

Local

Committee accepts finished bike-ped master plan

✎ By Austin Ramsey Messenger-Inquirer

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The city of Owensboro and Daviess County now have a lasting framework by which to plan future sidewalk and mixed-use trail projects in the region.

A Metropolitan Planning Organization advisory committee on Tuesday accepted a complete Bicycle-Pedestrian Master Plan after more than a year of work aimed at identifying infrastructure needs among users.

"Every time we look at a new project," said Daviess County Judge-Executive Al Mattingly, "we will refer to this to see how that money can be best spent; that's valuable."

Work on the plan began in July of last year with the formation of a Bicycle-Pedestrian Committee made up of engineers and representatives from local interest groups. Together, they collected data and debated what unfinished connective routes in the city and county would form a better network of transportation alternatives by which to access important trip generators or destinations.

User surveys, said MPO Coordinator Tom Lovett, revealed one guiding principle: Walkers and bicyclists in the area do so primarily for exercise and exercise only.

"We found, when we went over this data over and over again that this is an exercise-centric area," he said. "There just really aren't a whole lot of people using bikes (nor) pedestrians who are on the roads or sidewalks to conduct work or do their shopping. There are some, of course, but it's a very, very small number."

According to results from a Green River Area Development District survey, almost 98 percent of walkers in the region do so for recreation or exercise, and, of those who do walk to work or for shopping, they overwhelmingly travel 3 miles or fewer.

Still, almost half of respondents to the GRADD survey said they did not have sidewalks in their neighborhood, and 71 percent of those same persons polled said they walked most frequently in the area where they live. It's possible, officials have said, that a lack of resources has somewhat contributed to walking and biking behavior in the area.

"We list the sidewalks that people most wanted to see built," Lovett said. "Some of them were expected, like along Griffith Avenue or Kentucky 54 near Fairview Drive, but some of them surprised me, at least."

Now the plan has been accepted by the MPO's Technical Advisory Committee, it does not have to go directly before Mayor Tom Watson, Judge-Executive Al Mattingly and a representative with the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, Lovett said. It is a working document and will be revised as project development dictates.

The process involved in seeing the plan through to fruition has been long and full of revision, but officials applauded Lovett and his GRADD colleagues on their patience and fortitude.

"I think this is fantastic," said Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Candance Brake. "It's a really good starting point, and it keeps (bicycle-pedestrian infrastructure) in the forefront of people's minds."

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