



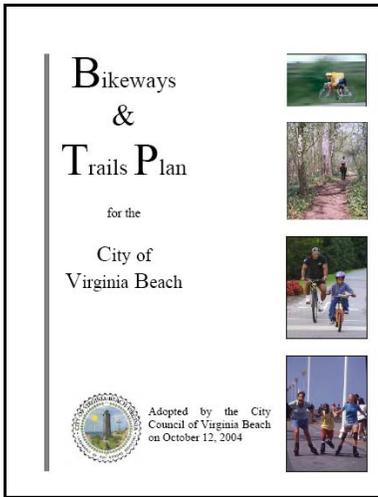
Chapter 2

Community Input

Photo above: The Bikeways and Trails Advisory Committee listens as Parks and Recreation staff gives a presentation.

Community Input

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

To start: people and their needs should drive the types and locations of bike-ped facilities in Virginia Beach. Different types of users need different facilities, and individual user needs can vary with changing situations.

In Virginia Beach, resident participation is routinely represented by the citizen-based Bikeways and Trails Advisory Committee (BTAC), the Council-appointed committee dedicated to bikeways and trails. In October 2004, Council charged this committee to:

- “Work with local civic groups and other interested citizens to develop secondary network priorities, linkages, and potential new corridors;
- “Work with City staff to review road construction projects to ensure that all roads and bridges, where part of the primary or secondary networks, are constructed, improved or maintained in a manner consistent with the Bikeways and Trails Plan;
- “Work with City staff to review the City’s development ordinances and recommend revisions in consultation with City staff to encourage bicycle and trail related accommodations;
- “Identify potential funding sources for proposed projects through various private, local, state and federal programs;
- “Provide a forum for direct citizen input in the planning of future bikeways and trails facilities; and
- “Focus efforts on achieving completion of the priority projects as identified in the Plan.”

(from “A Resolution Establishing the Bikeways and Trails Advisory Committee”, passed by City Council on October 12, 2004)

Community-Wide Surveys

Over the last several years, Parks and Recreation and other City departments have solicited resident feedback on a variety of issues, including bikeways and trails. Three surveys offered statistically valid data while other forums offered more qualitative feedback.

- 2004 Citizen Bike Survey
- 2005 Community Attitude & Interest Citizen Survey
- 2007 Transportation Town Meeting
- 2009 Comprehensive Plan Update
- 2009 Virginia Beach City Services Satisfaction Study
- 2010 Parks & Recreation Community Survey

Given the analytically valid nature of the survey instruments, we can reasonably infer that the weight of public opinion tilts consistently in one direction: citizens want more bikeways and trails, a better bikeways and trails system, and more transportation alternatives.

2004 Citizen Bike Survey

This survey guided the development of the 2004 Bikeways and Trails Plan. With no controls on who responded, it is not statistically valid. The main summary findings on page 17 of the Plan are:

"The top reasons why riders do not ride more often is due to the lack of facilities and unsafe conditions.

"Type A riders need on-road facilities, travel 20+ miles per day and have considered commuting by bicycle.

"Type B riders desire on-road and shared use paths and the majority have considered commuting by bicycle.

"Type C riders desire shared use paths and travel on average up to 3 miles per day.

"All types of riders desire off-road unpaved soft paths.

"The Northampton Boulevard/Shore Drive corridor is a highly desired bicycle route.

"Citizens desire facilities in close proximity to their residences that lead to both major and minor destination points."

2005 Community Attitude & Interest Citizen Survey

Virginia Beach Parks & Recreation conducted this survey to comprehensively evaluate its system, service offerings, recreation programming and facility development needs, largely as support for the development of a strategic plan for the Department. The survey was statistically valid and gave a 95% level of confidence with a precision of $\pm 4.4\%$. Its findings included:



- When asked about a household's need for various facilities, "walking and biking trails" ranked first with 70% of the respondent households citing said facilities as a need. Additionally, walking and biking trails had the highest percentage of respondents (41%) select it as one of the four most important facilities.
- When asked how well the City's facilities met a household's needs, "walking and biking trails" ranked lowest. In fact, 37% of respondent households indicated that current facilities met only half (or less) of their actual need for said facilities.
- The highest percentage of respondents (53%) were very supportive of renovating and/or developing walking and biking trails. 82% (overall) were either very supportive (53%) or somewhat supportive (29%) of renovating and/or developing walking and biking trails. 54% of respondents were either very supportive of renovating and/or developing bike lanes.
- When asked about tax dollar expenditures for parks and recreation facilities, the greatest level of support (54% of respondents) went to renovating and/or developing walking and biking trails. Tax dollar expenditures for renovation and development of bike lanes garnered the support of 29% of the respondents.

2007 Transportation Town Meeting

About 70 citizens attended a city-wide town meeting on January 30, 2007. The summary includes these comments:

- Attendees said that there are too few transportation options.
- Light rail and bikes were mentioned often, with requests for more "bike amenities".

2009 Comprehensive Plan Update

In 2009, the City's Department of Planning conducted a series of public workshops to receive comments for use in updating the Comprehensive Plan. Some of the comments and findings bear on bikeway and trail issues.

- The most frequent comments about Transportation were about "bike and pedestrian access and facility improvement".
- Additional comments were asking for a "combination of bike paths and on-road facilities/lanes for commuters"
- The 4th most often received comments about the Resort Area were to "add and improve bike and pedestrian facilities."
- 11 of 66 comments about Natural Resources, Parks and Open Spaces asked for "additional bike paths and pedestrian access"

More information on community participation and the comments received can be found on the Department of Planning's web site: www.ourfuturevb.co, under "Community Participation".

2009 Virginia Beach City Services Satisfaction Study

The City conducts a semi-annual telephone survey to learn how citizens feel about their community and the services provided by the City. In 2009,

the survey had no specific questions about bikes, pedestrians, bikeways or sidewalks, but it did have four statements about transportation, and residents rated their level of agreement with each statement. The survey was statistically valid with a margin of error of $\pm 4.4\%$. Quoting from the executive summary:

"39.6% of the Virginia Beach residents surveyed said they were satisfied with the flow of traffic on City streets. This means that 60.4% were dissatisfied. One of the most common complaints among those who were dissatisfied was that there is a high volume of traffic in the City during the morning and afternoon rush hour periods.

"Traffic concerns continue to be widely discussed by citizens in all Hampton Roads communities. For many, the issue relates to time wasted and frustration, while others associate traffic congestion with environmental issues. (Another 2009 study we conducted found that 83% of all Hampton Roads residents are concerned about environmental issues.)"

77.0% agreed that "I would like to have more alternatives to using my car to get around the City."

74.2% agreed that "The roads I use in Virginia Beach are generally too congested."

2010 Parks & Recreation Community Survey

Virginia Beach Parks & Recreation conducted this survey to assess how well the Department is meeting its four key community priorities, as discerned during the strategic planning process: Community Access; Healthy Lifestyles; Environment and the Outdoors; and Stewardship. The survey was statistically valid and gave a 95% level of confidence with a margin of error of $\pm 4.5\%$. Its findings include:

- 70% of the respondents indicated that acquisition and development of walking and biking trails was either very important (42%) or important (28%).
- The highest percentage of respondents (46%) indicated that having access to biking and walking/hiking trails would increase their ability to enjoy the environment and the outdoors.
- Overall, 92% of the community respondents indicated that the programming and facilities provided by Parks and Recreation are either vital (48%) or important (44%) to their pursuit of a healthy and active lifestyle. The results of this survey indicate the considerable importance given by citizens to bikeways and trails.

Bikeways and Trails Plan update process

Throughout 2010, an exhaustive amount and diverse type of public involvement was coordinated in association with the updated of this Plan. This process included various surveys, public workshops, technical workshops, technical stakeholders meetings, and public meetings with numerous City Council-appointed boards, committees and commissions. Feedback from all of the workshops and public meetings can be referenced in the Appendices. However, a succinct summary of the feedback is provided in the remainder of this section, with Findings to follow.



“Votes” for preferred bikeway types:

- 54 Paved shared-use path
- 54 Bike lane
- 35 Unpaved shared-use path
- 18 Wide sidewalk
- 6 Paved shoulder
- 4 On road, with the cars

Public Open Houses

Parks & Recreation hosted four open houses for citizens to drop in and talk about their interests and concerns for bikeways and trails. Between the four events, a total of about 50 people attended.

Attendees were invited to place stickers on maps to indicate where they wanted bike-ped facilities and where their favored destinations were. The map at right shows the results. Attendees also voted on their preferred types of bike facilities: bike lanes, paved shoulders, on road, shared-use paths, unpaved paths, and wide sidewalks. The sidebar at left shows the results.

Attendees also filled out survey forms with questions about their needs and preferences.

Stakeholder Meetings

Bikeways and trails can be a controversial topic, for which one can discern two types of stakeholders: those who are very interested and concerned about what goes on, and those who take less of an interest but still need to be heard. It has been important to get input from the diverse people who make up the populace of Virginia Beach, whether they would go to a meeting about bikeways and trails or not. For this reason, staff pursued input at a variety of meetings of groups that had any kind of connection to the topic.

At each meeting, after a brief introduction about bikeways and trails, staff asked three questions and recorded the responses on a flip chart.

- What are your main issues with biking and walking around Virginia Beach?
- What are the best improvements we can make "on the ground" to improve biking and walking around Virginia Beach?
- What are the best changes to law and policy that we can make to improve biking and walking around Virginia Beach?

These intentionally broad questions resulted in vigorous discussions and hundreds of comments. The nature of the questions pointed people to

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**bikeways & trails
plan update**

Please return this completed form by April 16, 2010 to: Virginia Beach City Manager, 101 West 17th Street, 23510-2000, or email: webch@virginia-beach.com

1. What is your overall opinion of the bikeways and trails in Virginia Beach?

<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	Comments: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Good	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Poor	_____

2. To where would you like to bike or walk for daily activities?

<input type="checkbox"/> School	Other: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Recreation	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Shopping/Drug Store	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Other Workplace	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Park/Trail	_____

3. What is the distance of your commute to work?

<input type="checkbox"/> None	Comments: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> 1-5 miles	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> 5-10 miles	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> 10-15 miles	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> 15-20 miles	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> 20+ miles	_____

4. What details are there to biking and walking in your part of Virginia Beach?

<input type="checkbox"/> No good routes	Other: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> No good trails	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> No good sidewalks	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> No good lighting	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> No good signage	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> No good parking	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> No good safety	_____

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Please return this completed form by April 16, 2010 to: Virginia Beach City Manager, 101 West 17th Street, 23510-2000, or email: webch@virginia-beach.com

5. What are your major safety concerns about biking and walking in Virginia Beach?

6. What other concerns do you have about biking and walking in your part of Virginia Beach?

7. Any other ideas, comments or suggestions?

talking about engineering/facility issues, but a surprising number of people went in other directions.

City Boards and Commissions

Staff held briefings and discussions with these official City bodies, many on several occasions, in addition to the routine work and staff support of the BTAC.

- Parks & Recreation Commission
- Historic Preservation Commission
- Bayfront Advisory Committee
- Resort Advisory Commission, Transportation Subcommittee
- Agricultural Advisory Commission
- Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities
- Arts & Humanities Commission
- Planning Commission Informal Briefing
- Virginia Beach Council of Civic Organizations
- 1st Precinct Citizen Advisory Council
- 4th Precinct Citizen Advisory Council
- 2nd Precinct Citizen Advisory Council
- 3rd Precinct Citizen Advisory Council

Special Interest Groups

Staff also held briefings and discussions with these neighborhood, civic and special interest groups.

- Southern District Forum, sponsored by Council Member Henley
- Tidewater Horse Council Business Meeting
- Tidewater Striders
- Tidewater Bicycle Association
- Beachcombers Kiwanis
- South Shore Estates Civic League
- Villages at West Neck, National Night Out
- Virginia Beach City Public Schools Student Cooperative Association

Technical Meetings

Designers' Roundtable

Staff met with transportation engineers and designers from several prominent consulting firms, each with special expertise in the planning and design of roads, bikeways, and trails. Unique, important findings included:

- Prioritize facilities by creating routes between destinations and to and from residential areas.
- Federal regulations require consideration of bikes and pedestrians. Make the plan a usable document that specifically states what type of

facility is required, where it goes, and how it will connect to a larger system.

- State how bikeways and trails benefit developers who build them.
- Coordinate with Public Works to identify potential priority corridors for bikeways and trails.
- Make the plan available online so that designers and developers can access it quickly from anywhere.
- Add bicycle parking to the zoning/subdivision regulations.
- Look at funding for eligible areas around transit stops.
- Be part of the required Development Services Center (DSC) review process.
- Give this plan teeth by:
 - Creating a policy with universal application for the City and developers.
 - Passing a City ordinance that requires bicycle and pedestrian accommodations.
 - Integrating current best practices for bikeways and trails into Public Works' road standards.

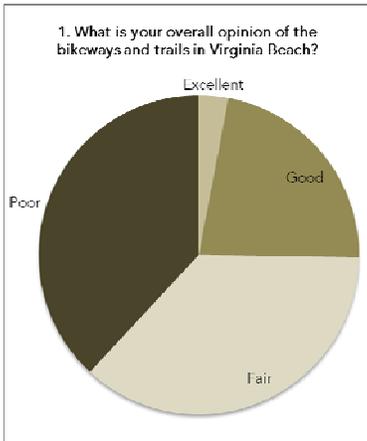
Planning Department

Parks & Recreation staff met with Planning Department staff to get their ideas about how to make the Bikeways and Trails Plan usable and enforceable.

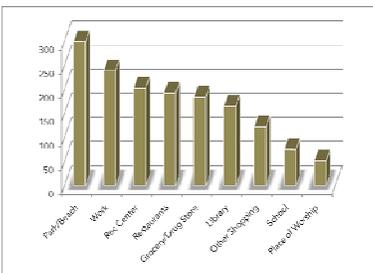
- Identify future development areas as important connectivity areas. Be as specific as possible.
- Make priorities clear, e.g., "Connections between Subdivisions" or "Access to Transit Modes". Be specific and align with Council's goals
- Use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to make more information easier to access for customers/developers. Click on a line that brings you to a link that gives you information.
- Consistency with other plans. Put geographic areas in the same place as other plans.
- The written plan document should be primarily an outline and a narrative, with the main focus placed on putting the details online. What are the best changes we could make to law and policy?
 - How to handle bicyclists in rural areas long-term (ditches, no shoulders). Link needs of cyclists to the agricultural community
 - Require existing City facilities to be retrofitted with secure bicycle parking
 - Incentives for showers, changing facilities and bicycle parking, including at EXISTING places.

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Question #1 results from the 2010 Virginia Beach Bikeways and Trails



Question #2 results from the 2010 Virginia Beach Bikeways and Trails online survey.

Public Works Transportation Engineering

Parks & Recreation staff met with staff from the Transportation Engineering Division in the Department of Public Works. Among their comments were these:

- Space: narrow, inadequate rights-of-way with houses on both sides
- Define our bike riders, what they want and where they want it.
- We rarely build “Cadillacs” (when it comes to infrastructure in the public right-of-way, either due to funding or real estate constraints). We should know what “Plan B” is.
- Identify a bike loop (or several) for hard-core riders.
- Make the plan implementable and prioritized.

Public Works Traffic Engineering

Parks & Recreation staff met with staff from the Traffic Engineering Division in the Department of Public Works. Among their comments were these:

- Perhaps create a backbone with branches off of it
- Have a long plan for each corridor
- We have seen problems getting enough right-of-way due to financial constraints.
- Developers get waivers from sidewalk requirements on many projects.
- Schools should connect to the communities around them.

Online Surveys

Over 400 people responded to the online survey form at www.vbgov.com/ survey. It was publicized via the City’s email lists, Facebook, and other ways. It had seven questions:

1. What is your overall opinion of the bikeways and trails in Virginia Beach?
2. To where would you like to bike or walk for daily activities?
3. What is the distance of your commute to work?
4. What obstacles are there to biking and walking in your part of Virginia Beach?
5. What are your major safety concerns about biking and walking in Virginia Beach?
6. What other concerns do you have about biking and walking in your part of Virginia Beach?
7. Any other ideas, comments or suggestions?

It also had two demographic questions:

- What is your zip code?
- What is your age?

Results for two of the questions are summarized at left. A more thorough discussion is available in the Appendices.

Because the online survey questions are the same questions asked in the public open houses and closely parallel those asked in the stakeholder meetings, the responses were included with the other comments for a single, comprehensive analysis. The online survey also allowed people to select “checkbox” answers.

Feedback Process

Parks & Recreation hosted two open houses on December 6 & 9, 2010, at the Oceanfront Library and Kempsville Recreation Center, respectively. About 40 people attended the two open houses and discussed the vision statement, findings, goals, and maps with staff. Questionnaires were provided to allow citizens to record their thoughts.

Further, just as public input was sought by meeting with a variety of groups, so also this feedback process includes returning to those groups. These return meetings are for the purposes of presenting the findings from the earlier input, reviewing the Goals and Implementation Tasks that came from those findings, and listening to the groups’ responses.

To date, public response has been largely positive and encouraging. The process will continue and expand to include additional groups as the Plan is implemented. Civic and neighborhood organizations especially can help refine details of the Plan.

Summary of the Public Input

For the sake of analyzing so many comments, staff merged all of the comments into a spreadsheet and sorted them among the 5 E's and 25 topics to create clusters of similar comments. Many comments overlapped in several E's and multiple topics. Each topic cluster was studied for patterns and trends, leading first to summaries within each cluster and then to this overall set of findings. The 25 topics were:

- Users: cars, cyclists, horses, pedestrians, runners
- Behavior: policy, rules, safety, sharing
- Location: connections, obstacles, routes, sites, types
- Design: details, extras, facilities, signals, signs
- Other: costs, maintenance, events, maps, & schools

As staff worked through this analysis and distillation process, several themes started becoming intuitively apparent. Eventually, four broad themes surfaced to summarize the rest. While these themes do not tie directly to the 5 E's or the 25 topics, they do constitute an effective summary of the public's thoughts and feelings on the topics of walking and biking around Virginia Beach.

Sharing the road

- Cyclists fear cars and their drivers, especially heavy traffic and distracted drivers.
- Motorists don't respect cyclists or their rights to use the roads.
- Cyclists and motorists alike don't 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's hard to do – sometimes very hard.
- "A resort city ought to do better for its guests."
 - Improve cycling AT and TO the oceanfront but don't leave out the rest of the City.
- Include bike-ped planning in road and land development planning.
- We need a complete network:
 - more bikeways on-road (54%) and off-road (46%)
 - more sidewalks and crosswalks
 - more related 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 doesn't have enough facilities for riding horses, even though they don't need much.
- Costs: how will we pay to build it all?
- Need better maintenance
- About 200 comments were suggestions about places to build bikeways and trails.

Responses to these Findings

Staff has presented these findings to citizens, elected officials and staff from other departments at a variety of venues, including City Council, Planning Commission, civic leagues, and the Tidewater Bicycle Association. Most people have agreed on each of the points as presented.

Some cyclists have taken exception with the wording of the statement, "Cyclists on narrow roads create hazardous situations for themselves and for motorists," because it's not always necessarily the cyclists that create the hazardous situations. To be fair, that is true, and a more technically proper wording would be, "The sharing of narrow roads by cyclists and motorists creates hazardous situations for both"; however, this is a summary of the public's comments.

Similarly, these comments include gross generalizations, especially under "Sharing the road". Not all cyclists fear cars, and some motorists respect cyclists. Many, perhaps most, cyclists and motorists know and abide reasonably well by the rules of the road. Again, this summary attempts to reflect the public's comments.

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