

CHAPTER 5

Related Policies and Programs

In order to ensure that this plan can be implemented effectively and efficiently and to ensure that goals of the plan are achieved, the county needs to consider making a number of investments and changes in policies and programs. Zoning and subdivision policies, bicycle safety and education programs, and bicycle outreach and promotional efforts are all important complementary aspects of a fully integrated bicycle program in Montgomery County.

Policies

The county's zoning ordinance generally addresses bicycles and bicycle facilities fairly well. Most zoning categories reference the need to safely accommodate bicycling and bikeways. Likewise, the county's zoning code also generally addresses bicycles and bicycle facilities.

RECOMMENDATION

- The Bicycle Education and Safety Advisory Committee (see below) comprehensively review all county policies related to bicycling and develop a report with recommended policy changes to the County Executive by the end of 2006.

Zoning and Subdivision

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC) requires all developers to submit a pedestrian impact statement as part of all subdivision and special exception applications (see Appendix E for sample pedestrian impact statement for both road projects and development applications), as of January 1, 2003. The statement should address but not be limited to the following topics related to pedestrian and bicycle safety, operations and access, as agreed upon with staff:

- Pedestrian and/or bicycle counts at intersections.
- Existing and/or proposed sidewalks and/or bikeways adjacent to the site and/or off-site of sufficient width, offset from the curb per county standards.

- Lead-in sidewalks to the site and connectivity to the local area.
- Existing and/or proposed bus stops, shelters and benches, including real time transit information.
- Pedestrian accommodations at nearby intersections, e.g. crosswalks, pedestrian signals, push buttons, median refuges, ADA-compatible ramps.
- Sufficient bicycle racks and/or lockers on-site.

Off-road bikeways (shared use paths) are provided as called for in the Master Plan, typically eight-foot wide. As for on-road bike accommodation, if the road is being newly constructed or widened, bike-accessible travel lanes, separate bike lanes or a shared use path would be provided as called for in the Master Plan. The Planning Board typically requires developers to implement bikeways as part of overall roadway improvements. Developers also pay a development impact tax, which can be used to construct or implement on-road bikeways as part of major road improvement projects initiated by the county or state.

Sidewalks and bikeways are required to be constructed by the developer of the adjacent property along the property's frontage. The Planning Board occasionally requests and/or requires developers to extend such sidewalks or shared use paths to an intersection or other terminus off-site if it can be justified.

All MNCPPC divisions and departments comprehensively review all development proposals and site design plans. The Commission's Development Review Committee (DRC) reviews these plans. The DRC consists of representatives from Development Review, Transportation, Community Planning, Environmental Planning, Historic Preservation and Park Planning and Resource Analysis. In addition, the DRC solicits comments from and coordinates with state and local agencies such as

Permitting Services, Environmental Protection, Public Works and Transportation, as well as the Washington Suburban Sanitation Commission and others.

During DRC, each division and agency has an opportunity to provide comments on the proposal or site plan. Any bikeways recommended by Master Plans are identified and a recommendation is made at that time as to which side of the road the bikeway should be provided.

Programs

The county should consider creating or expanding several programs in order to improve bicycle safety and encourage more people to use a bicycle for commuting and other trip purposes,

Bicycle Safety

Expanding, enhancing and improving the county's bikeway network will likely encourage more people to ride a bicycle for a variety of trips, both for recreation and transportation. Developing and expanding the bikeway network is only the first step to creating a bicycle-friendly county. However, programs that educate bicyclists on riding in traffic and educate motorists on how to share the road with bicyclists are also needed.

Education and encouragement are important elements to increase levels of bicycling while also improving safety. Together, they can improve skills and confidence of bicyclists to ride safely in traffic, which is critical for improving overall regional mobility. Enforcement refers to the extent to which the local motor vehicle laws that protect and enhance the safety of bicyclists are enforced, particularly speeding and failing to yield right of way.

The impact of facility improvements on bicycling levels is increased when combined with education, training and promotion. According to the Federal Highway Administration, as more bicycles enter the traffic stream, the accident rate for bicyclists is reduced. Educating motorists on safely sharing the road with bicyclists is very important, but especially so in Montgomery County which is part of the nation's third most congested region and an area becoming increasingly plagued by road rage and reckless driving.

Bicycle Education Program

The county should consider investing in a bicycle education program. This program could, among other services, offer effective cycling courses for both adults and children, coordinate with Montgomery County Public Schools to incorporate bicycle safety into existing health education programs, and work with police to enforce existing traffic laws that are critical to ensuring a safe bicycling environment. This program could be combined with, or added to, the County Executive's Pedestrian Safety Program. The services ultimately provided by this program should be determined in coordination with the DPWT's Bikeways Program, the M-NCPPC Bikeway Planner, the BESAC and the Montgomery County Bicycle Action Group (MCBAG).

MCBAG is a group of citizen bicyclists interested in recreational and on-road bicycling issues who give advice to the Department on current issues, programs and projects relating to cycling in Montgomery County. Created by the DPWT in 1996, MCBAG is an informal group that meets monthly to discuss and recommend positions on various issues on bicycling on a regional and local basis.

However, the group--consisting mostly of only bicycle advocates--is not currently one of the 75 recognized formal advisory boards, committees or commissions that provides guidance and advice to the County Executive. In order to obtain balanced input for bicycle projects, programs and policies from a variety of interest groups, this plan recommends that a new advisory committee to the County Executive be created. The Bicycle Education and Safety Advisory Committee (BESAC) might consist of 13 members as follows:

- Two members from the Department of Public Works and Transportation (the bicycle coordinator and a representative from Commuter Services)
- One member from the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (the bikeway planner)
- One member from the Maryland State Highway Administration (bicycle coordinator or designee)

- Two representatives from the bicycling community (one from the Montgomery County Bicycle Action Group, one from established bicycle advocacy groups in the area)
- Five citizen representatives (one from each of the county's five regional service areas)
- One member from the business community
- One member from the real estate or land development industry

The BESAC would supplement rather than eliminate MCBAG. MCBAG would continue to provide an open forum for anyone who wants to attend monthly meetings to discuss a wide variety of issues related to bicycling and bicycle safety. BESAC, on the other hand, would provide regular guidance and advice to the DWPT, County Executive, and the MNCPPC on all matters related to bicycle projects, policies and programs, including regular guidance and input to future community master planning efforts.

Bicycle Encouragement and Promotion

Many County residents already bicycle regularly for recreation or transportation, or both. Significant potential exists to increase the number of people who use a bicycle for transportation. So, what needs to be done to make bicycling a more attractive transportation option?

Societal attitudes toward bicycling on-road are likely the largest barrier for Montgomery County. Because the county has one of the region's best park trail networks, motorists expect bicyclists to ride along these paths and to get off the road. This plan emphasizes that bicycles are legal vehicles and that they have a right to use the road as much as motorists. Changing the perception of bicycles as only for recreation is a major barrier than can only be overcome with extensive outreach and education. "Share the Road" signs will only go so far.

Getting more people to view bicycling as a viable daily transportation mode will not be easy. Traffic congestion is undeniably getting worse in the county, yet many residents are still reluctant to find alternatives. A small percentage of total trips (work and non-work) are on the county's excellent public transportation system, yet the

majority of residents are seemingly still content to sit in traffic congestion in the comfort of their single-occupant automobiles. Therefore, targeted outreach, marketing and education are essential tools for convincing people to use any alternative transportation mode. Bicycle transportation is no different.

The county's residents and workforce not only must know where bikeways are located, they need to know how to get from place to place and how to research and identify a safe and efficient route to work or other destinations. Once there, they will need to know how to properly park and secure their bicycle and determine whether their employer provides showers and lockers. In addition, potential bicycle commuters must learn safe bicycle navigation and handling techniques, proper attire and bicycle commuting equipment.

Fortunately, the county and region's government agencies and non-profit organizations already operate several programs or services that help residents and workers with these issues. This plan recommends that these programs continue to be funded and/or supported by the county.

DPWT Bikeway Program

The Bikeway Program provides the linkage between Master Plan recommendations and the implementation of bicycle facilities (paths, bike lanes and shared lanes on roads). The program develops and constructs new



Figure 5-1. Cover for Montgomery County Bicycle Route Map booklet

projects. In addition, the program develops innovative bicycle-friendly features for the county including bike racks on county buses, bike lockers/rack programs, borrow a bike programs, and alternative mode endorsement. The Bikeway Program produces and publishes an attractive 48 page booklet-style bike route map (accurate as of April 2002) that can be used by bicycle commuters to identify safe and efficient bike routes to work and other destinations. The booklet actually contains 19 large-scale maps of different areas of the county.

Better Ways to Work!

Montgomery County Commuter Services (CSS) promotes bicycling as part of its Better Ways to Work! Program. The Program:

- Encourages employers to designate a bike coordinator who markets the biking program, provide showers and lockers for employees, provide incentives to get more employees to bicycle to work (free ride home for emergencies) and inquire CSS about bike amenities that may be available to employers.
- Educates employers on safe bicycling practices (e.g., wearing a helmet)
- Promotes the Bikes On Bus Program and educates employees on other bike-transit possibilities
- Partners with MWCOG's Commuter Connections and the Washington Area Bicyclist Association to help employers with launching a bicycle commuting program and to help employees start commuting by bicycle.

Through the County's Transportation Management Districts (TMDs), Commuter Services also coordinates annual Bike To Work Day (BTWD) activities each May and manages all the BTWD pit stops in the county.

Commuter Connections

Commuter Connections is a regional network of transportation organizations coordinated by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. The program provides residents of the region with information on all the various commuting options so they can make a smart

choice about to travel to work. Commuter Connections also helps employers establish commuting benefits and assistance programs

Commuter Connections publishes and distributes a booklet titled "Biking to Work in the Washington Area: A Guide for Employees (flipside of booklet reads "A Guide for Employers"). This attractive booklet provides all the information an employer or resident would need to start commuting to work by bicycle.

For employers, it highlights the benefits of having employees who bike to work (e.g., increased productivity, reduced parking costs), how to support a bike-to-work program in the workplace, provides guidance on selecting and installing bicycle parking facilities, and offering incentives to employees to bike to work more often (e.g., offering flex schedules).

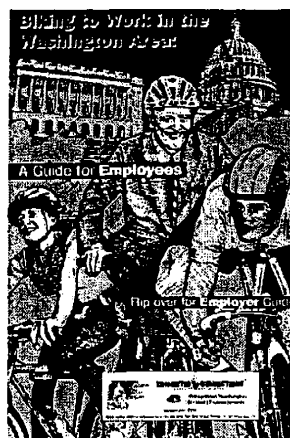


Figure 5-2. Cover for "Biking to Work in the Washington Area" published by MWCOG Commuter Connections.

For employees, the booklet highlights reasons to bike to work, provides advice on how to ride in traffic, how to select a safe bicycle route to work, and how to combine bicycle commuting with using transit. The booklet also educates readers on basic bicycling accessories and attire and highlights the various resources in the region available to bicycle commuters.

WABA's Bicycle Commuter Assistance Program

The Bicycle Commuter Assistance Program, developed and managed by the Washington Area Bicyclist Association, is an interactive bicycle commuter guide that provides detailed commuter information and maps online (www.waba.org). Bicyclists can use it to find the most convenient routes to various destinations in the Washington area. The maps show all the area bike trails and bike shops, and will eventually show the best commuter routes.