

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THIS PLAN

This Action Plan provides a coordinated and strategic approach to the development of bicycle and pedestrian improvements and programs in the Baltimore region. The recommendations within this report and the accompanying map will result in a network of on-road and off-road routes that support bicycling and walking for transportation and recreation purposes.

Bicyclists and pedestrians are legitimate road users: they have the legal right to use our roadways. Each time a person walks or rides a bicycle instead of driving, our region sees a direct benefit in reduced traffic congestion and air pollution. These are activities that must be encouraged and accommodated if we are to preserve and enhance the quality of life we've come to value in the Baltimore region. Further, providing transportation options is a critical facet of environmental justice, providing all residents of the Baltimore region with equal access to our transportation system, regardless of their ability to own and operate a car.

Ultimately, bicycling and walking must become as comfortable and convenient for short trips as other modes of transportation. This will require significant changes in the way we build our roads, plan our mass transit systems and develop our commercial and residential areas. As a result, all five of the 2001 Baltimore Regional Transportation Plan goals address improvements to bicycle and pedestrian access. It has clearly become a high priority for Baltimore Regional Transportation Board's (BRTB) members.

As a regional initiative, this plan, this study concentrates on regional connections. It identifies major trails and bikeways that should be developed to connect activity areas and adjacent jurisdictions. In many cases, more detailed planning will be needed at the local level to develop connections within each community. This is particularly true for improvements within identified pedestrian zones. Additionally, changes in local policies and practices regarding pedestrians will have a significant impact on improving conditions for pedestrians throughout the region.

It should be noted that places in this country that have achieved high levels of bicycling and walking have taken years to get where they are today. While the Baltimore region currently has levels of bicycling and walking that are lower

than many other places in the U.S, this plan provides a framework for significantly raising these levels in the future .

BENEFITS OF BICYCLING AND WALKING

With over 2.5 million people, the Baltimore region is home to nearly half of Maryland's population. The region is a popular place to settle, offering a mix of urban, suburban, small town and rural communities. Transportation access has historically been a key to prosperity in the Baltimore region – by rail, air, ship and a growing network of roadways.

However, the rapid growth in motor vehicle miles traveled in the Baltimore region has led to a roadway system that is increasingly congested. There is concern that traffic pressures are affecting the quality of life, creating communities where walking and bicycling are seldom used for transportation or recreation. Quiet, two-lane roads in the developing areas of the region have become major thoroughfares, increasing safety concerns for children and adults who walk and bicycle.

Efforts must be made now to ensure that bicyclists and pedestrians will be able to use the future roadway network throughout central Maryland. The Baltimore region is not alone in this initiative. There is growing support for bicycling and walking at the state and federal level as well. The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) has begun a number of new initiatives to fund bicycle and pedestrian improvements to transit facilities and roadways, and the U.S. Congress has provided a consistent source of funding for these activities for the past ten years.

There are a variety of reasons why improving the bicycling and walking environment are important to the Baltimore region:

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Developing trails, bikeways and walkable communities makes good economic sense for the Baltimore region.

- Businesses tend to invest more in locations that have a high quality of life, and corporate employers have an easier time attracting good workers to these locations. The Baltimore region's future as a first class employment location will depend on its ability to sell itself as a high quality place to live.

- Bicycle tourism is big business in the United States, bringing millions of dollars in tourism revenue to some parts of the country. (In Vermont, bicycle touring brings in more revenue than the maple syrup industry.) The Baltimore region has already gained national recognition for trails such as the Baltimore and Annapolis Trail, the BWI Trail and the Northern Central Rail trail. The East Coast Greenway (the urban equivalent of the Appalachian Trail) and the American Discovery Trail (the nation's major east/west route) will one day intersect in this region. It is clear that bicycle tourism should become a key feature of the region's future tourism strategy.
- A 1994 study of the Northern Central Rail Trail indicated that \$3.4 million in goods was purchased in 1993 because of the trail. Additionally, the study indicated that the trail supports an estimated 264 jobs.
- Constructing parking spaces for motor vehicles are expensive: the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) estimates that parking spaces in a suburban park and ride lot cost approximately \$6,000 each. The cost of constructing parking spaces in garages or in downtown areas are considerably more expensive.
- Yields of agricultural crops and harvestable forests have been found to be negatively impacted by ozone pollution.

TRANSPORTATION BENEFITS

Bicycling and walking are a necessary part of the transportation system in the Baltimore region.

- Bicycle and pedestrian facilities are needed to form important connections between activity centers, population centers, shopping areas, parks and tourism attractions in the region.
- Many people in the Baltimore region need an alternative method of travel to the automobile. A 1993 survey conducted by BMC found that 17% of households in the region had either no licensed drivers or vehicles. In Baltimore City, 39% of households are in this category. Bicycling is an extremely affordable option when compared to the expense of owning and operating an automobile (\$120 per year compared to over \$5,000 per year).
- According to drivers license records, approximately one third of Maryland's population does not have a driver's license. Based on a population of 5.2 million, 1.8 million Maryland residents must rely on alternative modes of transportation. Many of these are our seniors and children.
- The 1993 BMC household survey found that while bicycling and walking account for 13 percent of all trips and 3.9 percent of commuting trips, the potential to use these modes is far greater. Sixty-three percent of all trips

- in the region were found to be less than five miles, and 44 percent were less than three miles – many of these short trips could be made on foot or bicycle.
- According to a survey conducted as part of the 1998 Baltimore Regional Transportation Plan, 61% of respondents indicated that they would walk or ride a bicycle to work or for other errands if it was safe and convenient.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

More greenways and increased levels of bicycling and walking will help to improve air and water quality in the Baltimore region.

- The Baltimore region is classified as a severe non-attainment area for ground level ozone by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which means air quality in the region is below federal health-based standards for clean air. Motor vehicle pollution is a major contributor to ozone pollution.
- Increased levels of bicycling and walking can play an important role in reducing air pollution: 60 percent of the pollution created by automobile emissions happens in the first few minutes of operation, before pollution control devices begin to work effectively. By substituting a bicycling or walking trip for short auto trips, area residents can avoid adding about 15 pounds of pollutants per year to the air (WorldWatch Institute – based on a four mile round trip).
- Greenways can serve a dual purpose of offering an alternative transportation route while also preserving critical open space corridors in urban and suburban areas. Greenways filter stormwater run-off, remove pollutants from the air, and provide migratory routes for animal species.
- Air pollution is a serious threat to public health – it contributes to the deaths of 60,000 people nationwide each year (Harvard University School of Public Health).

HEALTH BENEFITS

Bicycling and walking can play a vital role in improving the health of Baltimore area residents.

- Residents of the Baltimore region are comparable to the national average – 60% of Americans lead completely sedentary lifestyles (1998 report of the American Medical Association).
- In Maryland, the prevalence of obesity increased by 75.6% between 1991 and 1998, the fourth highest increase in the nation. By 1998, 20.5 % of adults in Maryland were obese. (Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 1999).

- According to the Centers for Disease Control, the prevalence of childhood obesity has increased by approximately 50% over the last 30 years, with one in four children and adolescents considered overweight or obese.
- Total costs attributed to obesity (medical costs and lost productivity) amounted to an estimated \$99 billion in 1995, 10% of total national health care costs.
- Research conducted in 1999 by the Centers for Disease Control found that “obesity and overweight are linked to the nation’s number one killer – heart disease – as well as diabetes and other chronic conditions.” The report also states that one reason for Americans’ sedentary lifestyle is that “walking and cycling have been replaced by automobile travel for all but the shortest distances.” (October 1999 issue of the JAMA - Journal of the American Medical Association).
- Studies have shown tremendous health benefits for even a brief amount of light exercise (such as walking) each day.

QUALITY-OF-LIFE BENEFITS

Providing a livable community is a necessary part of attracting and keeping businesses, keeping our best and brightest young people here at home, and ensuring that Baltimore area communities remain competitive in the 21st century. We have come to realize that bicycling and walking are integral to our image as a friendly and welcoming community.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THIS PLAN AND STATEWIDE PLANNING EFFORTS

The Maryland Greenway Atlas

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources has done excellent work developing the *Maryland Greenway Atlas* – a statewide inventory of greenways and open space – and has been a central source of support for local greenway projects through Program Open Space funding and technical assistance. The purpose of their work has been to increase the amount of green infrastructure throughout Maryland, with an ancillary benefit being that greenway corridors can also serve non-motorized travel in locations where trails are provided.

In contrast, the Baltimore Regional Bicycle, Pedestrian and Greenway Plan is a *transportation plan*, with some corridors having an ancillary purpose of protecting important natural and cultural resources. This plan identifies locations where off-road trails (greenways) would serve a *transportation* purpose, enabling people to walk or bicycle to a destination without using an automobile. The result is

that some of the greenways shown on the Statewide Greenway Atlas are not shown on the maps produced for this project, since some are not recommended for public access and it would be misleading to show them within the context of this transportation plan.

As a practical matter, local jurisdictions should continue to work closely with Maryland DNR and the Greenways Commission to implement all types of greenways – those that serve transportation purposes, as well as those that serve to protect important environmental resources. The technical assistance provided by the State will continue to be resource that local governments should utilize whenever possible.

The Maryland Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

Overlapping with the development of this regional plan, the Maryland Department of Transportation is conducting the Maryland Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. This is an extremely positive development for bicycling and walking in Maryland.

One aspect of the statewide plan is to collect data on sidewalk conditions on all state roadways, data which was not collected for this Plan, and which may be very helpful to local jurisdictions who wish to make improvements.

In addition to the inventory of bicycling and walking conditions on state roads, the Statewide Plan will set a variety of policies within Maryland SHA for accommodating bicycles and pedestrians on state roadways. This is important, because a number of the roadways in the regional network are owned and maintained by the state. Local jurisdictions should participate in the statewide planning process to ensure that policies and practices are coordinated at the state and local levels.

As a member of the BRTB, MDOT (which includes SHA and MTA) has been involved in the development of the recommendations for this Plan. As the state plan moves forward, there will continue to be coordination between regional and state activities.