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M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Whatcom County Planning Commission

THROUGH: David Stalheim, Director

FROM: Wain Harrison, Long Range Planning Supervisor
Gary Davis, AICP, Senior Planner
Michelle Stiles, Planner

DATE: November 5, 2009

SUBJECT: Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee Plan

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Whatcom County Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) was created by Whatcom County Executive Pete Kremen in 2001, and was approved by the County Council through Ordinance 2001-013. The committee's mission is to assist the county in the planning, funding, development and implementation of facilities and programs that will result in the increased safety and use of bicycle and pedestrian travel as a significant and beneficial mode of transportation and recreation.

The purpose of the Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan, as stated in the introduction of the document, is to provide guidance for the implementation of interconnected bicycle and pedestrian networks for transportation throughout Whatcom County, with the goal of increasing the active mobility choices for the entire community.

The current 2003 plan expands upon the previous Whatcom County Bicycle Plan, which was originated by Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Department in 1994. The plan was then updated by the Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee and passed as a resolution through the County Council in May 2003. The proposed revision provides additional detail to ensure that the transportation system meets the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized travelers, and inter-modal access. The current 2003 plan gives general guidelines and recommendations while the proposed revision details specific facilities both on and off road to create a region-wide network.

The proposed revised plan incorporates recommendations for pedestrian and other forms of active travel facilities improvements, as well as updates to the priorities and implementation plan. The plan describes current planning and facilities related to bicycle

and pedestrian transportation. As stated in the plan, an effective bicycle and pedestrian system for Whatcom County will require facilities for both regional connectivity and local access. In the plan, BPAC provides network recommendations that describe facilities and actions recommended to address gaps in the completion of a regional non-motorized network. This plan focuses on the facilities that provide regionally important connectivity and on those that are outside of incorporated areas of the county.

The plan also drafts an implementation strategy that identifies steps, policies, and recommended schedules for implementation of the recommended actions. The plan more specifically defines the priorities for transportation needs, which should be implemented by the Public Works department. Included in the plan is a Priority Projects Table identifying and ranking the six-year (2008-2014) priority list for project implementation of the major corridors as well as an associated map. Where available, possible funding sources and estimated project costs have been included, these funding strategies and sources have been identified but there has been no commitment at this time.

OBJECTIVES & POLICIES OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The draft Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan is not intended to be adopted as part of the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, but if approved by the County Council it will serve as a background document to guide transportation policy and capital project planning. On page 18 of the document, “adoption of the bike plan and map in the Comprehensive Plan” is listed as a past step toward creating a regional network. This is technically incorrect and should be rephrased to “approval of the pedestrian and bicycle plan.”

The following text, goals and policies are currently found in the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, Chapter Six, Transportation:

GOAL 6M: Promote bicycle and pedestrian travel by systematically providing safe and convenient routes and facilities where feasible.

Policy 6M-1: Encourage safe and efficient bikeways that link populated areas of the county with travel destinations.

Policy 6M-2: Recognize public safety, education and law enforcement as integral to the development of bicycle transportation opportunities in Whatcom County.

Policy 6M-3: Where practical, identify site-specific on-street/road improvements needed for bicycle/pedestrian facilities along arterials and provide for regular shoulder sweeping and other maintenance as needed.

Policy 6M-4: Identify needed rights-of-way for bicycles.

Policy 6M-5: Include internal pedestrian circulation systems as well as links to external systems in development projects.

Policy 6M-6: Develop a system of off-road trail networks for non-motorized transportation to link population centers, employment centers and recreation areas.

Policy 6M-7: Implement a policy of providing safe pedestrian and bicycle access on county roads that have significant pedestrian and bicycle traffic as these roads are reconstructed, preferably by adding separated facilities or alternately by providing 4 foot minimum shoulders. Specifically, safe pedestrian facilities should be provided within a one mile radius of community places such as schools, markets and libraries if there is residential or other development that would generate significant foot-traffic within the one mile radius.

Policy 6M-8: Implement as a priority the goals, policies and recommendations of the latest Whatcom County Bicycle Plan.

If approved, more detailed implementation recommendations from the revised Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan may be incorporated into the comprehensive plan's transportation element as part of the 2011 update.

Recommended Action

Based on the above summary, staff recommends that the Planning Commission forward a recommendation of approval to the Whatcom County Council for the Whatcom County Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee Plan, with the correction to page 18 noted above.

Attachments

Attachment A: Draft Whatcom County Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan