

Bicycle Master Plan Public Hearing Draft Work Session #3

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DESCRIPTION

On January 25, 2018, the Planning Board conducted a public hearing on the Bicycle Master Plan Public Hearing Draft and received testimony from the public. Planning Board Commissioners are asked to bring their copy of the Bicycle Master Plan Public Hearing Draft and Appendix, which was included in the January 25, 2018 packets. They are also asked to bring Attachment A to the staff report from the February 15, 2018 work session, which includes all written comments on the Bicycle Master Plan. Attachment B summarizes public comment (both verbal and written testimony) as well as staff responses on all non-bikeway specific comments in matrix form.

The March 1, 2018 work session is anticipated to include these issues:

- Issue 1: Carbon Emissions Analysis
- Issue 2: Abandonments
- Issue 3: Speed Limits on Shared Streets and Neighborhood Greenways
- Issue 4: Use of Public Benefits Points
- Issue 5: Neighborhood Greenway Implementation
- Issue 6: Facility Planning Process Description

In addition, Attachment B contains a summary of 110 non-bikeway comments that Planning staff considers to be minor issues. Planning Board Commissioners are requested to bring to the attention of staff any of these additional non-bikeway comments that they would like to discuss.

DISCUSSION

Issue 1: Carbon Emissions Analysis

Montgomery County enacted a law (Bill 32-07) in 2008 to require the formulation of a plan to stop increasing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by the year 2010 and reduce emissions to 20 percent of 2005 levels by the year 2050. A subsequent Montgomery County law (Bill 34-07) requires the Planning Board to estimate the carbon footprint of master plan recommendations and to make recommendations for carbon emissions reductions.

In June 2017, Montgomery County reaffirmed its commitment to meeting the goals of the 2016 Paris climate agreement. In addition, the county endorsed the goals of the Under 2° MOU, a memorandum of understanding signed by 12 jurisdictions in 2015. The county's action aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 80 to 95 percent below 1990 levels or limit emissions to less than two metric tons per capita by 2050 (Montgomery County Council Resolution 18-846).

In December 2017, Montgomery County adopted Resolution 18-974 to accelerate the county's efforts to decrease greenhouse gas emissions by committing to a reduction of 80 percent by 2027 and reaching 100 percent elimination by 2035. The resolution initiates large-scale efforts to remove excess carbon from the atmosphere. The primary emission of interest is carbon dioxide.

Planning Department staff evaluated the peak-hour carbon emissions reductions from vehicle transportation generated as a result of the implementation of the Bicycle Master Plan, compared against a no-build scenario in which the Bicycle Master Plan is not implemented. This is included as Appendix L of the Bicycle Master Plan (see Attachment C).

Based on this model, implementation of the Bicycle Master Plan over the next two decades will reduce vehicle miles traveled and the emissions associated with them. Staff estimates that total GHG emissions from vehicle transportation in Montgomery County will be reduced by just under 2 percent per year by 2040, when compared to development without implementation of the Bicycle Master Plan.

The total calculated yearly reduction in emissions as a result of the implementation of the Bicycle Master Plan is between approximately 15,500 and 33,000 metric tons of CO₂e, which is equivalent to removing between approximately 3,300 and 7,000 cars from the roads each year. Based on staff's judgment, we believe the reductions are closer to the higher end of the range.

Issue 2: Abandonments

The Montgomery County Department of Transportation requested that the Bicycle Master Plan include language stating that the Bicycle Master Plan should be considered before public right-of-way is abandoned. (See Attachment B, Comment #3) To address this comment, we recommend adding a policy to pages 104-114:

"Abandonments

Recommendations included in the Bicycle Master Plan should be considered as part of any right-of-way abandonment petition.

Lead Agency: Montgomery County Department of Transportation"

Issue 3: Speed Limits on Shared Streets and Neighborhood Greenways

Pages 60 and 61 of the Bicycle Master Plan define shared streets and neighborhood greenways. Shared streets are an urban design approach where pedestrians, bicycles and motor vehicles can comfortably coexist. They prioritize pedestrian and bicycle movement by slowing vehicular speeds and

communicating clearly through design features that motorists must yield to all other users. Motorists are considered “guests” in this environment. Neighborhood greenways are streets with low motorized traffic volumes and speeds, designed and designated to give walking and bicycling priority. They use signs, pavement markings and speed and volume management measures to discourage through trips by motor vehicles and create safe, convenient crossings of busy arterial streets.

Policy 2.1 on page 107 recommends that Montgomery County petition the Maryland General Assembly to reduce the lowest possible speed limit to 10 mph on shared streets and 15 mph on neighborhood greenways in Montgomery County.

MCDOT commented: “Be mindful that with speed limits of 10 MPH or 15 MPH it is likely that many bicyclists will legally be speeding. While we are unaware of any enforcement of bicycle speeding, such speed limits could make it possible and potentially slow bicycle travel times.” (See Attachment B, Comment #76)

Staff Response: The intent for shared streets is that all road users travel 10 mph or less, including bicyclists. For neighborhood greenways, 20 mph is more in line with industry practice. Therefore, we recommend increasing the desired posted speed limit on neighborhood greenways to 20 mph.

Issue 4: Use of Public Benefit Points

Jonathan Genn of the LifeSci Development Corporation stated that instead of being overly prescriptive, the Bicycle Master Plan should use the public benefits points systems to determine how to achieve the multiple policy objectives of the public right-of-way on a case-by-case basis. He stated that “How high on the aspirational scale of bicycle mobility infrastructure a particular project proposes can be a function of how many Public Benefit Points that project would receive...” (See Attachment B, Comment #125)

Staff Response: Staff believes that the bikeway recommendations in this master plan represent critical public infrastructure. As with any other conformance requirement of a master plan recommendation, whether the required improvement meets the nexus and rough proportionality tests will be considered as part of regulatory review. Furthermore, for optional method applications, any public benefit points awarded will be reviewed and decided by the Planning Board based on the specifics of each application and the priorities established in the master plan.

Issue 5: Neighborhood Greenway Implementation

Neighborhood greenways are streets with low motorized traffic volumes and speeds, designed and designated to give walking and bicycling priority. They use signs, pavement markings and speed and volume management measures to discourage through trips by motor vehicles and create safe, convenient crossings of busy arterial streets.

Montgomery County has specific regulations about where traffic calming and access restrictions, measures used to create low volume and low speed streets, can be used (see Attachment D). For example, access restrictions can only be implemented on residential streets with a certain hourly traffic volume and where non-local traffic exceeds 50 percent. Traffic calming measures such as speed humps

include criteria about residential frontage, average lot size, posted speed limit, travel volumes, operating speeds and the length of the road segment. These criteria are important to help target these tools to locations where they can safely and effectively be implemented.

MCDOT commented that the Bicycle Master Plan should reference the Executive Regulations related to traffic restrictions regarding when and where they can be used. (See Attachment B, Comment #136)

Staff Response: MCDOT will need to consider changes to their access restriction and traffic calming policies to effectively implement neighborhood greenways. Therefore, staff recommends adding the proposed policy on pages 104 to 114 of the plan:

“Enable Traffic Calming and Access Restrictions on Neighborhood Greenways

To fully and effectively implement neighborhood greenways on residential streets, MCDOT should consider changes to the executive regulations to allow traffic calming features and access restrictions along neighborhood greenways that may not meet the criteria for similar treatments under Executive Regulations governing Speed Humps (ER 32-08), Access Restrictions (ER 17-94), and any other regulations or policies that limit implementation of traffic calming and access restrictions.

Justification: Executive regulations specify when traffic calming and traffic access restrictions may be used. While neighborhood greenway treatments may result in features and treatments typical of traffic calming and access restrictions, the goal of neighborhood greenways is to provide low-stress bicycling corridors, and implementation of corridor-wide improvements may warrant these treatments in areas that might not otherwise meet the requirements set forth in the executive regulations governing access management or traffic calming. Limiting the applicability of this policy to areas designated by the Bicycle Master Plan as a neighborhood greenway should prevent overuse of these treatments in areas where they are unwarranted and will not circumvent existing executive regulations relating to these treatments.

Lead Agency: Montgomery County Department of Transportation”

Issue 6: Facility Planning Process Description

The Montgomery County Department of Transportation stated that the blue box describing the facility planning process on page 135 of the Bicycle Master Plan is incomplete. (See Attachment B, Comment #100) After further discussion with staff at MCDOT, they provided guidance on replacement language.

Staff Response: Change the “Facility Planning Process” description to more broadly describe the “Transportation Project Development Process” as follows:

“Montgomery County Department of Transportation’s (MCDOT) Transportation Project Development Process

Facility planning for transportation projects, including bikeways, serves as the transition between

the master plan and a stand-alone project within the county's Capital Improvements Program (CIP). The Montgomery County Department of Transportation's (MCDOT) Transportation Project Development Process includes several phases to evaluate and preliminarily design a proposed project, provide information for elected officials to determine if the project should be funded, and move forward to final design and construction. All phases include public involvement. These phases include:

- Capital Funding Process: Every year, MCDOT submits a capital budget request for the design and construction of current approved capital projects and new capital project expenses. After a project has successfully made it through the Transportation Facility Planning Process, it is ready to be submitted as a "stand alone" capital improvement project.
- Planning & Analysis (Facility Planning Phase I): This phase is a rigorous planning level investigation of the proposed improvements leading to a preferred alternative, concept development and a benefit / impacts assessment for the following critical elements: public participation, background data, purpose and need, travel demand forecasting, conceptual alignments and typical sections, preliminary impacts and a project summary report.
- Preliminary Design and Engineering (Facility Planning Phase II & Final Design): This phase begins the 35 percent preliminary engineering design work for the project while Final Design takes a project to full 100 percent design. Upon completion of 35 percent design and when the project is funded in the Capital Improvements Program (CIP), the Division of Transportation Engineering can proceed with final design of the project. The length of time necessary to perform design varies depending on the size and complexity of the project. Major tasks of Phase II include ongoing public participation, topographic survey, horizontal and vertical alignments, right-of-way / easements needed, environmental impacts, construction sequence and construction costs. At the completion of Phase II, the County Executive and County Council review the project to determine if the project merits consideration in the CIP as a funded stand-alone project.
- Right-of-Way, Utilities and Permitting: The County must apply for and obtain permits from several agencies before construction can begin. As the design work is completed and the alignments and profile of the project are finalized, all necessary Right of Way is acquired for the project.
- Procurement and Construction: When the plans and design for a project are completed, it is ready to be bid out for construction. During construction, the Transportation Construction Section supervises and inspects the Contractor's work to ensure the project is being constructed to Montgomery County's standards for design and quality, while minimizing the inconvenience to the public/community."

In addition to the six issues noted above, Attachment B contains a summary of 110 non-bikeway comments that Planning staff considers to be of a minor nature. Planning Board Commissioners are asked to review these minor comments and bring to the attention of staff any of these additional non-bikeway comments that they would like to discuss.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A – Public Testimony

Attachment B – Matrix of Responses to Public Testimony for Non-Bikeway Comments

Attachment C – Carbon Emissions Analysis

Attachment D – Executive Regulations on Access Restrictions and Speed Humps