

TWIN CITIES AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY

Minutes Walk and Roll Meeting

April 28, 2010
8:00 A.M.

Abonmarche, 95 W. Main St., Benton Harbor, MI 49022

TWINCATS WALK AND ROLL MEMBERS PRESENT:	Chris Cook, City of Benton Harbor (Abonmarche Consultants) Larry Merritt, St. Joseph Charter Township / Merritt Engineering Kevin Reed, Berrien County Road Commission Dick Stauffer, Lincoln Charter Township Sarah Woolcock, MDOT – Coloma TSC
TWINCATS WALK AND ROLL MEMBERS ABSENT:	Mickey Bennett, Sodus Township Willie Fryer, City of St. Joseph
SWMPC STAFF PRESENT:	Anna Rahtz Suzann Flowers
OTHERS PRESENT:	Juan Ganum, City of Niles Community Development Juanita Henry, Benton Harbor City Commission Mark Hessemann, Evergreen Management / Harbor Shores Joanne Johnson, Disability Network SWMI Michele McGowen, Disability Network SWMI Tyanna Weller, St. Joe Today

1. CALL TO ORDER & INTRODUCTIONS:

- Subcommittee Chairman Cook called the meeting to order at 8:02 A.M.

2. US BICYCLE ROUTE 35 UPDATE:

- Cook explained to new attendees that the US 35 Bicycle Route is being developed as part of a nationwide bicycle route network. Flowers added that the route maps are at AdventureCycling.com.
- Rahtz asked if anyone had reviewed the Google maps route alignments that she had forwarded out from Paul Vandenbosch at the City of South Haven. She explained that the proposed route is along M-63 from South Haven, then jogs off onto Lake Boulevard and goes past Silver Beach in St. Joseph, then goes back onto Lakeshore Drive, jogs off along Thornton in Stevensville, and then goes back onto Red Arrow Highway / 94 BL.
- Woolcock raised a concern about the amount of traffic on 94 BL in the business district being unsafe for cyclists. She added that MDOT has a proposal to build a non-motorized pathway along it but does not have the \$35 million. The only way to get a wider shoulder is if the road is reconstructed.
- There was discussion about whether there is any alternative route for the US 35 route other than Red Arrow Highway, and it was agreed that Red Arrow is the best route.
- It was also discussed that since M-63 is being reconstructed with eight-foot-wide shoulders, this would still be an appropriate alignment for the US 35 bicycle route. It was agreed that the group endorses the proposed US 35 bicycle route alignment.

3. SAMPLE NON-MOTORIZED PLANS:

- Flowers presented a summary of example non-motorized plans from other communities. Some of the things included in the sample plans that she suggested including in the Walk and Roll plan were: land use; a community vision; high, medium, and low priority corridors; transit routes; preliminary project costs; required and optional actions for implementation; trip attractors; snow removal; and public outreach such as a Transopoly game or administering a survey at schools.

- Cook asked what the deliverable would be for Walk and Roll, commenting that it would be redundant to write a seven-chapter comprehensive plan. Rahtz stated that at least a short plan has to be written that can be amended into the TwinCATS Long Range Transportation Plan.
- It was mentioned that the Walk and Roll plan should also tie together the plans from the TwinCATS member communities.

4. GEOGRAPHICAL INCLUSIVENESS / REGIONAL CONNECTIONS:

- Rahtz noted that originally there had been discussion of doing a county-wide non-motorized plan, and asked if the committee wants to keep the Walk and Roll plan geographically limited to the TwinCATS boundaries. She added that she had gotten several phone calls and emails asking why New Buffalo was excluded from the Walk and Roll committee.
- Rahtz passed out the map from the Harbor Country Hike & Bike Plan, which includes the City of New Buffalo.
- Cook commented that since Walk and Roll is an initiative of TwinCATS, it should focus within the TwinCATS boundaries but still include regional connections that should be made to South Haven, Niles, and the Harbor Country area.
- Ganum noted that the trails plan for the southern Berrien County and South Bend, IN area includes a proposed trail connecting Niles to Berrien Springs along AEP right of way.
- Rahtz noted that the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission is working for the Berrien County Health Department to plan a trail from downtown Benton Harbor along the Ox Creek out to Sodus Township. She suggested that the two trails should be connected between Sodus and Berrien Springs.
- It was also noted that there is an old rail right-of-way along the East side of M-139.
- It was added that Allegan County is planning to build a path that goes South along North Shore Drive (the South Haven to Saugatuck trail) and that perhaps this could be connected into the TwinCATS area.

5. BACKGROUND INFORMATION / DATA:

- Rahtz shared pedestrian and bicycle crash data from 2008, using dots to illustrate the crash locations on the maps.
- Rahtz read off comments she had received from the public about where they would like pedestrian or bicycle facilities.

6. PRIORITIZATION OF PROJECTS:

- Several committee members agreed that to get the necessary momentum for Walk and Roll, it would be best to focus on a few implementable projects first, rather than doing a comprehensive plan that tried to include too much without prioritizing. It was remarked that the Harbor Country Hike & Bike map should be used as a model.
- Henry noted that part of the Harbor Shores trail network were missing on the map, and Heseman provided the most current Harbor Shores map to Flowers, to be added into the Walk and Roll maps.

7. NEXT STEPS:

- It was agreed that a simple map needs to be created showing the top priority projects. It was also agreed that the two major projects of focus are the two rails-to-trails projects – from Benton Harbor to Sodus (to Niles) and from St. Joseph Township to downtown St. Joseph.
- Reed remarked that Mike Jones had said he would develop a more detailed map of the St. Joseph to St. Joseph Township route. Rahtz noted that Jones had told her he wouldn't be able to make it to this meeting and hadn't said that he had worked on anything. Reed emphasized that a detailed map of the two rails-to-trails projects would be necessary before being able to proceed with the process. In order to know the best alignment for those routes, the right-of-way information is needed.
- Rahtz noted that the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission is creating that type of map for the Benton Harbor to Sodus route, but asked who would head up that process for the other trail project.
- Cook suggested that Rahtz do it, as it would be too much for volunteers to accomplish.

- Rahtz stated that SWMPC is being paid on a contract with the Berrien County Health Department to complete that process for the Benton Harbor to Sodus trail, but that they do not have funding which would allow them to do such detailed work on the other trail.
- Ganum asked if Berrien County receives Community Development Block Grant funds, stating that those could be used for trail planning. Rahtz and Flowers agreed to check into potential funding sources and clarify that they cannot use TwinCATS planning funding for such a purpose.
- Ganum added that usually such trail planning processes are headed up by county parks and recreation departments. It was stated that Brian Bailey from the Berrien County Parks Department is an advisory member of the Walk and Roll committee.
- Flowers and Rahtz agreed to follow up with the Parks Department and the other townships that are not yet represented.
- Woolcock asked what deliverables can be shown to the full TwinCATS committees, and Cook suggested showing them the maps that have been done.

6. ADJOURNMENT: 9:45 a.m.

- Next meeting is June 2, 2010 at 8:00 A.M. at the Abonmarche Office.

Compiled by: SWMPC staff, 4/28/10