



Stephanie Rawlings-Blake
Mayor

PLANNING COMMISSION

Wilbur E. "Bill" Cunningham, Chairman

STAFF REPORT



Thomas J. Stosur
Director

March 26, 2015

REQUEST: Baltimore City Bike Master Plan

RECOMMENDATION:

Approval with the following comments to the Department of Transportation:

- Provide the Planning Commission with an annual report regarding progress on the Priority Bike Routes for Implementation list and the other recommendations of this Plan as part of their Capital Improvement Program briefing,
- Complete a comprehensive update of this Plan at least every six years, and
- Continue to provide a dedicated funding stream for bicycle infrastructure as demonstrated in the Department of Transportation's Capital Improvement Program.

STAFF: Alexandra Hoffman & Heather Martin

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNER: Citywide

PETITIONER: Department of Transportation

OWNER(S): Mayor and City Council

HISTORY

Baltimore's first Bike Master Plan was adopted by the Planning Commission on May 4, 2006. This update to the Baltimore City Bike Master Plan illustrates the continued importance of bicycling, the successes that have occurred since the City's 2006 Bike Master Plan, and provides recommendations for additional infrastructure and policies to promote Baltimore as a more bicycle-friendly city.

ANALYSIS

The Department of Transportation's 2015 update to the Baltimore City Bike Master Plan outlines a 15-year plan for bicycle infrastructure and policies developed based on national best practices and public input. The updated Plan proposes a comprehensive bicycle network where bicycle facilities will be designed based on the specific street context. Although not every bicyclist may feel comfortable using every bicycling facility type, national standards ensure the necessary safety and comfort for the average bicyclist throughout the proposed bicycle network.

National Standards: As Baltimore City moves forward in designing and implementing more bicycle facilities, the Department of Transportation will use the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) to ensure facilities are designed appropriately. NACTO is a non-profit coalition of city transportation departments that have sought to raise the standard of urban design practice. NACTO has developed two design manuals, the Urban Bikeway Design Guide and the Urban Streets Design Guide, that provide standards and guidelines for proper street design in an urban context. Baltimore City is a founding city of NACTO and a contributing author to the two design guides identified, above.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) oversees and sanctions all design guides used at the national, state, and city level. In December 2013, FHWA officially adopted NACTO's Urban Bikeway Design Guide and the Urban Streets Design Guide as the appropriate standards and guidelines to follow when designing streets for the urban context.

Plan Summary: Generally, the Baltimore City Bike Master Plan recommendations are summarized as follows:

- *Vision*
In order to increase bicycling and its associated health, economic, and environmental benefits, the City will focus on creating safe and user-friendly bicycle infrastructure as part of its commitment to Complete Streets and multi-modal transportation options.
- *Current Conditions in Baltimore*
Like other cities, Baltimore has experienced a cycling boom. Over 100 miles of bicycle infrastructure has been implemented in the last ten years. Bicycle counts demonstrate a 50% increase in commuter cycling over the past few years. Though much has been accomplished, there continue to be opportunities to improve bicycle safety on many Baltimore streets. The Department of Transportation now has a full-time bicycle and pedestrian planner.
- *Proposed Bicycle Routes and Facility Types*
The Plan calls for a comprehensive bicycle network across the city, made up of a variety of context-specific bicycle facilities that follow national standards. As part of the City's implementation of Complete Streets, a policy adopted by Baltimore in 2010 that encourages a multi-modal approach to transportation planning, all transportation projects should consider including appropriate bicycle facilities.
- *Standards for Bicycle Oriented Development*
To further promote bicycling, development projects should support bicycling with amenities such as bicycle parking, bicycle repair stations, and Bike Share stations. Additionally, a guide of bicycle-friendly businesses should be created to recognize and reward those businesses.
- *Proposed Policies for a Bicycle-Friendly City*
The Plan recommends implementing a range of policies to support Baltimore as a bicycle-friendly city, including the formation of the Mayor's Bicycle Advisory Commission, updated engineering and implementation procedures, and the development of public events, educational and business programs, and expanded recreational bicycling

offerings. Collaboration among stakeholders is critical to achieving the specific policy goals.

Mayor's Bicycle Advisory Commission: The Mayor signed an executive order to formally recognize the Bicycle Advisory Committee as an official body called the Mayor's Bicycle Advisory Commission which will include representatives from the following departments and groups, at a minimum:

- Department of Planning,
- Department of Transportation,
- Police Department,
- Bicycle advocacy organizations, and
- Local cycling businesses.

Process: The Department of Transportation conducted a public planning process in the preparation of this update to the Baltimore City Bike Master Plan, summarized below:

- Ten community meetings to gather public input (2012 – 2013),
- Stakeholders such as Bikemore, BikeMaryland, and the Greater Baltimore Committee were invited to review and comment on the draft Plan (2014),
- The Department of Transportation held a community meeting to present the draft Plan (January 28, 2015),
- A formal public comment period on the draft Plan was held (February 3 – 20, 2015),
- The Department of Transportation then compiled all public comments and prepared individual responses that were posted on the Department of Transportation's website, and
- The draft Plan was finalized based on these public comments and published on the Department of Transportation's website ahead of this hearing.

Public Comments: The public comments received during the February, 2015 comment period and the responses by the Department of Transportation are summarized as follows:

- *Vision*
The comments generally represented two different philosophies of bicycling and bicycle safety: one group of commenters advocated for traffic calming and driver education rather than cycletracks, arguing that cycletracks will marginalize bicyclists, while another group of commenters advocated for cycletracks in all street situations, believing that physical separation is always the best option. The Department of Transportation is balancing these philosophies in its approach to designing bicycle facilities which relies on the NACTO national standards. The Department of Transportation will design appropriate bicycle facilities as recommended by NACTO on a street-by-street basis, taking into consideration 85th percentile observed speeds (*e.g.* observed speeds that are higher than 85% of the all of the speeds observed during a particular period) rather than posted speed limits.

- *Proposed Bicycle Routes and Facility Types*

Though numerous additional or alternative routes were proposed, several were mentioned repeatedly:

Jones Falls/Western Run Spur: Commenters noted that the Jones Falls/Western Run Spur was not clearly shown on the map; however, it will be built by the Department of Recreation & Parks as part of Phase V of the Jones Falls Trail and the Department of Transportation has updated the Plan to reflect this.

West Lake Avenue: Commenters stated that the speed and volume of traffic on West Lake Avenue make it unsafe for sharrows. The Department of Transportation is currently evaluating and developing alternative routes with community input.

Roland Avenue: Commenters also thought that Roland Avenue should be a cycletrack. The Department of Transportation will be partly converting the existing bicycle route into to a cycletrack during an upcoming resurfacing project and the remaining improvements recommended for the route will be completed at a later date.

33rd Street: Commenters frequently mentioned the 33rd Street bike lane as a good candidate for extension and cycletrack treatment. The Department of Transportation has upgraded that route from a minor route to a major route and therefore suitable for additional protection. The Department of Transportation is also looking at alternative routes in this area.

- *Proposed Policies for a Bicycle-Friendly City*

Commenters emphasized the importance of enforcement of traffic laws and speed limits to create a sense of safety. The Plan calls for increased enforcement and police training on bicycle laws. Many commenters supported Bikemore’s proposal that streets with 85th percentile speeds above 25 miles per hour should receive a cycletrack. The Department of Transportation is addressing these concerns by designing appropriate bicycle facilities on a street-by-street basis, taking into consideration 85th percentile observed speeds rather than posted speed limits.

Comprehensive Master Plan: The Baltimore City Bike Master Plan is compatible with the Comprehensive Master Plan for Baltimore City, specifically:

LIVE

Goal 2: Elevate the Design and Quality of the City’s Built Environment

Objective 3: Promote Transit Oriented Development (TOD) and Mixed-Used Development to Reinforce Neighborhood Centers and Main Streets

Goal 3: Improve Transportation Access and Choice for City Residents

Objective 1: Create a Comprehensive Transportation Plan to Improve Mobility and Choice

Objective 2: Strategically Redevelop Vacant Properties throughout the City

EARN

Goal 3: Improve Access to Jobs and Transportation Linkages between Businesses

Objective 1: Enhance Transportation Options to Provide Workers with Commuting Options and Mitigate Traffic Congestion

PLAY

Goal 2: Improve Nightlife, Entertainment, and Recreation Experiences for Residents and Visitors

Objective 3: Improve Local Participation in City Recreational Activities

Recommendation: It is staff's recommendation that the Plan be approved with the following comments to the Department of Transportation:

- Provide the Planning Commission with an annual report regarding progress on the Priority Bike Routes for Implementation list and the other recommendations of this Plan as part of their Capital Improvement Program briefing,
- Complete a comprehensive update of this Plan at least every six years, and
- Continue to provide a dedicated funding stream for bicycle infrastructure as demonstrated in the Department of Transportation's Capital Improvement Program.

COMMUNITY NOTIFICATION

In advance of this hearing, staff notified all the associations included in the Community Association Directory maintained by the Department of Planning by email of the requested action.



Thomas J. Stosur
Director