most cursory examination of relevant facts. Many cities with similarly hot weather have flourishing bicycle cultures, most notably Davis, California, which is known as a biking city. Cities in China with both heat and oppressive humidity see widespread bicycle usage. The most salient element for a community that supports residents' mode choice (including use of bicycles) is safe infrastructure for bicycling, not the weather.

In addition, with the rising popularity of e-bikes, many people now have bikes with pedal assist or even a throttle to reduce the exertion needed in the hottest weather. CalBike has heard from riders in the Central Valley who switched to e-bikes for this very reason..

As for the air quality, forcing people to drive because the outdoor air isn't breathable is a circular argument. The [California Air Resources Board](#) and the [Valley Air District](#) have the goal of improving air quality in the Central Valley for the sake of the residents, and giving people alternatives to driving is an element in that plan.

**Finding 4: 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.**

We suspect this finding exposes the true motivation behind this civil grand jury investigation: a resident or residents unhappy with a planned bikeway on H Street. The proper venue to discuss this is through the Bakersfield Planning or Engineering Divisions and at City Council meetings on the topic of this project. Convening a grand jury is a waste of civic resources and is less likely to deliver a compromise on this plan that would satisfy the needs of all parties.

**Finding 5: The narrowing of automobile lanes to accommodate bicycle lanes often has a positive impact of also tending to compel automobile drivers to reduce speeds.**

This is correct, and increases safety for people inside a vehicle as well as outside.

**Finding 6: Roads in new developments can be designed to accommodate bicycle lanes without inhibiting the flow of automobile traffic.**

This is true. Existing roadways can also be redesigned to accommodate bicycle lanes without inhibiting traffic flow. In addition, removing vehicle lanes, often called a "road diet," can improve safety and may ultimately lead to smoother traffic flow. Bike lanes, by converting some drivers to bike riders, are congestion reduction tools.

**Finding 7: 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.**

Requiring demand *before* a bike lane is built is like refusing to build a new highway because no one drives on *the highway that doesn't exist yet*. The number of people who ride bikes on a street with no bicycle infrastructure is not indicative of the demand for a safe bikeway on that street.

Also, paving one mile of urban roadway costs between \$2 million and \$5 million. At \$15,000 per mile, bikeways are a bargain.

**Recommendation 1: 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)**

We respectfully suggest the City Council decline this recommendation. By attempting to paint bike-aware and experienced planning consultants as “biased,” this recommendation would, itself, result in bias against biking infrastructure. This, we believe, is the subtext and the goal of this grand jury report. We would expect that the City already has procedures in place in the RFP process to identify true conflict and bias.

**Recommendation 2: Automobile and bicycle traffic counts should be conducted prior to installation of new bicycle lanes on existing roadways starting September 1, 2025. (Finding #5)**

This is a best practice and, we assume, is already commonly done in Bakersfield. In fact, increasing bicycle counts is a recommendation in the City’s most recent bicycle plan. The civil grand jury, with no apparent knowledge of planning practices, appears to be trying to invent the discipline from scratch.

**Recommendation 3: By September 1, 2025, cost/benefit models should be developed prior to the installation of any bicycle lane. (Finding #8)**

If the city council chooses to follow this recommendation, its cost/benefit models should not be confined to the woefully inadequate data considered by the civil grand jury. It should include air quality, safety, transportation choice, and equity considerations. It should disregard the flawed formula comparing CO2 reduction to the entirety of this pollutant produced in the Central Valley, which is a meaningless figure. The City could look to cost/benefit models already developed (available [here](#) and [here](#)) by the California Department of Transportation and used throughout the state.

Thank you for considering this information. If you have any questions, please reach out.

Best regards,



Kendra Ramsey, AICP  
Executive Director

Cc:

Peter Segall, Bakersfield Californian  
Sangmin Kim, KGET  
William Silverstein, KBAK