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September 30, 2014

## Bicycle Columbus' Comments for the Long Range Transportation Plan

### **Introduction**

Bicycle Columbus strongly supports making Columbus a city whose infrastructure is built on a human scale and not exclusively on the scale of the automobile. The mission of our organization is to promote bicycling, but BC fully supports efforts to make Columbus' thoroughfares serve all citizens, including pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and people with disabilities.

We urge the city to recognize the economic development benefits of high quality transportation alternatives, which are not just considerable but enormous. Demographic trends that are well documented and already underway show that young people are driving less, rejecting suburbs, seeking urban areas to live and work in—and moving away from cities that don't meet these expectations. Retirees, too, some unable to drive, others just sick of driving, are seeking out walkable, livable neighborhoods. Cities that understand and respond to the economic power of livability will be winners; cities that don't are sure to languish. Columbus received a well-deserved recognition recently when it was named one of the 100 Best Places to Live in 2014 by Livability.com. What most of these cities have in common is that they are pedestrian and bicycle friendly. In fact, 60 of the 100 cities on the list have been officially recognized as *Bicycle Friendly Communities* by the League of American Bicyclists, and every one of the top ten cities has this designation.

The renaissance of downtown Columbus, especially its steadily rising residential population, is visible testament that these demographic changes are at work in our own city. Furthermore, with the opening of the Chattahoochee Whitewater Course, Columbus has become a destination for tourists who travel for outdoor activity. A well designed bicycling network will allow the city to attract, impress, and retain even more of these visitors.

In the following comments, Bicycle Columbus does not privilege any particular type of bicycle facility, but rather follows the rule articulated by city planner Jeff Speck (a recent speaker and consultant in Columbus): "Make all significant destinations accessible by bicycle" by the appropriate placement of four types of facilities, bicycle paths, bicycle lanes, bicycle boulevards, and on-street shared routes (*Smart Growth Manual* 3.12). Columbus already has two excellent facilities, the Riverwalk and the Fall Line Trace. BC particularly endorses projects that connect these facilities to destinations to make them more useful for transportation.

## New projects

Bicycle Columbus recommends the following projects:

- Complete-street corridor along 13<sup>th</sup> Street / Cherokee / Edgewood / University Avenue. A consistent road design including bike lanes along this entire corridor would link the Fall Line Trace, Midtown, and Uptown Columbus. High priority.
- Bicycle Boulevard on 14<sup>th</sup> Street from 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue to Frank Martin pedestrian bridge. Restriping this road to give high priority to bicycle and pedestrian traffic, while still allowing motor vehicle traffic at slow speeds, would make this street a gateway to downtown and connect the east side of downtown (6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Swift Mill Lofts, Chamber of Commerce, etc.) with the Broadway area. High priority.
- Connector from Fall Line Trace to Billings Crossing Shopping Center. The FLT runs within 200 feet of this major shopping area in east Columbus, but no access exists due to a grade separation and a small creek. This low-cost connector would substantially enhance connectivity and be welcome not just to visitors but to employees in this shopping center. The owner of the center has endorsed this idea. High priority.
- The confluence of the Fall Line Trace, Talbotton Road, 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 27<sup>th</sup> Street, and Warm Springs Road triggers frequent complaints from FLT users. This area confuses local cyclists and absolutely baffles visitors. We recommend a simple and low-cost solution. By using bike lanes, green lanes, or even sharrows (in conjunction with robust way-finding markings), cyclists should be directed around the south side of Buck Ice, along 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 24<sup>th</sup> Street. At 24<sup>th</sup> Street, they can choose to continue west on the FLT by going straight across 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue, or they could turn north or south on 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue, which should be striped with sharrows or lanes. We understand that the Talbotton Road widening project will start soon, but we do not see why this should delay putting into effect this low-cost solution to a very conspicuous problem. High priority.
- Fall Line Trace users often complain that the path “ends” at 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Many say that they would like to see a separate path continue all the way to the Riverwalk. The problem is that no satisfactory route for such a path has been identified. While we don’t discourage new ideas for a better route between the FLT and the Riverwalk, the current route suffers from poor marking. For example, while AASHTO recommends sharrows to be placed right after intersections and no more than 250 feet apart, the sharrows now on 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue / Linwood / 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue / 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue / 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue / 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue are so infrequent as to be virtually invisible and utterly useless. A robustly marked bicycle boulevard along 14<sup>th</sup> Street combined with equally robust markings on the rest of the route would go a long way towards allaying the dissatisfaction with this route between the FLT and the Riverwalk. High priority.
- The proposed South Columbus Trail along an abandoned rail corridor east of South Lumpkin Road has been included as a TSPLOST project. It is imperative that this trail be designed as part of network of bicycle facilities, fully connected to the rest of Columbus, and not as an isolated park. The biggest challenge will be crossing Victory Drive, but we believe with sufficient expertise and motivation, a satisfactory solution can be found. Medium priority.
- It is outside the mission of Bicycle Columbus to analyze the pedestrian proposals, but one street seems so underserved by pedestrian accommodations that it can’t be ignored, and that is Second Avenue. Despite being heavily used by pedestrians, this four-lane road has not a single crosswalk between Talbotton Road and 35<sup>th</sup> Street, a distance of more than a mile. The clearly visible walking paths in the gaps between sidewalk coverage are further evidence that

this street needs attention and improvement for pedestrians.

### **High priority, short-term projects**

Bicycle Columbus recommends the following low-cost, high-connectivity projects for immediate action. Completing these projects will make a quick and significant improvement for non-motorized transportation, earn Columbus recognition as a Bicycle Friendly Community, encourage economic growth by attracting visitors and new residents, and build support for more complex projects.

- **Psalmond Road.** The section between the Fall Line Trace and John Rigdon Park should receive high priority. The poorly designed bridge over Manchester Expressway presents a challenge for cyclists and, even more so, pedestrians, but perhaps traffic calming devices could be used to slow cars to 20 mph for this short section until the bridge can be improved or replaced.
- **MLK Boulevard.** This road diet can be accomplished at no extra cost during the upcoming repaving project. This would add a welcome boost to livability and economic development in the area. It would also make this into a parkway more worthy of its name and create the possibility to capture grants to finance a civil rights history park along the south side of MLK.
- **10<sup>th</sup> Street bike lanes.** This project would connect MLK Blvd to downtown. If the entire street were changed to two-way traffic, the cycle track would not be necessary and regular one-way bike lanes could be used, thus avoiding the creation of unusual intersections with bicyclists riding against traffic.
- **Edgewood Road.** We recommend a consistent arrangement of one travel lane in each direction, center turn lane, one-way bike lanes in each direction, and sidewalks for the full length of Edgewood and Cherokee. (Only the last few hundred feet of Edgewood between Norris and University lacks a sidewalk, at least on one side, though Cherokee is conspicuously lacking a sidewalk.) The bicycle accommodations could be accomplished with simple restriping.
- **University Avenue road diet.** The potential vibrancy of this street is suppressed by its excessive width and high speeds of cars. The low volume of this road makes it a candidate for narrowing to two lanes with a center turn lane. Adding refuge islands would allow pedestrians to cross safely, which they cannot do now. Given the large number of driveways, ordinary bike lanes would be much safer than a cycle track. Columbus State University strongly supports a road diet for University Avenue, and has submitted a proposal to this effect to the City Manager's office.
- **Victory Drive.** Buffered bike lanes in the existing shoulder would provide needed connectivity.
- **Rigdon Road bike lanes.** This would provide needed connectivity between high residential areas, schools, and the city services area. It would also complement the MLK/10<sup>th</sup> Street corridor.
- **Cusseta Road bike lanes.** This would provide welcome connectivity, but cyclists would be safer and more likely to use it if included bike lanes rather than sharrows only.

- 17<sup>th</sup> Street bike lanes: This is already one of the most frequently used corridors among cyclists because it connects the Lakebottom area in Midtown to downtown. Bike lanes over sharrows would be preferable. If space is lacking, an up-hill bike lane / down-hill sharrow arrangement (as described in AASHTO) on the east end of 17<sup>th</sup> would make cycling more comfortable. To provide a connection from this route to the city services area on (significantly, the other side of) Macon Road, we recommend either a crossing light at Dell Drive or a route along Preston / Briarwood / Gardenia. A light may need to be installed at the intersection of Macon, Preston, and Gardenia to provide a safe way across.
- Woodruff Road bike lanes. This would provide a welcome north-south link between dense residential areas, retail, health care, the Fall Line Trace, and Edgewood Road. A road diet and bike lanes should be considered on the 4-lane stretch.
- Hamilton Road bike lanes: This would provide very high north-south connectivity between the Fall Line Trace (near 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue) and the Bealwood neighborhoods, and make commercial areas around Airport Throughway more accessible. Hamilton/5<sup>th</sup> is a two-lane road north of Talbotton and south of 13<sup>th</sup> Street. We recommend narrowing the 4-lane section to two lanes and including a consistent bike lane design for its full length.
- 38<sup>th</sup> Street. This would offer a low-cost, high impact connector between two high-density residential and commercial areas. We recommend extending it to 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue. Bike lanes would be preferable to sharrows.
- 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue. This route would provide a low-cost but very important north-south connection between the Jordan-Johnson residential area and the Fall Line Trace. Note that routing cyclists from 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the FLT will require rethinking the intersection around Buck Ice and coordination with the Talbotton Road widening project.
- Amber Drive bike lanes: This will provide a neighborhood connection in this residential area.
- Farr Road bike lanes: This project could provide a connection to the proposed South Columbus Trail via Old Cusseta Road, which would be all the more important as one of the few conduits between the east and west sides of I-185. It should be designed with this in mind. With a traffic count of about 8000, Farr Road does not seem to be a good candidate for widening. However, it would be a good candidate for bike lanes.
- Steam Mill Road bike lanes: This project would provide one of the few non-motorized transportation corridors to this underserved area.
- Britt David Road bike lanes: This project would connect several important destinations, including Britt David Park and the north branch of the public library.

### **High priority, long-term projects**

Bicycle Columbus endorses the following projects as high priorities for the long-term development

bicycling in the city, but recognizes their complexities in terms of planning and funding. We encourage the city to pursue these projects, but not to get distracted from the many high-quality, high-impact, low-cost projects that could have an immediate positive impact on the city.

- Bull Creek Greenway. This is an exciting proposal that could be transformative for south Columbus, both as a recreational and transportation facility. We strongly recommend designing it from the beginning with thoughtful connections to surrounding residential and commercial destinations and to the rest of the ATS network.
- East-West and North-South Trail. This proposes a smart use of existing ROW, whose connection to the Fall Line Trace seems very feasible. The western connection to downtown presents more of a challenge since it must use River Road, ironically a state bike route but now very forbidding to cyclists. A multiuse path along the west side (as in ATS 13) is a potential solution, but ideally all of State Route 219 should be redesigned to comfortably accommodate bicycles. We do not endorse ATS07 since the potential benefit of this project strikes us as being outweighed by expense.
- Airport Thruway multi-use path. This project would make smart use of airport ROW. Because the airport blocks one side and eliminates intersections, it would be an appropriate place for a separate multi-use path.

### **Policy recommendations**

**Complete Streets:** Bicycle Columbus recommends that the city adopt a Complete Streets policy, similar to current Georgia Department of Transportation Policy, and in keeping with many other communities in Georgia and across the nation.

**Traffic Capacity Review:** Columbus has a number of four-lane roads that are far larger than they need to be. Big roads with low traffic counts lead to high speeds. When they are up for repaving, they can be inexpensively restriped to a more appropriate size, and the existing right-of-way can be reallocated to include bike lanes and sidewalks. This is commonly called a Road Diet, and it is endorsed by FHWA as a proven safety measure. Bicycle Columbus recommends a policy to review all four-lane roads as they come up for repaving and to reduce their size when traffic counts and trends make this appropriate.

**Ending car-only development:** Low-density, suburban development patterns, typical in North Columbus, fundamentally undermine walking, cycling, and transit because they separate residential areas from the places people go. Cul-de-sac developments and strip malls are only reachable by automobile, and even the briefest of errands requires a car. This forces people to drive more, which increases congestion and creates pressure to widen roads. The roads and other infrastructure it takes to sustain this low-density, car-intensive landscape are very expensive and require huge government subsidies. This landscape also leads to a sedentary lifestyle and all the health risks associated with it. We recommend that the city review its zoning laws and development practices to put an end to this unhealthy and heavily subsidized pattern of development.

**Better connections:** Bicycle Columbus recommends developing policies that encourage better connections between common places of interest within communities. This policy should emphasize the importance of developing on-road facilities such as bicycle lanes, bicycle boulevards, etc., that connect existing multi-use trails to neighborhoods, government centers, hospitals, retail, schools, etc. This would drastically increase the usefulness of multi-use trails. It would also make it possible to start

a bicycle sharing program, as Nashville, Chattanooga, and many other cities around the nation have done. This program will allow users to check out/in bicycles for their trips, and return them at different, strategically located around town and places of common interest.

**Transportation Special Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST):** Bicycle Columbus recommends that a significant amount of TSPLOST funding be devoted to implementing this plan. This 1-cent sales tax is paid by all citizens—including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, and people with disabilities. It should therefore be implemented in an equitable way, not exclusively focused on big roads, bridges and highways. It is also important to use this revenue to transform the city, not to create huge unfunded maintenance liabilities in the form of suburban highways.

**Traffic Signal Detection Devices:** Bicycle Columbus recommends a policy to phase in bicycle detection devices on traffic lights. Many traffic lights already have these devices (video detection), but they have not been calibrated to detect bicyclists. The traffic code states that bicycles must observe all traffic control devices, but it is impossible to do when traffic lights will not recognize cyclists. It also makes it very difficult and dangerous for cyclists to cross high-traffic roads.