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# Houston Bike Plan & Chapter 33

## Comments and Questions Asked at TTI Committee and Responses



## PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

The Planning and Development Department (P&D) provided an update on the Houston Bike Plan at the Joint Council Committee on Transportation, Technology, & Infrastructure (TTI) and Ethics, Elections, & Council Governance on February 13, 2017. Below are P&D's responses to questions and comments at the meeting.

The **Houston Bike Plan** is a guide for the City of Houston to achieve the vision of making Houston a safer, more accessible gold-level bike-friendly city within 10 years (by 2027). The Plan provides recommendations on the general location and types of bicycle facilities, projects, policies, and programs that support the goals and vision.

The proposed **Chapter 33 amendment** ensures the Bike Plan is kept up to date (by requiring a biennial review at Planning Commission, who will make recommendations to Mayor on need for updates) and ensures all parties can participate in updates by clarifying roles and responsibilities for Mayor and City Council, departments, Planning Commission, Bicycle Advisory Committee and the public.

### Issues raised at TTI:

#### **"How many people ride bicycles? What are the benefits and costs?"**

- Nationwide research indicates that there is a large proportion of people who are 'interested but concerned' who would be more likely to bike if there were a high-comfort, low stress bike network as recommended in the Houston Bike Plan. Cities such as Portland and Austin have seen the mode share of people who bike double, triple, or more over time as they have built out higher-comfort bike networks.<sup>1</sup>
- The number of people who bicycle in Houston is growing, but is low compared to peer cities, indicating a significant potential for growth.
  - Bike boardings on METRO buses doubled from FY2011 to FY2015, and exceeded 250,000 in FY2015.<sup>2</sup>
  - Houston Bicycle checkouts more than doubled in four years, and were over 113,000 in 2016.
  - Bicycle commuter mode share in Houston is .5%. However, [in some parts of Houston](#), such as TMC, mode share exceeds 4%. The peer city average is 1.8%, indicating a large potential for growth.
  - Bike commute mode share describes only a portion of all bike trips, but is the metric most easily measured. People bike for many other purposes including recreation, shopping, and school.
  - On segments of Buffalo Bayou and White Oak Bayou, bicycle counts show volumes of 500-1,000 trips on weekdays and over 2,000 on weekends. This volume should increase as recommendations from the Bike Plan make it easier for people to access these corridors.
- Planning level cost estimates are shown on [p. E.S. 19](#). The Plan suggests a vision of achieving a highly improved bicycle network and achieving Gold-level bicycle friendly status within ten years. This network includes short term opportunities and key connections and is estimated to cost approximately \$100 to \$170 million, which could be funded using a variety of City and non-City funding sources.

#### **"The Bike Plan should not be implemented using ReBuild Houston funding."**

- The Bike Plan is a guide and makes recommendations; it does not commit any City resources nor dedicate funding.
- Funding source issues will be addressed later, such as during the CIP process.
- The City's Complete Streets Executive Order requires all travel modes to be considered.

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<sup>1</sup> *Austin Bicycle Plan, 2014, p. 49*

<sup>2</sup> *Source: METRO. This does not include bike boardings on light rail.*

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**“Cost estimates don’t include full cost of network buildout, and will consume a large share of ReBuild dollars.”**

- The Bike Plan does not commit funding. Bikeway projects may be funded from a variety of City and non-City sources, including TxDOT, TIRZs and Management Districts, non-profit organizations, grants and other sources.
- The Bike Plan provides planning level cost estimates for the proposed short term opportunities, key connections, and long-term off-street bikeway projects. As stated on [p. E.S. 19 of the Plan](#), it does not provide cost estimates for the long-term network of dedicated in street ROW bikeways that generally will be part of CIP street projects. These costs are difficult to estimate due to multiple variables associated with design and ROW needs. However, based on past reports, bikeway facilities within the paving section such as buffered bike lanes typically constitute from 5% to 7 % of the overall cost of a street reconstruction project. Furthermore, not all CIP/ReBuild projects will include bicycle facilities.

**“The drainage fee should not be assessed on off-street trails, including trails on private property.”**

- The current ordinance requires drainage fees be paid for all impervious cover on private property.
- This is a policy issue with regard to the drainage fee and is separate from the Bike Plan.
- Drainage fees are established in Chapter 47 of the Code and are not addressed in Chapter 33.

**“Adjacent property owners should not be required to maintain bicycle facilities, like sidepaths, behind the curb in public right-of-way.”**

- This issue warrants further exploration after Plan adoption. The Plan recommends that the Bicycle Advisory Committee develop maintenance recommendations for such types of facilities.

**“Will there be reductions in vehicular lanes or capacity on major thoroughfares?”**

- In general, the Bike Plan maps place bicycle facilities on off-street trails, such as bayous and easements, or local and collector streets, where feasible. However, local and collector streets do not always provide direct connections to destinations across neighborhoods. In some areas of the City, the major thoroughfares are the only logical connection, and therefore some thoroughfares are recommended for a bike facility.
- Many bike facilities on thoroughfares may be achieved without a change to the number of traffic lanes. Any modifications to the number of travel lanes would occur only after traffic analysis verifies that adequate vehicular capacity can be maintained.

**“Public engagement should be considered in bikeway design.”**

- The Bike Plan references the existing CIP community engagement process and recommends public engagement for non-CIP bikeway projects as well. The Plan recommends engaging the community no later than the preliminary engineering/design phase of the project (Key Recommendation 9.1).
- The Chapter 33 amendments will memorialize a public comment process for biennial review of the Plan, and a public hearing with Planning Commission and City Council action for amendments to the Plan.
- PWE has outlined a community engagement process in their *Planning & Design of Mobility Projects to Incorporate Complete Streets Policies* document. They have also committed to including it into the *CIP Process Manual* scheduled to be updated by August 2017.