

Minneapolis Bicycle Coalition

Draft Bicycle Master Plan Comments Summary 9-28-2010

Overall thoughts

This draft plan has many very good ideas to support safer bicycling and encourage more people to bicycle, and the proposed Bike Master Plan map (page 1-2) is quite extensive. We hope to see most of it implemented, but in the draft it is unclear what areas should and will be prioritized, the timeline for implementation, and whether steps will be taken to prioritize successful implementation. We also feel that the city should revisit the recently adopted Bicycle Facility Design Guidelines because they are too restrictive in several key areas and will make it hard to implement many aspects of this plan.

Key potential areas for potential improvement

1. Access to commercial areas

What the draft says: “The City of Minneapolis will design and maintain ‘Complete Corridors’ that include various bicycle facilities within each travelshed. ‘Complete Streets’ will not be interpreted as a bicycle facility on every street, but a system of streets with bicycling facilities within a reasonable spacing distance that meet diverse bicycling needs” (page 3-27). The result of this policy is that the plan’s bikeway map does not include potential bike facilities on the following important commercial streets:

- 7th and 8th Streets downtown
- 38th Street S west of Bloomington Ave
- Broadway Avenue
- Cedar Avenue
- Chicago Avenue
- Excelsior Boulevard
- Hennepin Avenue South
- Johnson Street NE
- Lake Street
- Lyndale Avenue South
- Nicollet Avenue (from downtown to 40th Street)
- University Avenue (outside of the existing bike lane)
- Washington Avenue (for most of its length)

Our thoughts: We have concerns that the “Complete Corridors” concept does not get at the biggest fundamental barrier to more and safer bicycling in the city—namely that the majority of crashes happen on commercial streets and that the majority of destinations are on streets where bicycle facilities are being left off and connections to adjacent bicycle-friendly streets are not fully integrated. In order to improve safety, encourage more bicycling, and support vibrant commercial areas, we feel that the plan should do more to provide bicycle access to commercial areas.

2. “Negative impacts”

What the draft says: “The city has attempted to draft a plan that when implemented meets the needs of as many bicyclists as possible without creating negative impacts for those who live or work in a given improvement area” (page 1-7).

Our thoughts: This statement assumes a “bicyclists-versus-everyone-else” mentality. It also doesn’t allow for a comprehensive evaluation of the costs and benefits of a proposal, including the potential for a bike project to support broad city goals like sustainability. Every transportation project—from bike lanes, to light rail, to roads—has positive and negative impacts; worthwhile projects are ones where the benefits significantly outweigh the negatives and justify the costs. If the city were to follow a no-negative-impacts policy for roads in general, they would never be able to change any roads period. This statement would greatly hinder the potential for bike-supportive projects in the city while holding bike projects to a different standard than other projects.

3. Greenways

What the draft says: Not much.

Our thoughts: Given the broad success of the Midtown Greenway, more emphasis should be put on the potential for additional greenway-type projects (see <http://www.tcgreenways.org/> for information).

4. The “vision”

What the draft says: “All bicyclists enjoy a welcoming environment; riding safely, efficiently, and conveniently within the City of Minneapolis year-round” (page 1-5).

Our thoughts: This statement implies that this plan is only for bicyclists. The vision—and the rest of the plan—needs to reflect the broad value of bicycling to the city as a whole rather solely for bicyclists.

5. Safety

What the draft says: “Safety is considered first and foremost” (page 1-6).

Our thoughts: More can be done in the plan to address safety. The bicycle crashes map on page 5-43 should form the starting point for a crash analysis section that evaluates the potential reasons for higher crash rates and recommends ways to improve safety on the streets with the largest problems. It is also worth noting that while safety is certainly very important it should not drive all bicycle projects.

6. Project prioritization

What the draft says: Starting on page 7-23, the plan offers a detailed matrix of potential projects rated with a simple “yes” or “no” to nine criteria ranging from “increase mode share” to “cost effectiveness.” Based on these ratings, six projects have been labeled as “Tier 1” (see a map of those projects at <http://netdensity.net/2010/08/22/1142/>) while the remaining projects are labeled as “Tier 2.” The sole difference between most Tier 1 and Tier 2 projects is whether operations and maintenance funds are identified.

Our thoughts: The current rating system is too simplified to be meaningful. Of course these projects should improve safety and increase biking, but the range of potential will vary quite significantly and the rating system needs to be able to reflect that. We suggest a more refined rating system that ranks projects from 1-5, so as to provide a higher level of precision for the analysis than is currently the case. There should also be a list of projects prioritized for the next five years. These should be projects where the road is already being worked on or where the bicycle-focused investment would lead to the greatest return—like eliminating gaps. We are very concerned that the current criteria require eligible projects to be in an approved plan because this would limit the ability to take on potential projects on any of the commercial streets we mentioned earlier or other potential unforeseen projects that may come forward. While planning is important, it cannot be expected to cover every possibility.

7. Barriers

What the draft says: The plan focuses on the barriers of maintenance and capital costs.

Our thoughts: While cost barriers are certainly important and must be addressed, the plan needs to directly discuss other existing barriers to implementation, which include state road design standards (which limit the flexibility in many areas to add bike lanes) and potential neighborhood opposition.

8. Implementation

What the draft says: “The infrastructure capital projects identified in this plan will require an additional \$500 million to complete and an additional \$300,000 per year will be needed for maintenance. Non-infrastructure programs will cost \$2 million per year to sustain” (page 8-1). The draft plan also talks briefly about the potential for bicycle projects as part of regularly funded road improvement projects.

Our thoughts: It is unclear where the cost estimates come from, which makes it harder to evaluate how to best spend public dollars to support implementation of the plan. We feel that additional resources are needed, but that the city should first and foremost ensure that it maximizes the potential of existing resources to support bicycling. To help achieve that, the city should ensure that every road project—from new construction to repaving—follows a consistent review process to evaluate the potential to add bike lanes, sharrows, or other bike-friendly facilities. It is unclear at this point that such a rigorous and consistent evaluation exists. We also feel that to maximize the value of this plan, the city should have full-time bicycle coordinator responsible for coordinating the implementation of this plan (in addition to other staff who will be involved). This staff member needs to have a clear mandate, political support, the authority to advocate for bicycling, and be able to coordinate work across multiple departments.

9. Funding

What the draft says: “The city will... need to consider new funding sources, including bicycle user fees, advertising, and endowments” (page 8-1) and then offers a fairly comprehensive list of ideas.

Our thoughts: We oppose any source that makes bicycling more expensive for low-income residents (for example, a bicycle registration fee). The plan needs to explicitly recognize that property taxes fund the vast majority of city transportation investments and that people who benefit from bicycle projects pay property taxes like everyone else. The draft seems to hold bicycle projects to a higher funding requirement than other projects. It is unclear how the city will evaluate funding sources or the timeline.