



# Executive Summary

Photo above: A girl stops to pose on the Atlantic Avenue feeder road, part of the Maritime Trail.

# Executive Summary

## **VISION**

*A new vision for bikeways and trails supports the vision which Council set for the City in the 2009 Comprehensive Plan:*

*“Virginia Beach will be a City where people can walk, run and ride anywhere safely, efficiently, and enjoyably.”*

The citizens of Virginia Beach have shown and stated consistently over the years that they want to be able to bike and walk around the City, both for recreation and for transportation alternatives. Citizens want active lifestyles that foster a healthier community; they want to avoid increasing fuel costs and reduce their dependency on motor vehicles; they want to reduce their environmental footprints; they want to reduce road congestion and the needs for roadway construction; and they want more bikeways and trails so they can do those things.

Virginia Beach’s 2009 Comprehensive Plan and its Master Transportation Plan respond to these desires generally, and this new Bikeways and Trails Plan responds to them specifically, pointing the way towards an enhanced system of bikeways and trails, plus the programs and other initiatives that support their use.

## **THE NATURE OF THE PLAN**

The Bikeways and Trails Plan is a guide – a planning document indicating what the City of Virginia Beach would like to accomplish in regards to bikeways and trails. As such, it is recognized that for any particular application the desired elements of this plan must be tempered by constraining realities to establish what bike facilities, if any, will be included with the particular application.

Therefore, in any particular application, such as when City transportation projects become active, a feasibility analysis will be performed to determine the extent, if any, to which bike facilities can be reasonably accommodated. Such analysis will consider costs, availability of funding, impacts to adjacent private properties (e.g., additional property acquisition due to bike facilities, potential for damages associated with the acquisition, and changes to access to property), impacts to public and private utilities, and other pertinent factors. The analysis will be documented and will be the basis for establishing what, if any, bike facilities will be included with the project.

When roadway improvements of an interim nature are being designed, reasonable accommodations to enhance the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists shall be included in the plans, if feasible, as dictated by project purpose, project site constraints and project budget. (Referenced in the attached Multi-Modal Accommodations Resolution approved by City Council on January 22, 2008)

Where practicable and feasible and upon availability of funding, construction of limited on-road bikeway related improvements may be evaluated and given due consideration through our roadway maintenance program for overlay and repaving operations.

## **VIRGINIA BEACH IS UNIQUE.**

Virginia Beach has numerous features which make it unique and which make this Bikeways and Trails Plan different from any other.

- Virginia Beach is a vacation town.
- Virginia Beach is mostly of a sprawling, residential suburban form – on a grand scale.

- Virginia Beach has a large, vibrant agricultural business community.
- Virginia Beach is very much a motorist's town.
- Virginia Beach is a military town.
- Virginia Beach's geography and climate make for very good biking and walking.
- Virginia Beach has a unique mix of cyclists and pedestrians.
- Virginia Beach allows bikes on sidewalks.

## **COMMUNITY INPUT (Chapter 2)**

Community input is central to the development of any public plan, and it is critical to this one.

Over the last several years, Parks and Recreation and other City departments have conducted several surveys that solicited resident feedback, including bikeways and trails issues. Most of the surveys offered statistically-valid data while other surveys offered more qualitative feedback.

The weight of the input tilts consistently in one direction: most citizens want more bikeways and trails, a better bikeways and trails system, and more transportation alternatives, and they are willing to pay for it.

The overriding objective of this Plan is to be consistent with the needs, desires, and priorities of the Virginia Beach community, so public input was sought in a variety of venues: public open houses, stakeholder meetings, technical meetings, and online surveys among them, plus briefings to City boards and commissions. The public's comments led directly to the following summary findings and later to a comprehensive list of goals and tasks.

### **Sharing the road**

- Cyclists fear cars and their drivers, especially heavy traffic and distracted drivers.
- Motorists do not respect cyclists or their rights to use the roads.
- Cyclists and motorists alike do not know or abide by the rules of the road or how to share the road.
  - Both groups need more education and more enforcement.
- Cyclists on narrow roads create hazardous situations for themselves and for motorists.
- Make crosswalks safer, including enforcement on motorists not yielding.

### **The City is not bike-friendly.**

- People want or need to get around by bike or on foot, but it is hard to do – sometimes very hard and unsafe.
- "A resort city ought to do better for its guests."
  - Improve cycling AT and TO the oceanfront but do not leave out the rest of the City.
- Include bike-ped planning in road and land development planning.
- We need a complete network:

### **Goals for the Plan**

#### **Reflect the community's needs and desires**

- What they want and what they need, where they want it and where they need it.
- Discern the community's expectations.
- Foster increased community support.

#### **Point to a brighter future**

- Better health, easier transportation, and more fun!
- Use 5-year and 20-year planning windows, but look beyond.

#### **A functional document ...**

Guide the work of planners and designers, both in-house and consultants.

- Show what to plan and design, and how to do it.
- Outline specific projects with timelines & funding.
- Improve departmental coordination for transportation planning, design and construction.
- Coordinate regionally and with neighboring localities.

#### **... for a functional system.**

- Establish performance criteria for new facilities.
- Create a system, not just a group of new facilities.

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Children parking their bikes at school.  
Photo courtesy of Bikes Belong

- more bikeways on-road (54%) and off-road (46%)
- more sidewalks and crosswalks
- more related system items like bicycle parking, signs and maps

## Connectivity

- Existing bike-ped facilities are discontinuous and disjointed. Connect them together.
- The City is like a bunch of neighborhood islands.
  - Connect neighborhoods to each other
  - Connect neighborhoods to destinations.
  - Connect destinations to each other.
- Major barriers include I-264, high-traffic roadways, and waterways.

## Other

- Fear of crime on paths
- The City does not have enough facilities for riding horses.
- Costs: how will we pay to build it all?
- Need better maintenance
- About 200 comments were suggestions about places to build bikeways and trails.



The Little Neck Trail

## **HOW THE PLAN IS ORGANIZED**

From the 1970's to the 1990's, the bike and pedestrian planning community evolved "The 5 E's" to describe how to plan bikeways, sidewalks, trails, and similar facilities. This comprehensive paradigm and its mnemonic device are recognized by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and internationally, so this new Plan is organized with a chapter for each of the 5 E's:

- **Education** teaches the rules of the road and how to ride safely
- **Encouragement** helps people see how to fit biking and walking into their lives
- **Enforcement** links users to the laws that govern their behavior
- **Engineering & Facilities** is what we build, where we build, and how we build
- **Evaluation & Planning** reviews progress and plans for ongoing needs



Virginia Capital Trail. Photo courtesy of [www.virginiadot.org](http://www.virginiadot.org)

## Goals and Implementation Tasks

This Plan is intended to be action-oriented. Each of the five E chapters contains its own list of Goals and Implementation Tasks to outline both a direction and a method:

- **Goals** describe desirable end results or conditions towards which the City should strive, and
- **Implementation Tasks** describe the actions that can help the City achieve those goals.



Trail at Beach Garden Park.

Each E chapter also contains a summary of the **Policies** that flow from the Goals and Implementation Tasks, and a review of the **Priorities** recommended by the Bikeways and Trails Advisory Committee (BTAC). The Plan has no separate, discrete Implementation section, because each E

chapter is its own Implementation section.

For brevity, the summary below touches only on the Goals and Priorities.

## Approach

Because the community is divided over on-road versus off-road bike facilities, the total system must include overlapping networks of each type. The Plan outlines ambitious goals that are beyond current funding abilities, so individual projects must be prioritized with a special emphasis on four patterns:

- Fix problems and fill gaps in the existing system
- Accept constant, incremental improvement rather than expecting immediate completion of the system
- Initially pursue projects with lesser challenges and obstacles
- Seek grants and partnerships to accomplish larger projects

## EDUCATION (Chapter 3)

Virginia Beach currently does not have an organized, wide-reaching program for bike education, nor any similar program for pedestrians.

- Goal 3: Motorists, cyclists, pedestrians and other road users will know and abide by the rules of the road.
- Goal 3.1: City government will partner with others to provide community education programs about sharing the road.
- Goal 3.2: Children will learn bike and pedestrian safety at school.
- Goal 3.3: City government will partner with others to provide community-wide print and other media about sharing the road.

## ENCOURAGEMENT (Chapter 4)

Bicycling and walking are healthy, fun activities and affordable modes of transportation. This section outlines goals and tasks that can help people recreate and commute on the bikeways and trails system.

- Goal 4.1: Virginia Beach will be seen as a destination for bike and pedestrian tourism.
- Goal 4.2: Virginia Beach will hold cost-effective events and programs to encourage bicycling and walking.
- Goal 4.3: People will increasingly bike and walk to go to work, shop, dine and other activities.

## ENFORCEMENT (Chapter 5)

In the past 10 years, the Police received reports of more than 2000 motor vehicle crashes involving bicycles and pedestrians. This section describes goals and tasks to protect the safety of residents and guests as they bike and walk around the City.

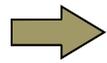
- Goal 5.1: Road safety, especially for cyclists and pedestrians, will improve due to enhanced enforcement of traffic laws.
- Goal 5.2: Criminal activity will decrease along bikeways and trails.



Virginia Capital Trail. Photo courtesy of Steve Hutchinson

**Top-Priority Goals** as selected by BTAC are highlighted here by underlining and brown arrows.

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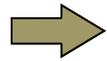
- Goal 5.3: Changes in traffic laws will improve conditions for all road users, including cyclists and pedestrians.
- Goal 5.4: Bike-ped safety will improve due to increased public information.

## **ENGINEERING & FACILITIES (Chapter 6)**

“What we build” can easily be seen as the primary issue for this Plan, and this section is by far the largest and most complex of the 5 E’s.

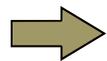
Virginia Beach currently has 18 miles of paved shoulders and bike lanes, 50 miles of shared-use paths, and 50 miles of wide sidewalks, but they do not combine to form a complete system. Citizens want better continuity among these bikeway and trail elements and connectivity between neighborhoods and destinations.

The goals and tasks are divided into four broad goal groups.



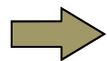
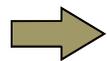
### **Goal 6A: Virginia Beach will have a comprehensive bikeways and trails system that serves all residents and visitors throughout the City.**

- Goal 6A.1: Virginia Beach will build and improve new bikeways and trails as needed.
- Goal 6A.2: Virginia Beach will be increasingly accessible to people with disabilities.
- Goal 6A.3: Virginia Beach will use the process of repaving and restriping roads to provide some new on-road bike facilities.
- Goal 6A.4: Virginia Beach will take advantage of opportunities in the 6-year Capital Improvements Plan to enhance the bikeways and trails system.
- Goal 6A.5: Bikeways and trails will follow linear corridors developed for other purposes, such as rail and utility corridors and unbuilt road rights-of-way.
- Goal 6A.6: Virginia Beach will have trails devoted to particular themes.
- Goal 6A.7: Virginia Beach will have suitable facilities for equestrian use.



### **Goal 6A.8: Support facilities will be available throughout the City, including convenient and secure bike parking.**

- Goal 6A.9: Greenways will follow logical corridors and provide green infrastructure benefits.



### **Goal 6B: Virginia Beach’s comprehensive bikeways and trails system will connect neighborhoods and destinations to each other.**

- Goal 6B.1: Gaps in the existing system will be found and filled.
- Goal 6B.2: Bikeways and trails will connect to public facilities, especially schools, libraries, parks, recreation centers, and transit facilities.
- Goal 6B.3: The oceanfront will connect to the rest of the City.
- Goal 6B.4: Bikeways and trails will connect the military bases to each other.

**Top-Priority Goals** as selected by BTAC are highlighted here by underlining and brown arrows.

**Goal 6C: Virginia Beach will treat bike-ped facilities both as valued recreational amenities and as integral components of the City's transportation matrix.**



- Goal 6C.1: Virginia Beach should have a Complete Streets policy.
- Goal 6C.2: The City's land development regulations will foster the construction of new bike-ped facilities.
- Goal 6C.3: Safety and maintenance issues will be systematized and properly managed.



**Goal 6D: Virginia Beach will be responsive to citizen suggestions for the bikeways and trails system and will work towards consensus.**

- Goal 6D.1: Staff from Parks & Recreation will continue to engage citizens, civic groups, City boards and commissions, and other stakeholders to receive their input into issues related to bikeways and trails and to learn about specific needs and ideas.
- Goal 6D.2: Staff will work towards consensus on the diverse suggestions of citizens about issues in their neighborhoods.



**Top-Priority Goals** as selected by BTAC are highlighted here by underlining and brown arrows.

**EVALUATION & PLANNING (Chapter 7)**

We must track our progress and continue planning for improvements.

- Goal 7.1: Virginia Beach will apply for Bicycle-Friendly Community status by 2015 and achieve it by 2017.
- Goal 7.2: Virginia Beach will maintain and evaluate tracking data about conditions for cyclists, pedestrians and other non-motorized road users.



**Top-priority Goals**

*Goal 3: Motorists, cyclists, pedestrians and other road users will know and abide by the rules of the road.*

*Goal 4.1: Virginia Beach will be seen as a destination for bike and pedestrian tourism.*

*Goal 5.1: Road safety, especially for cyclists and pedestrians, will improve due to enhanced enforcement of traffic laws.*

*Goal 5.3: Changes in traffic laws will improve conditions for all road users, including cyclists and pedestrians.*

*Goal 6A: Virginia Beach will have a comprehensive bikeways and trails system that serves all residents and visitors throughout the City.*

*Goal 6A.3: Virginia Beach will use the process of repaving and restriping roads to make new on-road bike facilities.*

*Goal 6A.8: Support facilities will be available throughout the City, including convenient and secure bike parking.*

*Goal 6B: Virginia Beach's comprehensive bikeways and trails system will connect neighborhoods and destinations to each other.*

*Goal 6C: Virginia Beach will treat bike-ped facilities both as valued recreational amenities and as integral components of the City's transportation matrix.*

*Goal 6C.1: Virginia Beach should have a Complete Streets policy.*

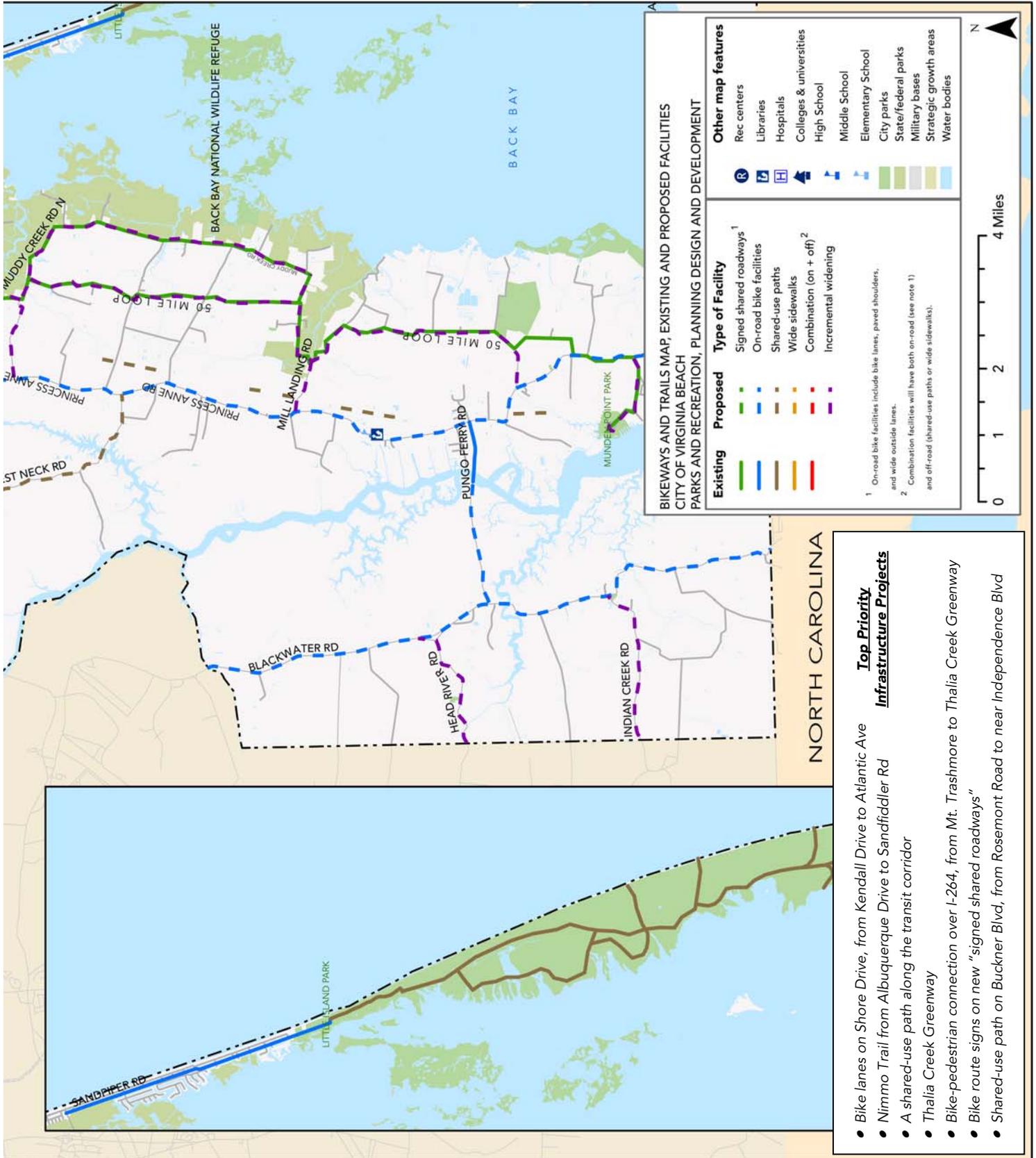
*Goal 6C.2: The City's land development regulations will foster the construction of new bike-ped facilities.*

*Goal 6D.1: Staff will actively continue to engage citizens, civic groups, City boards and commissions, and other stakeholders to get their input into issues related to bikeways and trails and to learn about specific needs and ideas.*

*Goal 7.1: Virginia Beach will apply for Bicycle-Friendly Community status by 2015 and achieve it by 2017.*

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- Bike lanes on Shore Drive, from Kendall Drive to Atlantic Ave **Top Priority**
- Nimmo Trail from Albuquerque Drive to Sandfiddler Rd **Infrastructure Projects**
- A shared-use path along the transit corridor
- Thalia Creek Greenway
- Bike-pedestrian connection over I-264, from Mt. Trashmore to Thalia Creek Greenway
- Bike route signs on new "signed shared roadways"
- Shared-use path on Buckner Blvd, from Rosemont Road to near Independence Blvd

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- Goal 7.3: The Bikeways and Trails Advisory Committee (BTAC) will have its appropriate influence on projects in the City.
- Goal 7.4: For implementing this Plan, partnerships between City departments and other agencies will be commonplace, collegial and collaborative.
- Goal 7.5: This Plan will be kept current and up-to-date.

### **POLICIES**

This Plan recommends the future adoption of several City-wide policies, including:

- A Complete Streets policy
- Revised land development regulations
- A bikeways and trails lighting policy
- Maintenance and renovation of bikeways and trails
- A signing system policy

This Plan suggests that Council consider including several items in future legislative packets for the General Assembly:

- Driver education about sharing the road
- Police training on bike-pedestrian issues
- “Due care” in the operation of motor vehicles
- Initiatives to reduce distracted driving
- “Three feet when passing” regulations

### **PRIORITIES**

The City must be entrepreneurial and opportunistic in implementing this Plan. The Council-appointed Bikeways and Trails Advisory Committee (BTAC) selected twelve Top-Priority Goals (inset, page EX-6) and seven Top-Priority Infrastructure Projects (inset, page EX-9).

BTAC prioritized all of the Goals using a pragmatic approach that involved twin issues: priority level and time frame.

- “Priority level” describes how important or urgent the Goal is, using a simple Top/High/Medium ranking.
- “Time frame” indicates how soon or how quickly the Goal can or should be accomplished, using 5 tiers: Immediate, Near (1-2 years), Medium (3-5 years), Long (more than 5 years), and Ongoing.