

## Bicycle and Pedestrian Action Plan, Plan and Policy Context

Increasing bicycle and pedestrian use has been a goal of the Town of Chapel Hill for many years. The following gives a summary of the history of planning policy and initiatives aimed at the provision of bicycle and pedestrian facilities in Chapel Hill. The documents outlined were produced by the Town of Chapel Hill unless otherwise stated.

**The 1977 Bikeway Concept Plan** was to establish a radial/ circumferential system of facilities linking origins and destinations in the town. It identified four types of bikeways: Grade Separated Bike Paths - paths separate from the roadway, Bike Lanes - marked travel lanes on existing roads, Bike Routes - posted routes suggested for bicycle travel and, Greenway Bike Paths.

**The 1979 Community Facilities Report** included seven bikeway projects from the 1977 plan for inclusion in the Town's Capital Improvements Program. Grade separated bike paths were constructed along sections of Airport Road, East Franklin Street, and Raleigh Road (Although these paths do not meet current North Carolina Department of Transportation standards for off road paths they are well used by cyclists and pedestrians). An off road path was also constructed between Cleland Road and Ridgefield Road parallel to 15-501 North Fordham Boulevard. Shared bike lanes/parking facilities were also identified on Country Club Road and Cameron Avenue.

**The 1982 Sidewalk Plan** provided a comprehensive approach to sidewalk planning in Chapel Hill. The plan examined the current conditions and the need for sidewalks by analyzing the Town's street network and major pedestrian origins and destinations. It outlined a proposed sidewalk plan and suggested standards which would form the basis for the plan. The plan discussed implementation through ordinance revisions, petitions, and a town construction program. It also recommended criteria for determining priorities and divided sidewalks into four classifications. The appendices contained detailed analyses of each street in the plan including existing sidewalks, worn paths,

traffic volumes, topographic problems, pedestrian generators, speed limits roadway and right-of-way widths, and anticipated street widening. Most of the sidewalks identified have now been constructed.

**The 1989 Comprehensive Transportation Report** of the Comprehensive Plan included a **1988 Bikeway Concept Plan** which identified a system of facilities connecting residential areas and employment centers made up of grade separated bike paths, marked bicycle travel lanes and streets signed as bike routes. Bicycle travel lanes were the chief component of the concept plan. In the Town center they were envisioned for Rosemary Street, Cameron Avenue, Columbia Street, Pittsboro Street and Airport Road. Outside of the town center they were envisioned for arterial streets corresponding to the Town's thoroughfare plan. The Comprehensive Transportation Report recommended the provision of signs to alert motorists, guidelines for the provision of bicycle parking facilities, bicyclist and motorist education, route maps, promotion of a "bike to work day", enforcement of vehicular regulations and methods to fund improvements.

The 1989 report also reviewed progress on the 1982 Sidewalk plan and recommended:

1. Sidewalks should be constructed adjacent to all Town streets as Local Class A or higher.
2. Existing sidewalks should be linked with each other.
3. Sidewalks should be constructed along roadways that are heavily utilized by pedestrians and lack adequate roadway width or shoulder width to provide safe pedestrian movement.
4. Future pedestrian ways should be constructed or paved rather than gravel surfaces. Brick should be used to replace gravel pathways in the residential areas surrounding the Town Center area.
5. The design review process should ensure that access within mixed-use developments and between adjacent developments ensures convenient, efficient and barrier-free pedestrian movement.

**The 1993 Regional Bicycle Plan** of Durham and Orange County was produced by consultants Greenways incorporated for the Transportation

Advisory Committee of the Durham Carrboro Chapel Hill Metropolitan Urban Area. The plan identifies engineering, educational, encouragement and enforcement actions for the following twenty years in five year phases. A stated goal of the Plan is to establish a comprehensive regional bicycle network.

**The 1994 Pedestrian Plan** focused on policies and guidelines for the provision of pedestrian facilities by the Town and developers. It identified as a key objective the development of a pedestrian implementation plan, and a specific and graphic plan of action turning guidelines into a system of pedestrian facilities including:

- Identification of pedestrian origin and destination nodes.
- Mapping of all existing and proposed pedestrian facilities.
- Graphic representation of the relationships between components of the system such as sidewalks, paths, easements, greenways and transit.
- Development of a comprehensive implementation plan, schedule and estimated costs for pedestrian improvements Town-wide, as well as specific proposals for funding.
- Coordination of pedestrian plans with bicycle plans and traffic calming techniques where appropriate.

**The 1998 Greenways Comprehensive Master Plan.** This plan identifies over 38 miles of linear space as potential greenways. The perennial streams located in Chapel Hill form the heart of a network. Highway corridors, rail corridors, ridges and park land all contribute to the system. Within the greenways, bicycle and pedestrian use is proposed. "Over 28 miles of the Town's greenway corridors are suitable for development of paved and unpaved trails. A variety of trail types are proposed to suit specific recreational and transportation priorities and specific site conditions. Trails may range from natural surface foot paths and boardwalks utilized to negotiate sensitive or difficult site conditions to paved pedestrian and bicycle trails offering maximum recreational and transportation use." (p. vii Plan summary)

**The 1999 Orange County Bicycle Transportation Plan** is the Bicycle Transportation Component of the Orange County Comprehensive Plan. This is a plan intended to develop transportation facilities and programs for bicyclists. The plan seeks to provide facilities between the urban areas within and adjacent to Orange County and to provide bicycle transportation access from rural areas to adjacent urban areas.

**The 2000 Comprehensive Plan** (please see Chapter 2 for details)

**Land Use Management Ordinance.** This provides the legal basis for the regulation of development as provided in the North Carolina General Statutes and the Town Charter. The design of street systems and regulation of traffic are described in Section 5.8. This includes not only vehicular access, but also facilities for bicycle and pedestrian access. Section 5.9 includes off street bicycle parking standards for new development.

**The Town Manual and Standard Details** These provide information which clarifies and illustrates the requirements contained in the Land Use Management Ordinance.

**Code of Ordinances. Traffic Code. (See Appendix 2)**

- **Section .21-3. Operation of bicycles, skateboards, rollers skates, and scooters on certain public streets.** This section prohibits operation of the above on sidewalks along Rosemary Street and Franklin Street west from Robertson lane to the town boundary and also on Columbia Street between Rosemary Street and Franklin Street.
- **Article VI. Bicycles. Sections 21-41 to 21-62.** This Article provides provisions for the operation of bicycles in the Town of Chapel Hill.

**Bicycle Facilities Policy**

On September 24, 2001, the Town Council considered a report on issues of wide outside lanes and striped bicycle lanes including the recommendations from the Town Manager, Transportation Board and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board for a policy for the construction of bicycle

facilities.

The Town Council adopted a bicycle facilities policy on that date which had a presumption in favor of providing wide outside lanes on arterial and collector streets within Chapel Hill. Striped bicycle lanes could be provided where a series of conditions were met.

On March 3, 2003, and June 17, 2003, the Transportation Board presented petitions to the Town Council to change the bicycle facilities policy. The Transportation Board argued that the conditions for providing striped bicycle lanes were too strenuous and that bicycle lanes were preferred by potential cyclists as a means to encourage more citizens to bicycle. On May 20, 2003 the Transportation Board and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board held a joint meeting to reach a consensus on this matter. However, consensus was not reached. During the summer of 2003, Council Members Harrison and Ward worked with Town staff to formulate a revised bicycle facilities policy which would be acceptable to both Boards. On October 28, 2003 and November 4, 2003 the respective Boards endorsed the revised policy.

On 10 November, 2003 the Town Council adopted a revised bicycle facilities policy at and directed the Town Manager to utilize this policy in reviewing development plans and in the design of roadway improvements within the Chapel Hill Planning Jurisdiction. The policy recognizes that:

*“ There are variable circumstances exist in the Town of Chapel Hill such as topography, vehicle speed and volume, impediments such as parked vehicles, drainage grates or raised reflectors, access to public facilities and activity centers and available right of way.”*

And states that:

- *Within the Planning Jurisdiction of the Town of Chapel Hill, the appropriate design, type and width of bicycle facilities will be assessed on an individual and site-specific basis depending on the circumstances that exist.*
- *Striped bicycle lanes will normally be provided on newly constructed or reconstructed Arterial Streets;*

*however, when existing Arterial Streets that do not currently have bicycle lanes are resurfaced they will normally be re-striped with bicycle lanes to the extent practicable.*

• *Either striped bicycle lanes or wide outside lanes may be appropriate on Collector Streets depending on site specific circumstances.*

*Local Streets will not normally include extra width for bicycle facilities.*

### ***Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board***

Preparation of a long-range Action Plan was included in the Council’s charge to the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board when it was established in 1999. The specific powers and duties of the Board are described in Chapter 2, Article XII, of the Town Code, and include:

- a. Advise the Council regarding the creation, development, and revision of a phased Walks and Bikeways Master Plan.
- b. Set priorities for new facilities or enhancement of existing routes in the Walks and Bikeways Master Plan.
- c. Identify and prioritize critical gaps in facilities; advise which critical gaps require Town action.

### ***Staff level Bicycle and Pedestrian Oversight Committee***

The 1994 Pedestrian Plan recommended the establishment of a Staff level Bicycle and Pedestrian Oversight Committee to monitor and coordinate pedestrian issues. A committee comprising representatives from the Town’s Planning Engineering, Public Works, and Parks and Recreation Departments, meets quarterly for this purpose.

### ***State Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)***

The strategic roads in the Town are generally State maintained. Alterations and improvements are controlled and largely financed by the State. The Town lies within the Durham, Chapel Hill, and Carrboro Metropolitan Urban area and is therefore a member of the DCHC Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Federal Highway Funds are administered by the State and some are allocated to member organizations through the

MPO. The funds are programmed in the State Transportation Improvement Program (6 year program) which incorporates the Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program (6 year program). The programs are reviewed every 2 years and the preparation, community input and approval process takes 2 years. The allocation and timing of improvements to State roads such as Estes Drive, Airport Road and Weaver Dairy Road are largely controlled by the State. The State also has the final say on the standards and design of facilities on State maintained highways.

***Capital Improvement Program (CIP)***

The Capital Improvements Program is a 15-year plan to fund capital projects that are selected based on a set of priorities and anticipated availability of funding. The program emphasizes maintenance projects at Town facilities, with the goal of addressing problems as they arise in order to avoid more costly repairs in the future. Funds for the construction of bicycle and pedestrian facilities may be included in the program.

***Annual Construction Plan and Ranking System***

The Town's current practice is to hold an annual public forum in the fall to receive citizen comments, including requests for new sidewalk and bicycle facilities. Requests for sidewalks are assessed using the Council's adopted sidewalk ranking system. This is a two-step system. The first step involves quantitatively ranking the sidewalk project list based on a series of factors. This ranking system is intended to be used as a "general guide" for identifying potential sidewalk projects. The second step is to work from this list and consider other factors, such as existing or available right-of-way, construction feasibility, and immediacy of need, to determine a list of new sidewalk projects for each fiscal year. By considering these other factors, projects other than those at the top of the ranking list could be chosen for funding and construction.

Typically, the Council focuses on projects that generally appear as higher priority projects in the sidewalk ranking system. However, the Council also takes into account the following feasibility criteria to evaluate sidewalk projects:

- Significant safety issues;
- Recognition of fiscal restraints;
- Reasonableness of costs compared to benefit attained;
- Efficient coordination of resources when other construction projects are underway;
- Consideration of prior commitments;
- Contributions of funds from an outside source to help defray costs;
- Distribution of funding throughout the Town; and
- Most efficient balance of use of Town forces and outside contractors.