

Whatcom County Bicycle-Pedestrian Advisory Committee
April 21, 2021

Meeting called to order at 5:46 pm

Members present: Patrick Alesse, Sunny Beaver, Stephen Zylstra, Sonja Max, Pete Sharp, Kelly Kendall, Sam Janis, Brian Johnson, Robin Thomas

Staff Present: Jason Ardt (Public Works)

Member(s) of the Public: Doralee Booth (Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce secretary), Chuck Kinzer, Carol Donovan and Sandy Phillips

Approval of Minutes from March 17 meeting: Gary moved to approve. Sunny seconded Approved unanimously.

Public Comment regarding Birch Bay berm:

Doralee: thrilled with what we have. The challenge is how to use and manage it. Birch Bay is “resort, residential, recreation”. It was initially billed as a pedestrian-only path and bike would ride on the road in the enhanced 2-3’ lane. But the width of the berm changed to 12’ or so and became designated interurban. We are looking for guidance from BPAC.

Chuck: is against the intent to have bikes on the berm due to safety issues. Wants signs indicating only pedestrians. As the summer evolves behaviors will get habituated so we need to create framework now. Racing bikes will cause divots in the dirt.

Carol Donovan: thanks Doralee. Expresses worry about getting hit on the path by bikes. We need a decision quickly. Suggests signage about yielding, signaling, staying right if bikes allowed.

Doralee: kids on bikes riding in the street isn’t a good idea either. It’s a balancing act.

Gary: expresses empathy for the community and recognizes worry, specifically about e bikes (speed)

Patrick: doesn’t want bikes on the berm. Maybe kids. Expresses concern about vacationers/people not familiar causing incidents.

Stephen: relates experience on multi-modal paths elsewhere i.e. Portland, and that there is a natural regulation between user groups enabling co-existence in a safe manner

Sonja: agrees about self regulation. Suggested a possible field trip. We need a safe alternative for cyclists. Many people may want to ride bikes but some only on a separated, safe path.

Doralee: views the concern about bikes to some degree as a hysteria of sorts in that it’s new to everyone and people are trying to figure it out. New things to get used to but will work out with time and signage.

Brian: what are the facts? Was it promised as a pedestrian path?

Jason: The original design was a 5-foot wide pedestrian path. The Hearing Examiner approved the change in width and it was changed to a roughly 12-foot wide path, which is what was built.

Pete: Racing bikes ridden by serious riders won't be on the berm. There are few grade separated paths in the county and should not exclude user groups if at all possible (we're all looking to recreate and have fun). Similar promenades/boardwalks in other places have multi-modal use. Even though some people are holding onto the path being billed as pedestrian only in the beginning, there are countless county residents and visitors who will want to enjoy this path multi-modally. We can't discount this vast majority just because they were not privy to or interested in the planning of this path.

Sonja: signs for now is the plan. She and/or Stephen will draw up recommendation for signage and generally how to handle people on bicycles.

Bike parking

Gary talked about his research into county bike parking options. Talked about different entities and their respective approach; Birch Bay 1 space per 1,000 sq ft or minimum 1 space. The marina says it should be commensurate with demand. Gary wants to propose a requirement for retail, multi family housing (housing with 5+ units for example). Questions whether motels, parks public buildings, churches, restaurants should be included and how.

Patrick likes the idea and Gary's effort.

Sonja ponders whether it should be based on occupancy.

Stephen wants us to consider the actual type of bike parking since some antiquated rack types aren't conducive to bike parking/locking.

Gary will be referencing: Bicycle parking Guidelines 2nd edition published by APBP- Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle professionals.

Whidbey Island multi-use trail plan

Stephen: Island County has developed a Whidbey Island bike map showing recommended bike routes and it is color coded to indicate safety levels. This map can be used to inform the similar BPAC map being produced for Whatcom County. Stephen talked to Catherine Kelly, program manager at Island County who mentioned a 2.1-mile fully separated paved path that has evolved over the years. This trail runs between Ebey State Park and Rhododendron State Park, and passes near the town of Coupeville. "It's an example of what can be done with agencies and a community working well together".

Robin says that it's a part of the Pacific Northwest Trail and the county has a huge right of way that enables such a great path. "The vision is for it to go all down the island".

-In Island County, the transportation staff does the planning/design and rank out these trail projects, then the county board votes on which to fund each year. And Public Works does the construction and maintenance on the separated trails

Stephen noted that he likes the idea of BPAC working closely with transportation planning to create and design non-motorized path projects as part of a larger transportation strategy, then when a project is approved by the county commissioners and put on the TIP, BPAC can assist in finding grants to fund the project and ultimately Public Work could implement construction and maintenance

Wynn Road connector

Stephen and Sonja went on a walkabout trying to identify some semblance of a trail possibility to connect Wynn Rd from the south through the DNR land to Wynn Rd to the north. Gary had mentioned this at a prior meeting as something he was curious about and interested in exploring. However, it was much swampier than anticipated says Stephen and Sonja. The ponds are deep and numerous. There is a route of sorts to the east but goes through airport property and it's heavily overgrown with blackberries. At this time, such a trail doesn't seem feasible. Gary wonders about a raised trail/boardwalk. Sonja says that to get approval from DNR and other necessary entities there would likely need to be evidence of a previous trail to make it possible.

Near miss

Pete described a scary incident while he was riding in the county. A big truck lost control and veered into the narrow bit of pavement to the right of the fogline and encroached onto the grass just after Pete had, by chance, decided to get off the road for a break. Otherwise, he would have kept riding expecting the truck would maintain control and steer safely around him. If he hadn't gotten off the road to take the break he would have been hit. He had his bright rear taillight on for safety during the day but this incident goes to show that despite all precautions, people on bikes are inherently at risk when sharing pavement with motorized vehicles. A bike lane or bigger shoulder is always better but can only do so much. Grade separation is the only true safe approach.

Bicycle Route map update

Sonja has been working on the map on a different mapping software. Based on levels of traffic stress. Wanting to know of any recommended modifications from our respective "homework" riding assigned routes.

Sonja pointed out there was some redundancy with routes and what to get rid of. For example, Bellingham to Ferndale—get rid of the Curtis Rd. option. All in agreement with this.

Also, between Ferndale and Birch Bay, there was a suggestion to move the route off Bay Rd. and instead following Bruce/Arnie/Ham and agreement was found here as well.

Stephen asked about increased signage. Jason says that in his experience with public works information gets lost with too much signage but maybe painting the pavement to designate lanes.

Jason took this opportunity to explain that the county's budget is about 1/3 of City of Bellingham's but yet has 3 times the amount of lane miles. "This is why we have to say no sometimes".

Discussion ensued about grant monies pursued. Jason says they are always seeking grants to offset costs i.e. the recent Marine Dr. improvements

Meeting adjourned at 7:45pm