

Regional Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee Sept 5, 2017

Present: David Holladay, Jeremy Holmes, Jim Lee, Jerod Meyers, Anita McMillan, Renee Powers, Mark Jamison, Kelly Fomenko, Bryce Johnson, Lindsay Webb, Pete Eshelman, Jeff Collignon, Christopher Blakeman, Ben Bristol, Andrea Garland, Liz Belcher, Barb Duerk

Staff: Rachel Ruhlen, Amanda McGee, Cristina Finch

Discussion of committee purpose

Background:

Several months ago, staff asked about adding Pedestrian to the Bicycle Advisory Committee. They then discovered that in the RVTPO Unified Planning Work Program, the committee has always been the Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee. The committee asked for further clarification from the Transportation Technical Committee. The Technical Committee observed that they need to know the purpose of the committee before determining if it should be just bicycle or both bicycle & pedestrian. Staff created a short survey for the Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee members to assess how the committee can be useful to them and their agencies and to solicit specific work items. Staff summarized the responses and asked members of the summary captures all the responses.

The committee discussion of its purpose has been on the agenda but due to rain or time, was never fully discussed. Therefore, the entire 9/5/2017 meeting was devoted to this topic. The following summary compiles the brief discussions at the previous meetings (8/1/2017 and 5/23/2017) and the in-depth discussion (9/5/2017). (Pete Peters, Frank Rogan, and many of those present at the 9/5/2017 meeting participated in those earlier brief discussions.) These organic, free-range conversations are summarized here by topic rather than chronology.

History:

Several members shared historical perspective.

- The committee was a forum for bicyclists to communicate with the Blue Ridge Parkway and VDOT. An example of a result of this is the bicycle accommodations on Cotton Hill Rd.
- In the early days when no one had much experience with bicycle facilities, the committee provided input. For example, Plantation Rd. Roanoke City received feedback through this committee on its earliest bicycle facilities.
- The City's Bicycle Friendly Community application launched this committee, and that gave it structure until the application was finished, after which the committee waned. In the BFC days, committee members included fire fighters, police, and schools.
- The committee gave legitimacy to ideas presented to the higher administration or other agencies.
- The committee has been strongly bicycle-centric, referred to in plans and on the website as Bicycle Advisory Committee. Bicycling is an economic driver, and walking was not seen as such.
- There was some perception that the committee has been city-centric, for example the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation counts have all been in the city. However, it has had participation and members from different localities and from businesses.

- The committee has reported to the Transportation Technical Committee.
- One member praised RVARC staff for their efforts to reinvigorate the committee after staff turnover and continuity disruption.
- What is missing from the discussion is that the history of the Regional Bicycle Advisory Committee is disappearing. Regardless of how the group was listed in the UPWP, the title of the committee, and how it was presented to the committee members, and most importantly, how it was presented to the public, was always the Regional Bicycle Advisory Committee¹.

Purpose:

Several members of both this committee and the Transportation Technical Committee at various discussions have stated that the question of bike vs. bike/ped is secondary to the larger purpose of the committee. This theme continued with an emphasis on the *regional* and *diverse* make-up of the group. One person felt that the most important word in the committee's name is *Regional*.

Some benefits of regionalism:

- A locality can make a better case for a grant by showing that a proposed facility ties into a *regional* network.
- A grant with partners (i.e. two localities) is stronger than one.
- A plan and regional network can influence a developer to build a connection (to get their project approved), prompt staff to request the connection from the developer, or prompt a planning & zoning commission to require a developer to build a connection. This is especially important for localities lacking a Complete Streets policy.

Benefits:

Some committee members addressed the benefits of having an advisory committee (bike or bike/ped).

- Nationally, it is a transportation "Best Practice".
- A "safe space" to talk about projects.
 - Forum for transportation users to give suggestions where a small modification could make a dramatic difference for the user.
 - Forum to share results, feedback after a project. A new facility doesn't need to wait 20 years for a tweak that would make it better.
 - Helpful for citizens to have access to staff in this committee in addition to the project-specific outreach activities in localities.
 - Discuss collaborative projects that are sometimes prickly
- Forum for localities to share knowledge and experiences. For example, the Garden City Greenway field trip highlighted new approaches to right-of-way acquisition.
- Important to plans, such as Plantation Rd and 419.
- Develop regional network.
- Long-time members are proud of the role this committee has played in the communities' accomplishments.

Role:

Some members described the role this committee can play or has played.

¹ Staff restored the outdated information to the website to preserve the historical record.

- Localities or agencies solicit specific advice from the committee. For example, identifying where we need more signed bike routes and how we could improve the signs with distance and time.
- Subject matter experts. Localities have gained experience since the early days, still benefit from information sharing. The easy projects are done, this committee can help overcome the challenges coming up.
- Coordination
 - Regional
 - Coordination among diverse initiatives promoting active living.
 - Outreach and provide resources to bike shops, civic groups, i.e. Izaak Walton League or the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.
- Help localities identify needs, develop solutions, and prioritize solutions.
- The word “advocacy” was used a lot, but it became clear that it meant different things to different people:
 - Represent the perspective of users of the facilities to the builders of the facilities.
 - Represent the perspective of staff (i.e., right-of-way, regulatory, or funding constraints) to the users of the facilities.
 - Lobby for state legislation
 - Lobbying is not appropriate for this group, but we can support efforts of other groups by providing information and education.
 - Make technical recommendations and technical endorsements.
- Recreation²
 - Several members value the economic impact of recreational bicycling.
 - Urban bicycling was described as city-centric and mountain biking as an economic driver.
 - Several members expressed a desire to have more mountain bike interests present, such as RIMBA, bike shops, mountain bike clubs.

A question came up about overlap between this committee and the Greenway Commission. The Greenway Commission is represented on this committee so that work is coordinated, not duplicated. For example, this committee could provide input on the Greenway Plan update that the Greenway Commission oversees.

Bike vs. Bike/Ped:

Some members wondered why this committee hadn't been involved in the Pedestrian Vision Plan or the Sidewalk Inventory. Staff explained that prior staff had made those decisions, and current staff weren't aware until recently that the Unified Planning Work Program refers to the committee as “Pedestrian & Bicycle”.

Several people felt pedestrian issues are very important and should be a part of this committee.

- Bike and ped safety overlap. Present a unified front.
- There is a lot of interest from many directions, such as health and aging, in walkable, livable communities.

² According to VDOT guidance, recreational off-road mountain biking and hiking is not in the TPO's purview.

- Staff from smaller localities and citizens appreciate having a single committee, don't have the resources to attend a bicycle meeting and a pedestrian meeting.
- According to a discussion on the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals listserv, smaller cities like Roanoke tend to have a single bicycle and pedestrian committee. Staff agree that we don't have the resources to staff separate committees. VDOT integrated bike/ped in 2013.

Others hesitate to dilute or weaken the bicycle focus.

- Many don't mind addressing pedestrian issues as long as bicycle is the bigger part of the discussion.
- Bicycle travel is regional, pedestrian travel is city-centric.
- Reversing the words "pedestrian" and "bicycle" would express incorporating pedestrian issues while maintaining the bicycle focus: Regional Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee.

Many don't care what the name of the committee is.

Action Plan³:

Many members expressed a desire for an annual action plan for the committee. Comments about an action plan included:

- Essential for meaningful experience of committee members.
- Committee members need to see that their ideas shape plans and that plans becomes reality.
- The action plan sets out actionable items that have tangible results.
- Once we complete tasks, who does it go to? One person suggested the Transportation Technical Committee.
- Prevents the committee from devolving into an exercise of listening to routine staff reports with little input or participation.

A few suggested Action Plan tasks:

- Advise on Bike Share station locations.
- Solve bike/ped facility maintenance issue in counties.
- Shepherd plans through implementation.
- Update Bikeway Plan (due 2022)
- Update Pedestrian Vision Plan (due 2024)
- Update Sidewalk Inventory
- Develop a Loop-the-Valley route

Who:

Some discussion addressed the make-up of the committee.

- A repeated comment was a desire to see more citizens and non-staff.
 - A majority of citizens, businesses, and advocates.
 - Agencies representing people who rely on walking and bicycling, such as people who are homeless.

³ During the conversation, the topic was referred to as the work plan. "Work plan" has been confused with the Unified Planning Work Program several times. Staff recommend another term, such as "Action Plan".

- Citizens know the missing links between the bike routes and the transit and pedestrian network.
- One member requested a network map of users. A network map would illuminate overlap between this committee and the Greenway Commission.

Other topics

During the discussion on the purpose of the committee, the topic of bike/ped facility maintenance in counties came up. VDOT bike/ped policy pertains only to building (or repairing) bike/ped accommodations, but maintenance is only for roads. Counties, unlike cities and towns, don't have the ability to require and enforce property owners to keep sidewalks and multiuse paths clear of snow, vegetation, and debris. Roanoke County contracts with the inmate program for some maintenance, Parks & Rec does some of the Greenways, and there are a half-dozen Comprehensive Roadside Management Program sponsors. This is a small percent of what needs maintenance.

Discussion included:

- State legislation, and what constraints there may be on this committee's ability to endorse or promote specific legislation.
- Volunteer program similar to Pathfinders but would require individual volunteers to get VDOT training and VDOT permits.
- Sidewalk maintenance is an issue discussed in the Pedestrian Vision Plan.
- Leveraging stormwater management. Street sweeping is a stormwater management best practice.
- Whether or not you are a county resident, you can report county issues on <https://my.vdot.virginia.gov/>.

The committee showed interest in this problem, and it seemed like a candidate for the committee's annual action plan.