

**The Stranger – Slog, 1/19/09**

## **Bike Lanes Still Covered with Sand**

Posted by [Erica C. Barnett](#) on Mon, Jan 19, 2009 at 4:03 PM

December's snowstorm is becoming a distant memory, but the sand and gravel spread on city streets to help drivers navigate it—12,000 tons, at last count—is still **a major hazard for Seattle bike commuters**, who've discovered that the city's [promise](#) to clear the sand from city streets does not apply to many bike lanes. All around the city, bike lanes are covered with caked layers of sand and gravel—a hazardous surface for bikers, especially those on road bikes with thin, low-traction tires.

Rick Sheridan, spokesman for the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), says the city is systematically clearing bike lanes "as we clear the travel lanes. ... Our instruction [to clearing crews] is to get as close to the curb as possible." However, he acknowledges that in places where a bike lane abuts a parking lane—the configuration for bike lanes in much of the city—SDOT isn't requiring crews to clear all the way to the curb (or putting up signs asking people to temporarily move their cars.) The result is that in many places, **cleared streets abut gravel-covered bike lanes**, forcing cyclists to either ride on a hazardous gravel surface or ride out in the lane of traffic.

While Sheridan says "I haven't heard of any large-scale issues" about gravel in bike lanes, David Hiller of the Cascade Bicycle Club says he's been **inundated with complaints**. A message board on Cascade's web site contains four pages of complaints about flats and dangerous riding conditions caused by rubbish and gravel left in bike lanes after the snow.

Hiller notes that in 2004, the city agreed to prioritize bike lanes on arterials when sweeping streets, on the grounds that "the people who are most at risk from debris in the right of way, in terms of crashes and injuries, are bicyclists," Hiller says. Given that SDOT does not appear to have followed through, Hiller says Cascade "will have to consider a more formal arrangement"—a "director's rule" from SDOT head Grace Crunican ordering SDOT workers to clear bike lanes when they clear the streets.