

# **Wilshire Boulevard**

**The [ ] of *UCLA***

**Cyclists forgotten and insulted**

**Limited Edition, 18 Feb 2009**

*The first complaint* against Wilshire must be the spelling of it. It is the fervor of simplicity and banality which drops the T from a venerable name: Wiltshire. Orthography ruled by tiredness of the tongue or the eye. Dropping the T makes us forget how cyclists wilt on a street that is also theirs. Wilt and wilt and *UCLA* does nothing. For car owners it may be Wilshire, for bicycle drivers it is Wiltshire every day.

In 1962 David Hockney arrived in LA. His home was in Santa Monica. On his second day in town, looking for some action around Pershing Square, he pedaled his bicycle the entire length of the Boulevard. But Pershing Square seemed deserted, so Hockney turned around and cycled back.

In 1962 Wilshire may still have served as a valid connection

for a cyclist, but today Wiltshire has become a massive barrier. The high speed of the car traffic on this road in the vicinity of Westwood, and the deplorable condition of the street surface, especially when coming from Beverly Hills, makes Wiltshire an insult to any cyclist with a sense of self-preservation. And *UCLA* does nothing.

A university has a geographical place. It is where it is. Accessibility for all modes is a campus responsibility. *UCLA* has built the largest underground parking structure in the West, but nobody ever thought to check the asphalt that would carry a bicycle from Beverly Hills to Westwood. Where the famed road cuts through the Los Angeles County Club, one sidewalk is missing, and the street surface rivals the streets of Beirut. And for years, *UCLA* does nothing. A mild and dismissive shrugging of shoulders and a vain hope that the city, some city

(which city?) will one day wake up and make it right for the bicycle commuters at *UCLA*. You wish!

The street spelled Wilshire offers the most direct connection to *UCLA* from the East and from the West. There is just no alternative for the cyclists. But it so happens that the street is in a rotten state and unprovided with bicycle lanes. And *UCLA* does nothing. Yes, they have a few Nobel laureates on campus, at least one of them an avid cyclist. But who would even consider to take away a few yards of landscaped lawn from the Los Angeles County Club in order to create a viable bike lane from Beverly Hills? Because nobody cares for the cyclist on Wiltshire.

In 2006 *UCLA* has adopted a bicycle masterplan.\* It makes improved access routes for bikes the first priority. But paper

\* *UCLA* Library: HE5738.L7 U25 2006

is patient, and the asphalt on Wilshire, passing the County Club, gets worse every day. Another employer of this size and importance would get an Interstate re-routed, or even a airport built, but *UCLA* lets its cyclists fend for themselves. No wonder that the bicycle coordinator who put together the masterplan has left the campus long ago.

See the busses driving on Robert Young Drive? With bright lettering on their side Transportation Services claims 20 years of service for the *UCLA* community. If you try to cycle to *UCLA*, it feels more like 20 years of neglect.

If Wilshire is the road that erects a block for bicycles that arrive from the East, perhaps we have more luck when we approach from the West? From Brentwood to Westwood, easy peasy, it even rhymes. But thousands of students and faculty

living within only a few miles of campus cannot use the bicycle for their commute because of the horrors of Wilshire, turning itself into an Interstate as it crosses the I 405. Passing under the Interstate, now newly extended to form a proper tunnel, makes for a frightful journey, always dirty, always dark, always noisy and threatening, and *UCLA* does nothing.

“We want this structure to be perfect” proudly exclaim the signs which are greeting car owners on campus. Cyclists don’t need expensive parking structures, but they need a bit of help as they fight their way to campus across or along Wilshire. But *UCLA* does nothing. Why would they? Michael King, employed by Transportation Services to look after bicycle interests on campus, has a simple answer to all the bicycle access problems: Take the car. Has anybody ever seen him on a bike?

This university has a specific population. It's members are very smart, all of them, and smartness breeds cycling (yes it does!) among professors, among staff and among students. But when will the administration recognize that cyclists on campus are a real asset, to be treated with pride and respect, and not left to ride in the gutter on the approach.

Not too long ago, there was a path which led from Brentwood to Westwood, and allowed the cyclist to bypass the boulevard turned interstate. Into the Veteran Administration, crossing Sepulveda with a traffic light, and then through the National Cemetery. But when 9/11 offered an excuse, the National Cemetery simply closed the gates, and in a scandalous move, tacitly tolerated by *UCLA*, sent many cyclists back to their car.

And yes, *UCLA* did something. But rather than intervening with the Pentagon, it designated Ohio Avenue, one mile further South, to be the preferred route to campus. Watch how this employer fulfills his duty of care to his cyclists. Cyclists need the shortest route, and if a closed gate adds one mile in heavy traffic to your commute, back and forth, then you will lose this cyclist. And all the benefits she would bring. So where are the keys to this gate?

Got the picture? Cyclists forgotten and insulted. Now type "The Stupidest Bike Lane in America" into Google.

To be continued.

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