



KEVIN KAMENETZ
County Executive

ANDREA VAN ARSDALE, *Director*
Department of Planning

July 23, 2015

Mr. Nate Evans, Executive Director
Bike Maryland
101 W. Ridgely Road, Suite 4A
Lutherville, MD 21093

Liz Cornish, Executive Director
Bikemore

Dear Mr. Evans and Ms. Cornish:

Thank you very much for contacting County Executive Kevin Kamenetz with your concerns and suggestions about the Towson Loop and Towson Spokes bicycle improvements. Mr. Kamenetz has asked me to respond on his behalf.

As you know, Baltimore County adopted the Eastern and Western Bicycle Access plans in 2006 and 2012, respectively. The county is aware of the many benefits that come from making communities more bicycle-friendly, and is making efforts to improve bicycling conditions for its residents. Comments from citizens are always welcome, and we appreciate that you have proposed specific proposals for us to consider.

Retrofitting a large, mature suburban jurisdiction for bicycle use is a challenging task. In many ways, it is more difficult than doing so in an urban environment such as Baltimore City or New York City. Baltimore County's roadways were constructed following the suburban, hierarchical model, where local residential streets feed into collectors that feed into arterials. The streets purposefully don't interconnect to protect the residential streets from through traffic. Conversely, urban streets form an interconnected grid network where users of streets have many options to get to destinations. The higher densities and variety of land uses also more readily support other travel modes including walking and using transit.

Removing motor vehicle lanes or parking lanes on suburban streets creates a greater impact than on urban streets due to the suburban auto-oriented road structure. There are no interconnected parallel roads that can absorb the lost capacity. With lower densities and the need to make longer trips, there are few efficient alternatives such as walking or using transit.

There is also a difference in the culture and expectation of suburban dwellers versus urban ones. City dwellers are more accustomed to traffic congestion and lack of parking, whereas many residents who made Baltimore County their home chose to live here to enjoy quieter streets with plenty of parking.

Even with these challenges, the county is attempting to create a shift from an automobile-dominated transportation system to one that is multi-modal, but it will take time. As it has been in other jurisdictions, including the urban ones, it takes the small contingent of advanced riders to create a bicycle presence, and as ridership grows, continual improvements can be made to the system. Your suggestions

may be worthy goals for the County to pursue as it improves its bicycle system over time. But for now, we need to ensure that the improvements do not create substantial negative impacts on motor traffic capacity, which supports nearly 90% of our workforce.

Please be assured that Baltimore County is not proposing any bicycle project that “endangers lives just to stay under budget.” Baltimore County is following AASHTO and MUTCD guidelines for bicycles. Bicycles are legally permitted on all roadways, and the improvements being proposed will help motorists be aware of that fact. By directing bicyclists to designated roads, we can begin to build ridership and start the process of transforming the dominant auto-oriented culture to one that accepts bicycling as a legitimate user of the road.

Also, planning for improving bicycle use requires a multi-pronged approach that includes not only the physical engineering improvements, but also training, encouragement and enforcement. Bike Maryland and Bikemore are in unique positions to help support the county’s efforts with training and encouragement programs. Given the structure of the county’s land uses and road network, it is not really possible to create a bicycle system for novice users, at least in the short term. Through the outreach completed as part of the development of the county’s pedestrian and bicycle access plans, we learned that most people would rather build their skills on offroad trails before attempting to engage in onroad cycling. The county’s pedestrian and bicycle access plan has attempted to identify those roads that have lower amounts of traffic, and that can be connected together to form a network providing access to destinations important to cyclists. Even with separated bicycle facilities, cyclists will need to mix with motor vehicles at intersections at some point. Less experienced cyclists need to have training and encouragement to build their confidence in navigating roads with traffic.

Specific responses to your suggestions are as follows:

1. With private off-street parking available to residents, evaluate parking consolidation on Kenilworth Road between West Road and Charles Street and Cromwell Bridge Road between Providence Road and Cowpens Road.

While most houses on these streets have driveways that provide stacked parking for two vehicles, additional vehicles and guest parking must use the street. In addition, we have found that many homes used to have one or two cars, but today we are finding more and more homes have upward of 3 to 5 cars per household. On-street parking is not only an expected convenience for county residents and more of a necessity today, its removal will not be supported by most residents.

2. Remove the center turn lane on Kenilworth Drive between West Road and Bosley Avenue and replace with a bike lane in each direction

A center turn lane is needed for left turning vehicles, and in particular, for larger vehicles accessing the jail, school (buses) and apartment complex. A sharrow marking is proposed instead which will allow bicycles to distance themselves from the parked vehicles lining this stretch to avoid being “doored”.

3. Extend bike lanes on Putty Hill Avenue from Loch Raven Boulevard to Goucher Boulevard. Intersections are typically the most dangerous areas for all roadway users. Adding bike lanes to these areas will improve safety for all.

The congestion from Lasalle to Goucher and the pavement width do not provide enough room for the addition of bike lanes. At the signalized intersection of Putty Hill and Goucher, there are 2 eastbound thru lanes with 2 receiving lanes. There are parking restrictions that are in effect during pm peak hours on the south side of Putty Hill east of the Calvert Hall driveway to Lasalle to accommodate heavy peak hour traffic volumes, therefore removal of a lane would affect traffic flows.

4. Transform outer motor vehicle travel lane to buffer for bike lane on Bosley Avenue from Kenilworth to Towsontown Boulevard, which still provides for two motor vehicle travel lanes and left turn lanes. Bosley Avenue will need to be resurfaced after the water main replacement which provides an opportunity for a buffered bike lane.

Three vehicle travel lanes are needed to meet the current traffic demands. The future construction of the Towson Row, 101 York Road and other major developments in the area will only add to the current traffic congestion levels. The removal of traffic lanes simply is not feasible.

5. Remove all Bike Routes signs where bike lanes do not exist as these provide a false sense of comfort for novice cyclists.

The bike routes signs are being used to mark the preferred route for bicyclists to use to get to specific destinations. It is, at least, a way to alert motorists that there is a higher expectation for bicyclists to be present on the particular route than on other roads. It is also a way to encourage more bicyclists to use the route, and eventually to build a bicycle presence on the road that will help to change the unfriendly attitudes of many motorists towards bicyclists.

6. Transform a motor vehicle lane into a bike lane on both Pennsylvania Avenue and Chesapeake Avenue making central Towson more accessible by bike.

Pennsylvania Avenue and Chesapeake Avenue are not part of the Towson Spokes or the Towson Loop projects. The roads were not recommended by the county's pedestrian and bicycle plan for bicycle improvements. Both roads serve the business core of Towson, which is the ultimate destination for the two bike projects. Both roads have ADTs of less than 2500, and operate at a Bicycle Level of Comfort type "A," the most comfortable rating. Thus, a bicycle lane will not make bicyclists feel more comfortable. And since bicyclists will be accessing businesses on both sides of the road, or making left turns to access other streets, a large percentage won't even be using a bike lane.

7. Transform a motor vehicle lane into a bike lane on Fairmount Avenue from Towson Towne Blvd to Goucher Boulevard. A bicycle lane is essential on southbound Fairmount between Goucher Blvd and Joppa Road for people on bikes to climb this steep section.

The motor vehicle travel lanes are needed to meet current traffic demands. Removing travel lanes at signalized intersections would require additional green time added to serve a lengthened queue due to a lane removal. Because these intersections run on fixed cycle lengths, any additional time added to one leg, would need to be subtracted from another. In this case it would be subtracted from the main streets, which would adversely affect traffic flows. Additionally, as noted in #4 above, future developments in this area will only exacerbate the current situation.

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You also expressed concern that the Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee was not given the opportunity to review the county's plans prior to making them public. Please be aware that the duties of the Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee do not include review of the county's project plans, but any comments and suggestions are certainly welcome as part of the citizen review.

On behalf of County Executive Kevin Kamenetz, thank you for your comments on the Towson Spokes Project and other suggestions for bicycle improvements. Your interest in improving the quality of life for Baltimore County citizens is appreciated. I am hopeful that the County can work together with Bike Maryland and Bikemore to help improve conditions for bicyclists.

Sincerely,



Kathy Schlabach
Chief, Strategic Planning Division