


Bicycle Master Plan Framework Report Worksession #2

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RECOMMENDATION

Approve the Bicycle Master Plan Framework Report.

SUMMARY

On July 28, 2016, the Planning Board reviewed the Bicycle Master Plan Framework Report and received testimony from the public. On September 8, 2016, the Planning Board reviewed the public testimony and requested the staff address two remaining issues that are the subject of this worksession.

DISCUSSION

This worksession will continue the discussion of Issue #1 and Issue #3 from the September 8, 2016 worksession to determine how they should be handled in the Bicycle Master Plan Framework Report.

Issue 1: The Report Marginalizes “Moderate-Stress” Bicycling

Comment: At the July 28, 2016 hearing, Jack Cochrane of MoBike requested that the Bicycle Master Plan include a metric that recognizes the benefit of projects that reduce the stress of bicycling, even if they do not achieve the plan’s “low-stress” vision. He recommends doing this by adding a “moderate stress” metric that is weighted less than the existing “low-stress” metrics.

Planning Board Direction: At the September 8, 2016 worksession, the Planning Board agreed with the metrics in the Draft Framework Report but directed the staff to address Mr. Cochrane’s comment through the implementation section of the Bicycle Master Plan. In particular, the Planning Board requested a facility planning study decision making process that explores all means by which a low-stress bikeway can be implemented, but where not immediately feasible, an alternate approach that enables the County to implement a moderate-stress bikeway should be pursued.

The proposed process is shown on pages 64 and 65 of the revised Framework Report (Attachment A). Staff will walk the Planning Board through this process at the worksession.

Issue 3: Focus on “Low-Stress” Bicycling Will Result in the Removal of Bike Lanes

Comment: David Rodgers and Jack Cochrane expressed concern that a focus on low-stress bicycling will result in removal of bike lanes, which in their opinion provide an option for faster bicycle riding. They expressed concern that sidepaths and separated bike lanes will require bicyclists to travel at slower speeds than they could achieve in the roadway. Mr. Cochrane stated that moderate-stress bicyclists “typically benefit from having faster facilities, simpler intersections, fewer conflict points with turning cars and fewer pedestrians entering the bike space.” He expressed concern that the Framework Report suggests that sidepaths are equivalent to bike lanes for moderate-stress bicyclists.

Planning Board Direction: At the September 8, 2016 worksession, the Planning Board asked the staff to identify the type of bicycling environment that is needed to create a comfortable, convenient, safe and efficient network of separated bikeways, including separated bike lanes and sidepaths, that attract bicyclists that travel at different speeds.

In response, staff is recommending two changes to the Framework Report. First, on page 66 of the revised Framework Report staff recommends replacing the “Higher Quality Sidepaths” section of the Framework Report with the “Breezeway Network” section shown below. This revised section of the report describes the principles that are needed to achieve a high-quality bikeway that enables faster bicyclists to co-exist in a comfortable, convenient, safe and efficient environment with slower bicyclists and pedestrians.

Delete:

“Higher Quality Sidepaths

Sidepath surfaces in Montgomery County tend to become a rough bicycling surface over time as they develop cracks at the edges from use by maintenance vehicles and bumps due to the growth of tree roots.

Sidepaths need to be designed to withstand vehicle loading since maintenance trucks will use them. That may result in different designs for subgrade and pavement thicknesses based on soil conditions. Per the AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities, shared use paths, at a minimum, should have a 6-inch total pavement depth, including the surface course (asphalt or Portland cement concrete) and the base course (typically an aggregate rock base) placed over a compacted subgrade. There may be other ways to reduce pavement cracking.

As discussed previously, the Working Draft of the Bicycle Master Plan will recommend higher design standards for sidepaths.”

Replace with:

“Breezeway Network

The Bicycle Master Plan will identify a network of low-stress bikeways that are suitable for a wide range of users. To accommodate the full range of cyclists, these bikeways must not only provide a high level of comfort, but also a high level of convenience, safety and efficiency. To that end a subset of the low-stress network will be identified to enable higher speed bicycle travel between major activity centers, including CBDs, transit stations and job centers. This network, which staff is tentatively calling the Breezeway network, will consist of sidepaths, separated bike lanes and trails and will accommodate and encourage longer trips by bicycle, since people are more likely to travel longer distances when the travel time for their trip is closer to that by driving.

To ensure the Breezeway network can provide an equivalent traveling experience for bicyclists as motorists are provided on highways, the design standards for the Breezeway network will have to be significantly improved from past design practices. Improved design will require the following:

- High-quality construction and maintenance that avoids pavement cracking and buckling.
- Separation between pedestrians and bicyclists in areas with higher levels of activity.
- Intuitive and safe intersection and driveway crossings.
- Adequate widths to enable side-by-side travel and passing.
- Appropriate buffers from traffic.
- Straight alignments to allow higher speed, and direct travel.
- Removal of poles, trees or other obstructions that are present in many existing sidepath locations.
- Direct and seamless connections to destinations and other bikeways.
- Lighting.”

Second, staff recommends modifying the language on page 54 of the Framework Report to indicate that bike lanes are an acceptable interim treatment until sidepaths can be constructed to the standards described in the Breezeway Network section of the Framework Report (page 66). Staff recommends modifying the second paragraph on page 54 as follows:

“In suburban locations, bike lanes should remain an interim treatment on higher volume and higher speed roads where there is sufficient space in the existing roadway to quickly and cheaply install bike lanes through restriping and:

- A sidepath is either recommended ~~(but does not exist)~~, or
- The existing sidepath ~~is substandard~~ does not meet the high-quality design standards identified on page 66.”

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A – Revised Framework Report