

Notes from October 13, 2010 Meeting of the SPC Pedestrian Bicycle Advisory Committee (*draft*)

Attendees:

Chuck DiPietro, SPC  
Bill DeGuffero, Indiana County  
Tracy Stack, PA DCNR  
Scott Brilhart, Upper St. Clair Township  
Chris Ziegler, Butler Freeport Community Trail  
Linda Boxx, Allegheny Trail Alliance  
Mary Beth Kim, ACTA  
Ryan Gordon, SPC  
Eric Boerer, Bike Pittsburgh  
Adam Marshall, PennDOT D-10  
Chris Goswick, Allegheny County  
Ryan Sheran, LR Kimball  
Roy Weil, Free Wheelin Easy  
Mary Shaw, Free Wheelin Easy  
Doug Smith, SPC  
Hannah Hardy, Pennsylvania Environmental Council (*revisions received/corrections made*)  
Ben DeVore, PennDOT D-11  
Bob Dudash, URS Corp  
Dave Cooper, JMT  
Guy Rettura, PennDOT D-11  
Bill Evans, Beaver County Planning  
Jerrold Green, North Side resident  
Joan Miles, Pashek Associates  
Tom Baxter, Friends of the Riverfront  
Cheryl Moon Sirianni, PennDOT D-11

The meeting opened with a welcome from SPC, and a round of introductions.

***Route 51 Viaduct/West Carson Street Presentation*** - David Cooper of the firm JMT presented the plans for improvement of Route 51 (West Carson Street) between the West End Circle and Stanhope Street, which forms the border between the City of Pittsburgh and McKees Rocks.

The purpose of the project is to replace a structurally deficient viaduct. In conjunction with that project objective, the project will also look to increase the vertical clearance at a CSX railroad crossing from 15 ft to 16 ft or more by slightly depressing the roadway in that location. The project will also provide enhanced bicycle and pedestrian accommodation, as this corridor serves as a key connector between downtown Pittsburgh and the west end communities in the City of Pittsburgh and the western suburbs beyond. Much needed drainage improvements and the enhancement of missing or substandard barriers and curbs will also be accomplished with this project.

A pedestrian/bicycle checklist completed as part of this project indicates that there are both bike/ped “generators” in this corridor, and visible pedestrians. A formal pedestrian count to determine HOW MANY pedestrians will be completed in the preliminary engineering stage of project development.

Currently, the roadway features a 38 ft. cartway width in a three traffic lane configuration (2 lanes outbound, 1 lane inbound), with a key pinch point at the railroad underpass. There are sidewalks the entire length, although they are not continuous and generally in severely deteriorated condition. On the river side of the road, the sidewalk is actually cantilevered over a shelf created by the adjacent railroad, with plywood used to cover gaping holes in some locations.

The roadway has experienced 60 serious accidents and 4 fatalities during the time evaluated by the consultants.

In their evaluation, it was determined that the three traffic lanes would have to be retained between the West End Circle and Corliss Street, although in theory a road diet (dropping one lane of traffic) could be feasible between Corliss and Stanhope, if turn lanes were provided at Tabor and Corliss Streets. To accommodate pedestrians and bicycles, a 12 -14’ shared use path could be created on the river side of the road, which would be cantilevered out from the roadway. The estimated cost for this sort of improvements is about \$20 million.

In working on other design concepts for this updated roadway, several alternative approaches to pedestrian and bicycle accommodation were evaluated. These options included:

- A three lane traffic configuration that had lane widths of 14ft, 10 ft and 14 ft, with 5 ft sidewalks on each side
  
- A 6 ft. exclusive bike lane inbound, with three traffic lanes having widths of 11 ft, 10 ft and 11 ft. This design would also include 5 ft sidewalks between the West End Circle and Stanhope Street. (Design preference was for a bike lane inbound, and a Share the Road Program outbound)

All sidewalks will be replaced, and an effort will be made to eliminate the cantilever section between the busway entrance and the West End.

In response to questions from the meeting attendees, the consultant indicated that the project will leave an incomplete connection between the pedestrian/bicycle facilities in the West End Circle, and the West Carson Street viaduct. The bike lane that comes into the West End Circle will end before the ramp to the West End, requiring bikes to share the road for a bit before reaching the new path on West Carson Street. This will require that cyclists using this connection be “bike savvy” and confident of their abilities to ride in traffic. There will also be no bike lane or special bike accommodation on the ramps in the vicinity of the Circle. In that sense it is an imperfect solution. No new signals are anticipated as part

of this project and an effort will be made to make address visibility concerns in the vicinity of barriers and retaining walls, such as at the entrance to the West Busway at the eastern limits of the project area.

There was some consideration at one time of extending the bike lane across the ramp, as is done on the Birmingham Bridge. PennDOT indicated that they may take a look at that option again.

Other comments that came out during general discussion:

- Special crossings will be created for pedestrians and bicyclists at key locations.
- The City and the Port Authority agree that there are few outbound transit boardings in the project area.
- At the request of meeting attendees, PennDOT will consider extending bike lane markings across the entrance to the West Busway (technically just outside the project limits) and make other efforts to make bicycles and pedestrians visible at this skewed, slightly obscured intersection.
- Lighting under the railroad underpass will be improved
- Issues of local business owners, residents parking on the sidewalk on the inbound side of West Carson Street have been incorporated into project design. Alternative parking options are being developed. Enforcement will be an issue that is outside the parameters of this project.
- All signals will be equipped with loop detectors or other equipment that will effectively detect cyclists
- Colored bike lane painting in key areas may be considered

In response to the discussion that followed the presentation, PennDOT invited inquiries from the attendees on the status/plans for other projects in PennDOT District 11. A few of the observations:

- The Route 51/88 project will have sidewalks when the project is complete
- PennDOT is aware of the need for bike loop detectors at traffic signals, working toward 100% utilization
- Sidewalks will be installed in the Wexford Flats area; will use cameras for signal detection, which are effective for sensing cyclists
- the implementation of shared use markings, or sharrows, where bike lanes end should make the transition into traffic easier for cyclists

- PennDOT can install sharrows in PA, but the municipality must agree to maintain them
- SPC will provide PennDOT District 11 with a list of locations where existing sewer grates, drains or scuppers are known to pose a hazard to safe cycling due to the design or orientation of structures, or due to deferred maintenance

On a follow up question of PennDOT, but this time for PennDOT District 10, it was noted that the website for the *Freeport Bridge* project continues to identify plans for a 5 ft. sidewalk. At meetings on the subject of bicycle and pedestrian accommodation, PennDOT Districts 10 and 12 agreed that the sidewalks would be 6.5 feet. Is the website inaccurate or misleading, or has the design changed? (Subsequent response following the meeting: Plans continue to call for 6.5 ft. sidewalk width on bridge. Old plans, depicting 5 ft. sidewalks, are included on the website to illustrate how plans have changed over time.

**The City of Pittsburgh** is soliciting input on the design alternatives for the new bike route signs that are under development. There are three styles to choose from: A standard bicycle icon/image with route information; a very similar design that has been modified slightly to a Pittsburgh specific image in which spokes have been added in the wheels of the previous image to reflect the three rivers theme; and a route signing option that provided more verbal clues, without the bike image.

A reminder that the **Western Pennsylvania Trails Symposium** is scheduled for Friday, October 22, 2010 at the Regional Learning Alliance facility in Cranberry. Registration for the event is strong, and the panels appear to be very interesting. Exhibit space at the event is “sold out.” This is a live event, with no plans for record or podcast the individual sessions.

The **SPC Bike Count program** was initiated in 2008, with the goal of quantifying bicycle commuter activity and monitoring trends in cycling use/activity. By identifying downtown Pittsburgh and Oakland as our key bicycle commuter destinations, SPC staff and others identified local “cycling friendly” routes into downtown and Oakland. These included on road routes as well as trails. Peak hour bicycle activity has been monitored at least once at 47 different locations in the City of Pittsburgh. Most of these were manual counts, performed by a person physically situated at the intersection or trail segment in question for the two hour peak period. A few counts were completed using automated equipment over 24 hour periods, with peak hour activity extracted manually from the larger data report.

Bicycle counts are completed in the spring and in the fall. Fall counts – usually completed in September and October - are generally higher than the spring counts which are completed in mid to late April. The timing of the spring counts is set to account for the early May termination of classes at the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University, both of which are located in Oakland.

Ryan Gordon of SPC identified the “busiest” bike count locations as being:

Hot Metal Bridge at Eliza Furnace Trail  
Hot Metal Bridge at South Side Trail  
Intersection of Ellsworth and Aiken, Shadyside  
Intersection of Fifth and Neville, Oakland  
Intersection of Schenley and Forbes, Schenley Park Golf Course  
Intersection of Fifth and Bigelow, Oakland  
Intersection of Forbes and Craig, Oakland  
Intersection of Penn and 21<sup>st</sup>, Strip District  
Intersection of East Carson and 18<sup>th</sup>, South Side  
Intersection of Baum and Millvale, North Oakland

Just as the Spring Counts tend to be lower than the fall counts at any given location, the morning counts tend to be lower than the afternoon counts at any given location. There may be several reasons for this, including the likelihood that we are capturing both commuter and recreational riders in the late afternoon/evening timeframe, and the possibility that morning peak travel hours for cyclists may be different in Oakland than they are for drivers due to a slightly different demographic, etc.

When evaluating the ten busiest locations (as identified through the count program), the busiest locations in the afternoon are clearly Oakland-centric. When looking at morning counts only, the downtown intersection of Fifth and Grant enters the top ten busiest locations.

It should be noted that these observations are based on a very low sample size (just a few counts at any given location). SPC is working to expand its count capabilities, and last month trained about 20 volunteers on how to do bicycle counts. They completed approximately 25 counts for SPC.

In the coming months, SPC hopes to develop a prioritized list of bicycle count locations, in the hopes of developing a sustainable bike count program that collects bike count data at 12 or so key locations up to 4 times every year, and another dozen or so locations on at least a semi-annual or annual basis. Counts at the remaining locations will be collected as time and staffing permit, most likely every other year or so. An annual review of activity at these locations will be completed, so as to permit SPC to be responsive to changes in activity that may result in a reconsideration of the prioritized count locations.

It was noted that caution should be used in the “level of confidence” ascribed to the bicycle counts completed electronically. The same infrared counters are used in some locations along the Great Allegheny Passage, and when the electronic data is compared to manual counts completed at the same location, significant data discrepancies have been noted. These discrepancies between the manual and the electronic counters have been too inconsistent to permit the development of a single “calibration correction” to the automated counts. SPC will continue to work to identify a standardization process for the automated count data.

The US Bureau of the Census released a new **American Community Survey** on September 23, 2010 which identified Pittsburgh as having the fourth largest growth in bicycle commuters, with a 206 % increase. That places Pittsburgh in the top 15 cities in the US in the number of persons commuting to work by bicycle. When assessed on the basis of percentage of area residents who walk OR bike to work, Pittsburgh is in the top TWO nationally.

Doug Smith of SPC provided an update on the **Regional Operations Program**, or ROPS. The Regional Operations Program is an element of the regional long range transportation plan that looks at how the regional transportation network *functions*. It complements other SPC functions, including the pedestrian and bicycle planning program, the Congestion Management Program and the Regional Traffic Signal Program(s) among others.

As a comprehensive, multimodal program, ROPS can cover a large number of “projects” within the region. They could range from the implementation of a crowdsourcing Iphone application to identify arrival times of buses to traffic signal coordination and the assessment of local roadways to identify needed safety enhancements.

The question of bicycle detection at traffic signals was of interest to this group, and Doug reported that the bicycle compatible loop detection devices were presumed to be required as part of any new traffic signal, traffic signal replacement or tuning/optimization effort supported by SPC.

An important element of the ROPS program is the completion of 3-5 Roadway Safety Audits per year. An RSA consists of three days of field view of a given roadway by a team of SPC staff, PennDOT personnel, municipal officials and others. Each roadway selected for the program has been identified as eligible based on a high accident rate in recent years or on the basis of some other known safety concern.

A multidisciplinary team views roadway operations in a variety of conditions, from early morning (dark), mid-day and evening (dark) and make observations about existing infrastructure, driver behavior, lighting and signage and other elements that affect how traffic moves in this corridor. Auto, transit, freight, pedestrian and bicycle behavior is all noted and assessed to identify how the corridor “operates.”

Sometimes, there are surprises when an RSA is completed. For example, the team found that there was a higher than anticipated number of pedestrians using Route 224 in the vicinity of the Wal-Mart (New Castle, Lawrence County).

In the assessment of roadway safety, reportable crashes is the metric used to identify “accident rates.” It is recognized that this definition typically undercounts accidents involving bicyclists.

One of the more recently completed Roadway Safety Audits was completed along Liberty Avenue in the Strip District. In the coming months, an RSA will be completed along Route 51 in Chippewa Township,

Beaver County. In the Spring of 2011, RSA's will be conducted along SR 21 in Fayette County; Route 356 near Route 68 (Wal-Mart area) in Butler County; and along Route 22 near Blairsville, in Indiana County.

**SPC Bike Suitability Maps** – The draft maps for Armstrong County have been posted to the SPC website. SPC will begin working with Westmoreland County on draft Suitability Maps for that County in the Winter/Spring.

Regional Updates –

**Butler Freeport Community Trail** – 2.5 miles of the last four miles at the north end are now done. Every month about 12-15 riders join together for a group ride that includes lunch at one end of the trail. The recent half marathon was a huge success, with 600 runners and 150 volunteers. They are making plans for a full marathon and a unicycle ride for next year. They continue their sharrow marking program in the City of Butler, with 67 sharrows painted last weekend. Thanks to the They Working grant program for their recent grant for the acquisition of traffic marking paint in support of this effort.

**Washington County Planning** – The County has submitted a PCTI grant application for the connection of the Panhandle Trail from Burgettstown to the West Virginia line, a distance of about 9 miles, as well as spot improvements. This will complete the Panhandle Trail. They also have an application in to DCNR for improvements to the Mingo Bike Trail, from Ebenezer to Mingo Bridge (in and around Mingo Creek Park).

**Pennsylvania Environmental Council** – A construction bid has been awarded for the completion of the connection of the area between the bridges at Whitaker and Duquesne on the **Great Allegheny Passage** (Coke Gas Pipeline property). The constructors are on site now. That work will permit the bridges to be opened, and the closure of that trail gap. The Regional Trail Corporation is working to connect Grant Avenue to the Duquesne Bridge, but an Allegheny Regional Asset District (ARAD) grant (to match a DCNR grant) remains to be confirmed. (Ed note: matching grant has been confirmed.) This match issue is likely to be resolved, and work complete, early in 2011. The section of trail from Whitaker to the Waterfront is being paved at this time. A draft report on the proposal for a trail extension from Millvale to Freeport is likely to be released by the Friends of the Riverfront by March 2011.

**Freewheelin' Easy** – a new print edition of this ride guide will soon be available. Authors Mary Shaw and Roy Weil also reported that they continue to work with the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail Alliance on efforts to bring a series of disconnected trails together into a single, continuous off road route that would connect Pittsburgh and Erie. The local connection to the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail would be the North Shore trail extension from Millvale to Freeport. Mary also reported that the Trail Volunteer Fund received about a half a dozen applications for "They Working" program funds in the latest round of applications. The next application deadline is December 1, 2010.

Linda Boxx/Allegheny Trail Alliance – Offered a reminder that the annual **Day of Giving** is coming up. On that day charitable donations made to registered non-profits will be matched (on a pro rated basis) by

the Pittsburgh Foundation up to a total match of \$500,000. It's a great way to maximize the impact of an individual donation. The Regional Trail Council and the Friends of the Riverfront are among the registered non-profits eligible for matched donations that day. Linda also announced that the Allegheny Trail Alliance would be launching a new smart phone application that will instruct users on how to reach certain trailhead locations, etc. They will beta test the application in the near future. The ATA has also working) with others in the State) on the question of "pedal assist bicycles" in light of new ADA accessibility requirements, the eligibility of these vehicles to use shared use paths that were developed using funds designed for "non-motorized uses," etc. This effort is currently on hold, but is likely to receive attention again in the not too distant future. PennDOT is reportedly working to redefine the pedalcycle "degree of power assist" question. ("Pedalcycle" is PennDOT speak for a pedal powered vehicle such as a bicycle.)

**PennDOT, District 10** – provided an update on efforts in Indiana and Butler Counties. In Butler County, the Pillow Street project never got underway, and it is too late in the construction season for it to advance now. The Safe Routes to School project in Homer City is nearing completion, including a stamped concrete pedestrian crossing (mimics the look of bricks, creating an aesthetically pleasing look, as well as providing clear visual clue as to the presence of a crosswalk). A contract has been awarded for the completion of PCTI funded improvements in Blairsville, although most of that work will now have to wait until spring for completion. In the new round of PCTI availability, PennDOT District 10 is reviewing five candidate applications and providing input to PennDOT Central Office. In a final note, Ben informed the group that Ben Matthews is the new Bike Ped coordinator for PennDOT District 10.

DCNR – Tracy Stack announced that the **2010 DNCR C2P2 Grant awards** would be announced later this week, possibly as early as tomorrow.

**Upper St. Clair Township** – Scott Brillhart noted that the Township has submitted a PCTI application for improvements to Mayview Road, to include sidewalks and bike lanes to connect to regional facilities such as the Community Center and Library. There are many pedestrians in this area already. The Township also continues to work on its Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan. All existing sidewalks in the community have been identified and mapped, and residents and local elected officials agree that more sidewalks and more connectors are needed. Pedestrian mobility at South Hills Village, both on mall property and in the vicinity, will be evaluated during on-going reconstruction activities. They are looking at the probable need for pedestrian enhancements between the mall and the nearby T Station, as well as the provision of racks for bike parking.

**Jerry Green, North Side resident** – informed the group that the North Side bike group is currently working with new staff/management at the Three Rivers Casino to monitor/prevent unpleasant interactions between trail users and Casino. Other efforts underway in the North Side include a bike route mapping effort and a design effort that would call for curb bumpouts along North Avenue in East Allegheny to make North Avenue more pedestrian friendly. Jerry also noted that requests for the placement of bike racks in the North Side have been pending for a while, apparently due to a permit assessment slow down at the City.

**Trail Town Program** – Amy Camp reported on a new initiative among the Great Allegheny Passage, in the formation of a **Sustainable Business Network**. They are currently working to identify “green businesses” along the trail, and create a website that will help trail users find these businesses.

**Bike Pittsburgh** – Erok Boerer indicated that Bike Pittsburgh is working in partnership with the City of Pittsburgh in the creation of 7 new miles of bike lanes and shared lane markings, or *sharrows*. They are working to identify even more locations for bike lane and/or *sharrow* installation next year.

**Airport Corridor Transportation Association (ACTA)** – In partnership with Bike Pittsburgh, the 2010 Ready, Set, Walk! Challenge Carnegie was created to compliment the August 20, 2010 Car Free Friday event in Carnegie. The program is an extension of the Ready, Set, Walk! Challenge program hosted annually by the three Southwestern Pennsylvania TMA's. Mary Beth Kim indicated that 40 participants signed up for the **Bike Pittsburgh/ACTA Ready Walk challenge** that ran from August 9<sup>th</sup> through September 13<sup>th</sup>.

SPC also Sara reported on a Regional Initiative, “The Airport Corridor Riders Guide.” This publication reflects the Port Authority changes that took place on September 5, 2010 and presents a summary of transportation services in the Airport Corridor.

**Indiana County Planning** – Bill Degufferoy, indicated that the County continued their work on the development of a Pedestrian Bicycle Plan, and that their efforts have seemed to spike the attention of Indiana University of PA to the pedestrian/bicycle needs of their students.

**Oakland Planning and Development Corporation** – is working on a Hill-Uptown-Oakland Access Study, which is currently available in draft form.

**URS Corporation** – Bob Dudash indicated that they are continuing to work with Bike Pittsburgh on the identification of roadways for the implementation of bike lanes and sharrows. He also noted the problematic language of most existing shared use signage, in which it is stated that bicycles may use full lane. The problem is that the placement of signage with this sort of language seems to imply to motorists that the right of bicyclists to use the full lane in this location is somehow exceptional. Language to the effect that bicycles ALWAYS have the right to the full lane (when needed) may be more effective.

-- End.