



TRANSPORTATION SAFETY & ADVISORY COMMISSION

CITY OF HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA

TO: Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission Members, Council members, City Manager Kurt Hodgen, Assistant City Manager Anne Lewis

FROM: Brad Reed, Transportation Planner

DATE: Tuesday, May 5, 2015

RE: Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission Summary from April 8, 2015 Meeting

The Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission met on Wednesday, April 8, 2015 at 8:30 AM in Room 205 of the City Municipal Building, 345 S. Main St.

Members and Advisory Members present included: Bill Blessing (NE Citizen Member), Calvin Ferrell (SE Citizen Member), Len Van Wyk (SW Citizen Member), Joshua Humphries (At-Large Citizen Member), Brad Reed (Public Works Member Designee), MPO Greg Deeds (Police Member Designee), Sgt. Pete Ritchie (Police), Deputy Chief Ian Bennett (Fire), Lee Eshelman (JMU), Doug Stader (DMV)

Guests Present: None

Commission meetings are open to the public and citizens are provided the opportunity to voice their views/concerns about any item before the Commission. It is the policy of the Commission to move relevant agenda items to the beginning of the meeting when citizens are in attendance to avoid detaining them for the entire meeting.

Welcome

New Business

1. Comments on I-81 Exits 245/247 Interchange Alternatives Analysis

Mr. Humphries shared comments on the March 26 public information meeting for the I-81 Exits 245 and 247 Interchange Alternatives Analysis, asking if the Commission would like to make a formal recommendation on any of the presented alternatives. He said that he is not in favor of Alternative 1 for Exit 245, which includes realignment of the I-81 South on- and off-ramps with Bluestone Dr, because it would result in a major loss of land and parking along Hillside Ave and

would relocate the Bluestone Trail. Addressing the loss of parking, Mr. Eshelman noted that remote bussed parking is an idea that JMU is considering for the future regardless of how the I-81 project progressed. Mr. Humphries stated that he prefers Alternative 2 for Exit 245 because it preserves more land and is cheaper as compared to Alternative 1. He went on to say that he prefers Alternative 1R for Exit 247 because it would help alleviate traffic on Reservoir St with its added interchange.

Mr. Reed added that the alternatives shared in the public meeting are still preliminary and will be explored further as part of a more detailed Interchange Modification Report, which is not currently scheduled. Construction of any form of improvement at these locations is unfunded and is likely several years down the road.

Mr. Blessing said that it's probably too early to make a recommendation from this Commission, as there will be opportunities in the future to review with more detailed information. Also, the MPO Technical Advisory Committee and city staff are already reviewing the alternatives in depth.

Mr. Van Wyk commented that widening streets and adding parking lots isn't always the best option, as it encourages single occupancy vehicle use which contributes to traffic congestion. He asked whether this was being taken into account in this study. Mr. Reed agreed that wider roads and more parking have the potential to contribute to traffic congestion and the encouragement of driving over other modes of travel; however, these interchange modifications are not geared toward rebuilding a long stretch of roadway, rather they are focused on small area improvements needed to enhance safety on I-81 and city roads by reducing queue overflow onto the interstate and through local intersections. Taking these steps will assist traffic flow a good deal, but will make far more significant advances in the provision of safer facilities for all modes of travel.

Mr. Eshelman added that HDPT and JMU tried to establish a convocation center to quad express bus 3 years ago, but had only 33 regular riders. Students not using the service and parking near the bus stops said that they wanted to have their car for convenience. He felt this highlighted the challenges in providing alternative transportation options, as convenient parking makes such alternatives less desirable.

2. Request for support of flashing school zone lights at Keister Elementary on Maryland Ave

MPO Deeds requested the Commission's recommendation for flashing school zone lights on Maryland Ave for Keister Elementary, noting that pedestrian safety is the primary concern in the midst of high traffic volume and speed. Sgt. Ritchie noted that there is a lot going on in the vicinity of Keister to pay attention to as a driver and a pedestrian. He added that he is surprised that flashing lights aren't located at every school.

Mr. Reed said that he can't speak to why flashing lights have not previously been installed at all schools, but cost is a consideration for retrofitting them, with each pair of signs costing about \$8,000-10,000. The locations with warning lights are generally limited to areas with higher speed issues, blind hills or curves, and/or higher potential for pedestrian crossing of the major adjacent street. Current schools with lights include: Thomas Harrisonburg Middle School,

Pleasant Valley Elementary, Stone Spring Elementary, and Waterman Elementary (in one direction).

Mr. Van Wyk noted that Maryland Ave carries more traffic than the roads passing by many other city schools, so Keister may be a higher priority than other locations without lights. MPO Deeds said that the railroad crossing near Central Ave does help slow traffic, but speed and high volume are still issues to consider. He added that Stone Spring Elementary on Pleasant Valley Rd has school zone lights with a reduced speed limit, but the lights aren't too effective at slowing traffic even after switching the lights to LED to make them more noticeable. Mr. Blessing said that he thinks we ought to have school zone lights at every school to at least remind the 85% of drivers that are likely to use more caution if aware of the school zone condition.

The group agreed that those schools with a higher prevalence of walking and biking should be a higher priority for school zone lights. This distinction is important, as requests for lights at other schools are likely in the future. The Commission requested that staff review conditions on Maryland Ave further and report back at the next meeting.

3. Brief on Complete Streets Policy development

Mr. Reed provided an update on literature research of complete streets policies that is underway. Mr. Reed presented slides (**attached**) and began with an introduction of "What is a Complete Streets policy?". He noted that Harrisonburg already has a Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan and Comprehensive Plan with recommendations to support alternative transportation modes, but that a Complete Streets policy would take efforts a step further by encouraging city departments to accommodate the needs of all modes of travel during all stages of maintenance and planning.

A Complete Streets policy would also better define budget needs and the case for exceptions when accommodating non-vehicle modes on projects. These efforts would help further Goal 10 of the Comprehensive Plan, which is "To develop and maintain a safe and convenient transportation system serving all modes, such as, automobile, pedestrian, bicycle and mass transit." Adopting a Complete Streets Policy would be followed with updates to city zoning ordinances, design and construction standards manual, and other documents.

Complete Streets policies came up during the 2014 Annual Harrisonburg & Rockingham Bike-Walk Summit, where attendees asked why Harrisonburg doesn't have a Complete Streets Policy. Several hundred cities across the country have adopted Complete Streets policies. In Virginia, policies exist in Roanoke, Alexandria, Virginia Beach, Richmond, and elsewhere. Smart Growth America (<http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org>) lists and reviews complete streets policies nationwide.

Public Works staff will be meeting with City Departments over the coming months to discuss the possibility of a Complete Streets Policy for Harrisonburg and will return to the Bicycle & Pedestrian Subcommittee and Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission later on with an update.

4. Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan Update

Mr. Reed reviewed the outline for the 2016 Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan (**attached**). There will be a public workshop help on May 19 from 6-8 PM at Thomas Harrison Middle School to kick off this plan update effort.

5. Review of right turns on red at Port Republic Rd & I-81 South off-ramp

Mr. Reed asked the Commission to consider whether right turns on red should be restricted from the I-81 south off-ramp due to limited sight distance and potential conflicts with pedestrians. The Commission reviewed this matter previous to the pedestrian fence being installed on the interstate bridge wall and concluded that, although vehicles had to pull forward and partially block the crosswalk to see oncoming vehicles, adequate sight distance could be achieved and there did not appear to be anything more than an inconvenience for pedestrians. Also, large vehicles could typically see over the parapet bridge wall to achieve sight distance without encroaching on the crosswalk.

With the fence installed, sight distance can now only be achieved by pulling forward and almost completely covering the crosswalk. This creates the issue of vehicles blocking the pedestrian right-of-way and the potential safety hazard of vehicles inching forward looking one way while pedestrians enter the crosswalk coming from the opposite direction and not being seen. The argument for keeping a right turn on red would be to limit vehicle delay and, more importantly, prevent backup of traffic onto I-81. Since the times when demand for the right turn is heaviest tend to overlap with the times of heavy traffic on Port Republic Rd, the opportunities for experiencing these benefits may be rather limited. Mr. Reed noted that sight distance at the I-81 North off-ramp is much better since the ramp is positioned farther from the bridge than the other off-ramp. For this reason, it is possible that no action would need to be taken at this location but further review would be worthwhile.

The Commission discussed various options, such as traffic sensitive or time-based signs to limit right turns on red. Mr. Reed said that the issue of limited sight distance is present at all times of day and that a pedestrian conflict could occur at any level of traffic volume, so options other than a full restriction may not be complete solutions. Mr. Blessing commented that he is inclined to restrict right turns on red completely as has been done at other intersections with sight distance problems, such as E Market St & Mason St. He added that, if this is a safety issue, then that ought to be the Commission's consideration rather than traffic delay as long as the backup isn't onto I-81.

Mr. Reed said that he plans to perform further review of this matter and will need to include VDOT in the discussion since they maintain the interstate ramp. A follow-up report will be provided at a future meeting.

6. Request for parking restriction on Emerald Dr

Mr. Reed shared a citizen request to have parking restricted along a section of the south side of Emerald Dr near Deyerle Ave to resolve a sight distance issue experienced when exiting a row of townhomes. Recognizing that a recent request for parking restriction to improve sight at a nearby location on this street led to disagreements between residents, the requestor was asked to submit a petition signed by the townhome owners fronting the section of the proposed parking restriction (the same ones with the sight issue). Such a petition was submitted and was

signed by 5 of 6 owners, with the sixth home being marked on the petition as being occupied by renters.

Mr. Reed showed an image (**attached**) of the sight line from the townhome entrance, explaining that sight is limited when the block is full of parking and that a restriction of about 80 feet, enough space for 4 parked cars, would provide 200 feet of sight to the west. 200 feet of sight is less than the 250 feet called for by local standards on a new road, but is still adequate in many residential street situations. Parking is already restricted 50 feet to the west of the entrance, so sight is not an issue in that direction. Off-street parking is available for homes on both sides of the street and on-street parking is available along the north side of the street.

Mr. Blessing said that if we are going to restrict parking to improve sight, then we should do so for the full block up to the duplex entrance to the west. This would prevent a similar issue from occurring at that location if parked vehicles were to shift down the block and concentrate there after the proposed restriction. Mr. Eshelman added that the duplex units have ample off-street parking and should not be impacted negatively by the proposed restriction. Mr. Reed suggested that there may be a benefit to petitioning the duplex owners before proceeding with any recommendation. The other Commission members disagreed and felt that this should not be needed because they have several off-street parking spaces available.

The Commission made a recommendation to remove on-street parking from the full block section between the requestor's townhome block and the first duplex entrance to the west.

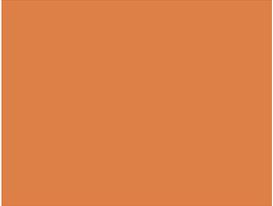
7. Sight distance concern on Robin Ct at Blue Ridge Dr

Mr. Deeds shared a citizen concern regarding a sight distance limitation when turning off of Robin Ct onto Blue Ridge Dr. Looking at the aerial image (attached) for this location, the Commission unanimously agreed that parking should not have to be restricted for this situation. City ordinance prohibits parking within 20 ft of a street measured from the end of the corner radius, which means that no parking is allowed on Blue Ridge Dr between Robin Ct and the adjacent driveways on either side of the intersection. Further, on-street parking is sporadic in this single family home area where all homes have driveway parking and may only limit sight distance in rare circumstances. MPO Deeds will share these comments with officers in the area to keep an eye on parking within the ordinance-restricted area.

Old Business - None

Other Business / Announcements - None

Adjourn



Complete Streets Policy

What is a Complete Streets policy?

- Statement of a city's commitment to:
 - ▣ Design, operate, and maintain streets in a manner that promotes safe, comfortable, and convenient access and travel for people of all ages and abilities
 - ▣ Address all users on all streets with limited exceptions
 - Pedestrians
 - Bicyclists
 - Transit riders
 - Motorists
 - Freight carriers
 - Disabled persons
 - Socioeconomically disadvantaged persons
 - Young/Elderly persons
 - Others

Why is it important for Harrisonburg?



- Important for advancing Goal 10 of the Comprehensive Plan & associated objectives
 - ▣ Goal 10. To develop and maintain a safe and convenient transportation system serving all modes of travel, such as, automobile, pedestrian, bicycle and mass transit.
- Lays groundwork for the development of sustainable infrastructure that enhances our economy, ecology, and social equity

Why is it important for Harrisonburg?

- Commits the city to following Complete Streets principles
 - Defines roles & responsibilities
 - Staff training
 - Public outreach & education
 - Budgeting practices
 - Departmental coordination on design and planning elements

- Addresses/considers street elements that are often missing from design discussions, but have been requested by the public during past planning efforts:
 - Pedestrian crossing points
 - First/last mile to reach transit
 - Human scale street design
 - Wayfinding signage
 - Protect and add street trees and native plants
 - Public art

Timeline



□ **Now**

- Literature review (thank you to Nicole Evans, MPA Program)
- Brief for Subcommittee
- Policy development

□ **April**

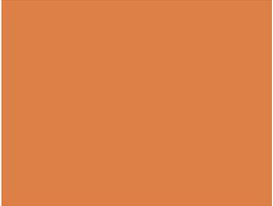
- Brief for TSAC
- City departmental meetings (intro/request for support)
- Policy development

□ **May/June**

- Community survey (Be Heard Harrisonburg)
- Policy development & review (city staff/TSAC/Subcommittee)

□ **Future**

- Public input meeting
- Finalize policy – request support for adoption from City Depts/TSAC/SubC
- Request City Council adoption



Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan

Proposed Schedule – Bike/Ped Plan

- **May 2015** – public workshop (“brainstorming”) and public comment period
- **June through October** – PW staff will meet with departments, and key agencies, will write draft plan, develop maps, and subcommittee reviews
- **November** – At subcommittee meeting, review draft plan
- **December/ January** – release draft plan for public input and host public meetings
- **March** – update draft plan
- **March 2016** – At subcommittee meeting, review draft plan and make recommendation
- **April 2016** – Seek City Council Adoption

Project Stakeholders

Project Sponsors:

- Harrisonburg Department of Public Works
- Harrisonburg Bicycle & Pedestrian Subcommittee
- Harrisonburg Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission

Advisory Groups:

- Harrisonburg Planning Commission
- Harrisonburg Parks & Rec Commission
- Harrisonburg Department of Public Transportation
- Harrisonburg Department of Planning & Community Development
- Harrisonburg Police Department
- Harrisonburg Department of Parks & Recreation
- Harrisonburg City Public Schools
- James Madison University
- Eastern Mennonite University

Community Outreach:

- Shenandoah Valley Bicycle Coalition
- Sentara RMH Community Health
- Blue Ridge Community College
- Valley Associates or Independent Living
- Harrisonburg Redevelopment & Housing Authority
- Our Community Place
- New Community Project
- Neighborhood Associations

How can we make walking & biking in Harrisonburg safer and more convenient?
Help us kick off the 2016 update to the Harrisonburg Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan

Harrisonburg

Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan

Public Workshop

Tuesday, May 19, 2015

6 - 8 PM

(please arrive @ 6 PM for the start of the workshop)

Thomas Harrison Middle School,
1311 West Market Street, Harrisonburg



Questions? Contact the Public Works Department at 540.434.5928 or visit www.harrisonburgva.gov/bicycle-pedestrian-plan

About this Plan: Harrisonburg's Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan provides a framework for enhancing the safety and attractiveness of walking and biking through on- and off-street improvements and public programs. The current Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan was adopted in 2010 and is now being updated for 2016.



Port Republic Rd & I-81 South



Emerald Drive Sight Distance



Robin Ct sight distance

