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Photo above: Road cyclists on Virginia Beach Blvd.

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League of American Bicyclists Bicycle Friendly Community sign. Photo courtesy of the LAB



Bike riders at the Oceanfront .



Pedestrians at a crosswalk. Photo courtesy of www.pedbikeimages.org/ Jan Moser.

The Need for the Plan

The City of Virginia Beach adopted its first Master Bikeway Plan, as a component of the Comprehensive Plan, in 1985. The Plan has been updated five times. Though each plan is different, there is a common theme: the creation of a place where people enjoy working, living, playing, and learning in an environment of unparalleled quality and opportunity.

The previous Bikeways and Trails Plan was adopted by City Council in 2004. It envisioned:

- a Primary Network along roadways,
- a Secondary Network connecting neighborhoods, and
- Specialized Features such as a criterium and greenways.

The time has come to update the Plan because things have changed since 2004. Many projects in the 2004 Plan have been built, while others are forthcoming or look unlikely to be built soon. New neighborhoods and corridors create additional opportunities, and new needs have arisen. In addition, the Plan was not always clear about what improvements should be built on any specific project.

Virginia Beach needs multi-modal transportation options for a variety of reasons, including increased fuel costs; increasing road congestion; citizen desires for healthier communities and lifestyles; and decreased funding for roadway construction. The Master Transportation Plan chapter of the 2009 Comprehensive Plan addresses these community-wide needs by calling for the development of alternative transportation modes.

Not all Americans use a motor vehicle as their primary transportation mode. The U.S. Census Bureau reported in 2009 that about 9% of American households do not have access to a motor vehicle. (http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-qr_name=ACS_2009_1YR_G00_DP4&-geo_id=01000US&-ds_name=ACS_2009_1YR_G00_&-_lang=en&-redoLog=false&-format=) Further, several categories of people are limited in their use of motor vehicles, including:

- Children under the age of 16
- People with impaired vision
- People with mobility issues and health limitations
- People with low incomes
- People who choose not to drive.

To address the needs of the entire community, the 2009 Comprehensive Plan calls for the development of alternative modes such as walking, cycling, and public transit. In response, this Plan has been developed to foster a better understanding of bike and pedestrian needs in Virginia Beach and to guide the work of planners, designers, and developers as they implement the elements of the Comprehensive Plan.

In general, the Bikeways and Trails Plan is an attempt to:

- Reflect the community's needs and desires

- Provide an inventory of existing and currently proposed bike and pedestrian facilities
- Provide guidance for engineering/facilities, education, enforcement, encouragement, and evaluation/planning activities
- Serve as a framework for identifying and selecting bike/pedestrian projects in the Capital Improvements Program.

In Virginia Beach, the Department of Parks & Recreation oversees the planning and implementation of bikeways and trails. The Senior Planner dedicated to this work has duties that closely mirror what other communities call a Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator.

Public Input

The overriding objective of the Plan is to be consistent with the needs, desires, and priorities of the Virginia Beach community, so the creation of the Plan required public input from a variety of sources. Public open houses, stakeholder meetings, technical meetings, and online surveys all played an integral role in informing the priorities, policies, and recommendations outlined in this document. The planning team worked from the public comments to outline the community issues and develop the goals and tasks.

Throughout this document, the community's suggestions and concerns punctuate this plan, making it distinctly a Virginia Beach plan.

The Nature of the Plan

The Bikeways and Trails Plan is a guide – a planning document indicating what the City of Virginia Beach would like to accomplish in regards to bikeways and trails. As such, it is recognized that for any particular application the desired elements of this plan must be tempered by constraining realities to establish what bike facilities, if any, will be included with the particular application.

Therefore, in any particular application, such as when City transportation projects become active, a feasibility analysis will be performed to determine the extent, if any, to which bike facilities can be reasonably accommodated. Such analysis will consider costs, availability of funding, impacts to adjacent private properties (e.g., additional property acquisition due to bike facilities, potential for damages associated with the acquisition, and changes to access to property), impacts to public and private utilities, and other pertinent factors. The analysis will be documented and will be the basis for establishing what, if any, bike facilities will be included with the project.

When roadway improvements of an interim nature are being designed, reasonable accommodations to enhance the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists shall be included in the plans, if feasible, as dictated by project purpose, project site constraints and project budget. (Referenced in the attached Multi-Modal Accommodations Resolution approved by City Council on January 22, 2008)



A Parks and Recreation staff member talks with a citizen during a public meeting held at the Kempsville Recreation Center.



A beach cruiser hitched to a bike rack at the Oceanfront.

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One of the entrances to the Oceanfront Boardwalk

Where practicable and feasible and upon availability of funding, construction of limited on-road bikeway related improvements may be evaluated and given due consideration through our roadway maintenance program for overlay and repaving operations.

How This Plan Is Organized

Community input has been central and critical to the development of this plan. Chapter 2 focuses on how that input was pursued and the findings that it yielded.

Chapters 3-7 focus on the “5 E’s”, a comprehensive paradigm that evolved during the 1970’s through the 1990’s. Early bike and pedestrian planning focused primarily on facility development, but this more complete approach and its mnemonic device have come to be recognized by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and internationally. One important purpose of the paradigm is to equate all facets of a bikeways and trails system, making traffic safety education just as important as building new bikeway and trail facilities.

The 5 E’s are described by the League of American Bicyclists (LAB) at www.bikeleague.org thus, in the context of communities preparing to apply for bike-friendly status:

“ENGINEERING [& FACILITIES]

“Communities are asked about what is on the ground; what has been built to promote cycling in the community. For example, questions in this category inquire about the existence and content of a bicycle master plan, the accommodation of cyclists on public roads, and the existence of both well-designed bike lanes and multi-use paths in the community. Reviewers also look at the availability of secure bike parking and the condition and connectivity of both the off-road and on-road network.”

“EDUCATION

“The questions in this category are designed to determine the amount of education there is available for both cyclists and motorists. Education includes teaching cyclists of all ages how to ride safely in any area for multi-use paths to congested city streets as well as teaching motorists how to share the road safely with cyclists. Some things that reviewers look at are the availability of cycling education for adults and children, the number of League Cycling Instructors in the community, and other ways that safety information is distributed to both cyclists and motorists in the community including bike maps, tip sheets, and as a part of driver’s education manuals and courses.”

“ENCOURAGEMENT

“This category concentrates on how the community promotes and encourages bicycling. This can be done through Bike Month and Bike to Work Week events as well as producing community bike maps, route finding signage, community bike rides, commuter incentive programs, and having a Safe Routes to School program. In addition, some questions focus on other things that have been built to promote cycling or a cycling culture such as off-road facilities, BMX parks, velodromes, and the existence of both road and mountain bicycling clubs.”

“ENFORCEMENT

“The enforcement category contains questions that measure the connections between the cycling and law enforcement communities. Questions address whether or not the law enforcement community has a liaison with the cycling community, if



Virginia Beach Police Officers patrol the Oceanfront on bikes



A bike with a hitch on the back at the Oceanfront Boardwalk

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A sign directs bikers to the Maritime Trail.



Bikes parked next to the statue at Grommet Island Park, the first 100% accessible oceanfront park in America.

there are bicycle divisions of the law enforcement or public safety communities, if the community uses targeted enforcement to encourage cyclists and motorists to share the road safely, and the existence of bicycling related laws such as those requiring helmet or the use of sidepaths.

"EVALUATION & PLANNING

"Here the community is judged on the systems that they have in place to evaluate current programs and plan for the future. Questions are focused on measuring the amount of cycling taking place in the community, the crash and fatality rates, and ways that the community works to improve these numbers. Communities are asked about whether or not they have a bike plan, how much of it has been implemented and what the next steps for improvement are."

LAB created a scorecard called "Is Your Community Bicycle Friendly?" with three questions about each "E", for communities to determine if they are ready to apply to be a Bicycle-Friendly Community. These questions are shown in each "E" chapter. When Virginia Beach can answer "YES" to each question, the City will be ready to apply for Bicycle Friendly Community status. In addition to receiving national award recognition, the Bicycle-Friendly Community program provides incentives and hands-on assistance for communities that actively support bicycling.

Goals and Implementation Tasks

This Plan has been written to be both visionary and action-oriented. Each of the five E chapters contains its own list of Goals and Implementation Tasks to outline both a direction and a method:

- **Goals** describe desirable end results or conditions towards which the City should strive, and
- **Implementation Tasks** describe the actions that can help the City achieve those goals.

The Goals and Implementation Tasks are addressed within each E chapter rather than as a collective of all, because the goals and tasks within each E are very different from the goals and tasks in the other E's. They do not mix and match well.

Policies and Priorities

Each E chapter contains a summary of the **Policies** that flow from the Goals and Implementation Tasks, either as part of this Plan or which the City needs to develop and adopt; and a review of the **Priorities** recommended by the Bikeways and Trails Advisory Committee (BTAC). The Plan has no separate, discrete Implementation section, because each E chapter is its own Implementation section.

Prioritizing Method

Virginia Beach must be entrepreneurial and opportunistic in implementing this Plan. Some top priority projects will require a long time to accomplish, such as the shared-use path along the transit corridor, which must be treated as incidental to the long-term transit project. Some other projects can be completed quickly with minimal use of resources or disruption to

work flow on the higher priority projects, and thus could be addressed sooner.

The Council-appointed Bikeways and Trails Advisory Committee (BTAC) set two groups of priorities: **Goals** and **Infrastructure Projects**.

Prioritizing is based on a pragmatic approach that involves twin issues: priority level and time frame.

- Priority level describes how important or urgent a task or project is.
- Time frame indicates how soon or how quickly it can or should be accomplished.

Priority Level

This Plan uses a simple Top/High/Medium priority system that balances several characteristics of each goal:

- Responds to the themes (therefore, direct importance to citizens)
- Improves safety of users and the general public
- Improves circulation and connectivity
- Benefits more people
- Involves social justice or equity issues
- Must precede another task or project

Time Frame

This Plan likewise uses a simple time frame system, with 5 tiers:

- Immediate: can be addressed immediately and could be completed very quickly
- Near: could be completed within 1-2 years
- Medium: could be completed within 3-5 years
- Long: probably will require more than 5 years to complete
- Ongoing: will repeat periodically or occasionally

The time frame is focused on how quickly each goal could be completed or when an ongoing level could be achieved, not when work on it should begin. Time frames are suggested for each goal by balancing several characteristics:

- Priority level
- Cost
- How much time the work will require
- Staff time and City resources it will require
- Outside forces, such as partnerships and grant cycles
- Sequencing with other tasks or projects
- Dependence on uncontrollable circumstances, e.g., pavement deterioration before repaving and restriping
- Public involvement processes



Walkers on the Cape Henry Trail



A surrey on the Oceanfront Boardwalk Trail

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Virginia Beach Art Institute students participate in the ribbon-cutting ceremony for Constitution Drive.



Bikes parked outside the Ferry Plantation House. Photo courtesy of Bruce Drees

Virginia Beach Is Unique

Virginia Beach has numerous climatic, cultural, geographic and land use features which make it unique and which make the bikeways and trails opportunities offered in this Plan different from any other.

Virginia Beach is a tourism destination.

The Chesapeake Bay, Oceanfront, and Sandbridge beaches are playgrounds for over 3 million visitors every year. Residents enjoy the beaches too; the ambiance of the beach fosters a laid-back lifestyle, with many people getting out of their cars and casually biking or walking around. Our world-renowned 3-mile boardwalk with a separate bike path is the perfect place for visitors and locals to enjoy the Atlantic Ocean and the beach.

Virginia Beach is mostly of a sprawling, residential suburban form – on a grand scale.

Virginia Beach grew from a sleepy little beach town to become the largest city in Virginia, with over 430,000 residents. The City has large nodes and strips of commercial and office development, and 95% of the City's residents live in suburbia. This land use pattern spreads us out and often puts destinations beyond easy biking or walking distance.

The City is mostly built out. A "green line" preserves the southern part of the City for agriculture by limiting development pressures, so most new development will be redevelopment, with the greatest intensity being focused in 8 Strategic Growth Areas (SGAs) across the middle of the City, mostly along I-264 and Virginia Beach Boulevard.

Virginia Beach has a large, vibrant agricultural business community.

The sights and flavors of the southern part of the City are diverse and delightful: roadside markets, the Pungo Strawberry Festival, the Farmer's Market, horse farms and so much more. Many suburbanites, including cyclists, value the open space and pastoral scenery of the south, which also hosts valued ecological niches within the Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge and False Cape State Park.

Virginia Beach is very much a motorist's town.

The City's rapid growth during the auto-dominated second half of the 20th Century gave it 3,500 miles of roads. Most of the major roads are designed as parkways and boulevards. In general, neighborhoods have been designed to preclude cut-thru traffic, funneling most traffic onto the major roads and creating numerous bottlenecks. In addition, certain nodes of the City offer traffic that can be hectic and aggressive; the resort area can be completely clogged with motor vehicles during peak periods; and wide roads with many fast-moving motor vehicles can make biking and walking unattractive for many people.

Virginia Beach is a military town.

Major military installations dominate our geography, economy, and culture: Naval Air Station (NAS) Oceana and the Dam Neck Annex; and Joint

Expeditionary Base (JEB) Little Creek - Fort Story. Bases in other Hampton Roads communities add to the weight, including Naval Air Landing Field (NALF) Fentress in Chesapeake, and especially Naval Station Norfolk, the largest of its kind *in the world*. Many of its personnel live in Virginia Beach and commute. This population is transient in nature, with strength of character and a global exposure to other ways of doing things. Similarly, many of the military enjoy cycling, running and other similar fitness activities. As a result of the unique military presence in Hampton Roads, especially Virginia Beach, there is perhaps a greater expectation that things will get done to improve the type of supporting bikeway and trails infrastructure in the Commonwealth's largest city.

Virginia Beach's geography and climate make for very good biking and walking.

The land is uniformly flat, making it relatively easy for pedestrians and bicyclists to get around comfortably. Except for Mount Trashmore, Landfill #2, and a few other natural dunes and man-made landscape features, most of the City is less than 15 feet above sea level. Winters are mild; Spring and Fall are wonderful for outdoor activities; Summers can be hot but generally suitable for getting out. On the other hand, wide waterways and wetlands meander throughout the City, dividing the land into "necks" that are reflected often in the road names.

Virginia Beach has a unique mix of cyclists and pedestrians.

People walk all over the resort area, sometimes with little regard for the rules of the road. People of all ages ride comfort bikes and beach cruisers, sometimes to do shopping or with racks to carry surfboards. Bike rentals at the Oceanfront resort area offer beach cruisers for people to ride for a few hours at a time, as well as four-seater, four-wheeled, pedal-powered "surreys". We have a substantial number of racers and fitness riders, often doing much of their riding in groups. Several bike shops and clubs sponsor weekend rides that can exceed 100 riders *each*. We have kids and teens riding to get around, often on BMX bikes, mountain bikes, cruisers, skateboards and a host of other variants. We have bike commuters, some of whom opt not to own motor vehicles. We have low-income people who cannot afford a motor vehicle and must walk or rely on their bikes and a mix of other forms of transport to go any significant distance.

Virginia Beach allows bikes on sidewalks.

Local ordinances allow bikes on sidewalks, except in the resort area and Town Center. This is unusual in Virginia and in Hampton Roads. Allowing bikes on sidewalks can help people get around, especially across gaps in the bikeways and trails system.



Children ride their bikes at the Tour de Beach event at the Princess Anne Athletic Complex.



A bike commuter taking a break.

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Bike lockers at the Silverleaf Park and Ride in Virginia Beach



Shared use path on Shore Drive

Goals for the Plan

At the beginning of the process of researching for this Plan, the Bikeways and Trails Advisory Committee (BTAC) and staff agreed on these goals for the development of the Plan.

Reflect the community's needs and desires

- What they want and what they need, where they want it and where they need it — within real-world constraints.
- Discern/establish the community's expectations.
- Foster increased community support.

Point to a brighter future

- Better health, easier transportation, and more fun!
- Use 5-year and 20-year planning windows, but look beyond.

A functional document ...

Guide the work of planners and designers, both in-house and consultants.

- Show what to plan and design, and how to do it.
- Outline specific projects with timelines and funding.
- Improve inter-departmental coordination for transportation planning, design and construction.
- Coordinate regionally and with neighboring localities.

... for a functional system.

- Establish performance criteria/standards for new facilities.
- Create a system, not just a group of new facilities.