

# Improving turn safety at 53<sup>rd</sup> & Lake Otis

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A minor change in the lane dividers on Lake Otis just north of its intersection with 53<sup>rd</sup> will improve safety for cars turning north when entering Lake Otis from 53<sup>rd</sup>. This intersection is fairly heavily used as 53<sup>rd</sup> drains a substantial residential area as well as the local school and church. (53<sup>rd</sup> is not connected to International but is essential its extension on the east side of the New Seward highway).

Lake Otis in this section is a five-lane road with the center lane being used for part of its length as turn lanes with lane dividers (north of 53<sup>rd</sup>) and as an uncontrolled turn lane for either direction (south of 53<sup>rd</sup>). For the most part it is working well although drivers must exercise some caution when entering this “suicide lane” to make their turns.



**Lake Otis and 53<sup>rd</sup> intersection from the southwest. Turns from 53<sup>rd</sup> (foreground) to northbound on Lake Otis cross 2 southbound lanes and a turn pocket (not used for turning) to reach the fast northbound lane beyond the directional sign.**

The most difficult and dangerous turn is from 53<sup>rd</sup> northbound on Lake Otis. The lane dividers for a left turn lane from Lake Otis onto the non-existent eastern extension of 53<sup>rd</sup> make cars entering from 53<sup>rd</sup> proceed directly over into the left traffic lane. They thus need three (or better 4) lanes clear of traffic before making the turn and must be particularly aware of traffic coming up over the rise from the Waldron light.



**In this picture from the northwest it can be seen that the turn pocket is used as a U-turn lane only.**

Since no eastern extension of 53<sup>rd</sup> will ever be built (a subdivision occupies the land) the turn lane is rarely used and then only for a U-turn on Lake Otis.

There are several possibilities for improving the safety of this turn:

- 1) Remove the lane divider from 53<sup>rd</sup> back to where the useless left turn pocket starts (photo above). This would make it possible for multiple cars turning north from 53<sup>rd</sup> to enter the central lane and select the safest time to continue into the regular fast lane northbound,
- 2) Remove the lane dividers from 53<sup>rd</sup> all the way back to the pocket for the Waldron turn lane (photo on left). The Waldron turn lane is about 2 blocks north and the same lane divider as seen at 53rd continues to Waldron. This would permit the safer turn and permit a bit more space to match speeds with fast lane traffic, and
- 3) Remove the dividers as mentioned in (2) and add a single narrow divider between the center lane and the southbound lane of Lake Otis. In addition to the safety features mentioned above this would continue to deny left



**Turn pocket for Waldron.**

turn privileges to cars from the local apartments and the new subdivision being built to the east.

Of these the first change is so minor that it probably could be done by a regular maintenance crew. The others will require more work.



**Waldron and E.50<sup>th</sup> intersections from the SW. The left turn pocket with the light forms a continuous divider with the dividers at 53<sup>rd</sup>.**

I hope this could be done promptly before the new subdivision is completed and folks start using the U-turn a bit more.



**New subdivision street entering from east just north of the 53<sup>rd</sup> turn pocket. The next curb cut to the south is not used.**

Entering from the west is Greenridge which is the access to the two apartments buildings on its north. Greenridge is connected to Waldron west of the two apartment buildings giving residents access to a light for north bound Lake Otis traffic.



**Greenridge enters from the west one block south of Waldron.**

This improvement in the turn onto Lake Otis will help me feel a bit safer, particularly on winter ice, when making left turns from 53<sup>rd</sup>. My wife routinely drives an extra mile on often slippery neighborhood streets to avoid this intersection.