

My most-controversial post ever yesterday

Who knew I'd create so much controversy with a post asking people to call their congressional representative and support cycling in the upcoming transportation bill? There's definitely something to the oft-repeated advice that political stuff should be kept away from retail! I would like to believe that the things I asked for had such broad appeal that both sides, left & right, would not have much trouble. Especially since my customer base is presumably favorably predisposed to better infrastructure for cycling! And for the most part, my call to action was well-received. Lots of people sent emails thanking me not just for bringing the issue (Thursday's vote in the House of Representatives that could potentially end all federal funding for pedestrian and cycling road improvements) to them but also for the clear instructions showing what they could do.

But I had one email from someone on the "left" who was very disappointed that I would ask people to support an amendment from someone (Representative Petri, Republican from Wisconsin) on the "right", feeling that I was endorsing the person (Petri). The reality is that it's extremely important this amendment did come from someone on the "right" since it gives cross-party appeal, something desperately needed right now! It's very unfortunate that the needs of pedestrians and cyclists have become associated with Democrats and derided by Republicans, as a matter of obedience to their party chiefs. I am willing to work with anyone, but especially those traditionally, well, hostile is perhaps an appropriate word, to our needs.

And I received a very different email from someone at least initially offended that I was willing to mortgage his children's future by spending money today that we don't have. This was probably a reaction to the last couple of paragraphs in my piece, where I explained that investing in the future represents our belief in that future, and that it's not an unusual thing to do (giving the examples of having kids and buying houses, neither of which are things that can generally be done using cash on hand but instead represent a commitment to pay on the installment plan). In retrospect, those last paragraphs didn't need to be there, but in this case, it did start a dialog with the customer in which discussing politics became "real." Instead of just digging in and saying this is the way it is (as is the norm in DC right now), he explained why he thinks the way he does, and I explained why I think the way I do, and there was actually significant common ground.

Will I walk this path again? Most likely. Even viewed strictly from a selfish business standpoint, there's likely more to gain than lose (making assumptions that there is in fact some pre-selection of customers that tends to favor those more willing to tax themselves slightly, or give up something else, in favor of better cycling opportunities... this is a bicycle business after all!).
--Mike--