

West Piedmont Regional Bicycle Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The West Piedmont Regional Bicycle Plan was developed to identify a coordinated network of local and regional bicycle routes to guide the future of bicycle transportation in the West Piedmont Region. The plan identifies priority projects at the regional and local level and includes recommendations for support programs and policies as well as implementation. Project funding was provided through the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and was administered by the West Piedmont Planning District Commission (WPPDC) and the West Piedmont Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The project was guided by a Bicycle Advisory Committee (BAC) which included stakeholders from local government planning agencies, VDOT, the Virginia Department of Health, and active members of the bicycling community.

During the course of the study, the BAC developed a series of six goals to guide this regional planning process (listed below in no particular order):

- ❖ Promote bicycling in the community as an alternate mode of travel.
- ❖ Develop a prioritized regional network of bicycle routes which provide connectivity between residential areas and activity centers such as business and commercial districts, historical and cultural destinations, and public facilities.
- ❖ Increase public awareness of bicycling safety by providing additional education opportunities for cyclists, drivers, and property owners.
- ❖ Promote improved health and mental wellness among present and future generations of the region's citizens and enhance the quality of life by increasing the availability of recreational opportunities in the region.

- ❖ Emphasize the development of bicycle infrastructure to leverage the economic development potential of the region's existing commercial and natural resources.
- ❖ Provide guidance for the creation of bicycle-oriented policies, programs, and standards that will promote the development and maintenance of full-service bicycle facilities.

Citizens of the region provided substantial input to the study process through their participation at five public outreach meetings conducted around the region and through comments submitted through a project website which was active for the duration of the seven month planning process (www.bikepiedmontva.com).

The recommendations outlined below include suggested steps for creating a regional bicycle network and for guiding the future of bicycle transportation planning in Virginia's West Piedmont region.

Regional Bicycle Network

The overall recommended regional bicycle network includes over 800 miles of on-road routes and shared-use trails shown on Figures 4.1 through 4.7 in the full report. Recommended routes are denoted in three separate colors to delineate planning-level costs (year 2005 dollars) that could be expected along each corridor in order to provide bicycle accommodations. Recommendations for bicycle accommodations were divided into three categories as follows:

- ❖ Low cost routes (green) - \$15,000/mile – includes minimal amount of investment to provide signing and striping for bicycles (both directions)
- ❖ Medium cost routes (purple) - \$200,000/mile – includes routes requiring a modest level of investment, which could entail the addition of paved shoulders, along with full signing and striping for bicycles

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- ❖ High cost routes (red) - \$500,000/mile – includes significant improvements to accommodate bicycles, such as the construction of a parallel, off-road shared-use path to keep bicycle traffic physically separated from automobile traffic

Typical sections for various types of bicycle facilities are included in the **Appendix** of the full report. These facilities are consistent with guidelines established by the *Virginia Bicycle Facility Resource Guide* and include on-street bicycle lanes, on-street bicycle lanes with adjacent vehicular parking (urban areas), wide outside (curb) lane, and paved shoulders.

Prioritized Projects

One logical strategy is to build on successful local projects, such as the Dan River Trail. Extension of this trail west from the “Crossing at the Dan” complex to the Union Street Bridge and northward to the North Main Street area is planned and \$250,000 in federal transportation enhancement funds are programmed. Other interested agencies and organizations in the region could organize group rides by traveling to the Dan River Trail now to evaluate the possibilities for their area.

Another logical strategy is to accentuate the positive and promote outstanding community assets. Much of the region is scenic and popular with outdoor enthusiasts who come to the region to explore and ride the roads. In particular, the world-class Blue Ridge Parkway lies on the very western edge of this region and represents an untapped potential to boost tourism. Ecotourism was cited by several citizens as the potential to increase the number of visitors to the West Piedmont region to ride trails and roads that connect with the Blue Ridge Parkway.

In urbanized areas (Danville and Martinsville), funds to upgrade existing signalized intersections could be earmarked to upgrade vehicle detectors (in-pavement or video) to improve the sensitivity

for bicyclists. Often, the lighter metal weight of a bicycle is undetected until a motor vehicle arrives, typically frustrating bicyclists to the point of passing through the signal illegally. Changing the sensitivity to recognize bicycles would improve bicycling conditions and obedience of traffic laws.

Another strategy is to including the addition of bicycle accommodations (striping, signing, pavement widening) with upcoming roadway improvement projects that have not yet been designed. The construction of bicycle facilities can occur with reduced costs and improved planning if projects are “piggy-backed” with upcoming roadway projects.

Planning for the future Interstate 73 through this region and elsewhere in Virginia should include consideration of a separated shared-use trail at the edge of the freeway right-of-way. Treatments at interchanges should take advantage of the grade separation so that “through bicyclists” would not be required to travel through at-grade intersections with cross-roads. Alignment planning should also consider reasonable grades for basic-level bicyclists.

Improvements to Route 58 in the region should consider the potential for a major east-west bikeway or shared-use path connecting the region. This is the only continuous roadway corridor linking east and west. Much of the central and eastern sections are not presently suitable except for the most advanced bicyclists. Similar consideration should be given to Route 29 (through Danville and Pittsylvania County) and to Route 40, which traverses the northern portion of the region and connects Chatham (Pittsylvania) with the Town of Rocky Mount in Franklin County.

Following are recommended short-term and medium-term projects, by locality.

City of Danville

- ❖ Program bicycle facilities into the scope of future services and construction

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improvements to US Routes 29 (north-south) and 58 (east-west) as well as Business 29/293 and the Route 58 Bypass.

- ❖ Install bicycle racks on the Danville Transit System buses to facilitate more commuter bicycling and provide options for more long range bicycling.
- ❖ Encourage the Dan River Basin Association to coordinate with Henry County to develop a long term/long distance route to connect the Cities of Danville and Martinsville as well as connect the Dan River Trails to the proposed Smith River trails.
- ❖ Use annual traffic signal funding to construct a demonstration signal to use advance signal detection system (loop detection) to include cyclists in phases. It is recommended that the city choose a heavily traveling intersection along a proposed bike route to be considered for the demonstration. (River Road or Route 293)
- ❖ Widen Route 51 for bike lanes and provide striping and signing.
- ❖ Utilize annual roadway maintenance funds to improve poor pavement conditions along the recommended bicycle routes.
- ❖ Identify key locations to install bicycle racks downtown as well as other frequented destinations.
- ❖ Coordinate with Pittsylvania County to construct a bicycle facility to connect the Angler's Park area to the Ringgold Rail Trail.
- ❖ Construct additional phases of the Dan River Trail system and provide maintenance for existing phases.

Pittsylvania County

- ❖ Program bicycling facilities into the future improvements for US Route 29

(north-south) and US Route 58 (east-west) to provide regional access routes.

- ❖ Identify spot locations for shoulder improvements along US Route 58 to allow for bike lane, striping, and signing.
- ❖ Pursue the extension of the Ringgold Rail Trail west to the City of Danville. Coordinate with the City of Danville to construct a north/south bike route to connect Angler's Park Trails to the Ringgold Rail Trail.
- ❖ Encourage the installation of bike racks on main street areas of the Towns of Gretna, Chatham, and Hurt. Bike racks combined with the existing wide pavements found in the areas will create a great avenue for bicyclists, locally and regionally.

City of Martinsville

- ❖ Extend the Uptown Rail Trail to connect to the central business district.
- ❖ Identify spot locations on recommended bicycle routes for opportunities to provide bike lanes to cyclists.
- ❖ Develop a plan and construct facilities to include bicycle route access and bicycle racks to make the downtown central business district (Church Street) bicycle "friendly".
- ❖ Coordinate with Henry County to provide a route to connect the central business district to the proposed Smith River Trail.
- ❖ Provide a route to connect the central business district to the proposed mountain bike trails around the Martinsville Reservoir #1 and to provide connectivity to the Patrick Henry Community College.

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Henry County

- ❖ Construct a 1-mile demonstration trail along the Smith River to the south of the City of Martinsville.
- ❖ Construct facilities to connect the Martinsville Speedway to US Route 220 and US Route 58 Bypass. This will provide a local alternate to traffic congestion when entering and exiting the Speedway.
- ❖ Construct a bicycle facility along the Smith River from Philpott Lake Dam south to the Virginia/North Carolina state line. Connect to the proposed Smith River demonstration project to the south of the City of Martinsville.
- ❖ Construct mountain biking trails around the Martinsville Reservoir just to the north of the City of Martinsville. Provide a route from the City of Martinsville to connect to the reservoir and Patrick Henry Community College.
- ❖ Identify spot locations on recommended bicycle routes for road widening opportunities to provide bike lanes to cyclists.

Patrick County

- ❖ Coordinate with the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation to provide access and facilities to and along the Blue Ridge Parkway for cyclists.
- ❖ Develop a local bike network system in the Town of Stuart building off of Business Route 58. The route should include connections to the elementary school. The plan should also include the installation of bicycle racks along Main Street and other community activity centers.
- ❖ Program bicycle facilities into future Route 58 planning. Pavement widening, striping and signing are recommended.

- ❖ Elected officials should endorse and support the development of a stand alone bicycle facility along the future I-73 within the right-of-way.
- ❖ Develop Mayo River Rail Trail to accommodate pedestrian and bicycling uses.

Franklin County

- ❖ Construct a shared-use path or mountain bike trail through the Grassy Hill Nature Preserve to provide access and connectivity between the north and south sides of the preserve.
- ❖ Promote the development and connectivity of bicycling facilities in the Westlake area, which currently lies within the Westlake Corridor Overlay District.
- ❖ Elected officials should endorse and support the development of a stand alone bicycle facility along the future I-73 within the right-of-way.
- ❖ Coordinate with the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation to provide access and facilities to and along the Blue Ridge Parkway for cyclists.
- ❖ Continue extension of Philpott Lake trails to the west, with ultimate goal of connecting to the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Support Programs and Policies

While physical obstacles such as rivers, bridges, and railroads are more visible, additional obstacles to bicycling have existed in more subtle, but equally significant institutional forms. If traditional ways of administering transportation programs at the local, regional, and state levels have been slow to change in the past, the Commonwealth's transportation leaders are now recognizing the importance of using "out-of-the-box" thinking to move people from one place to another in more efficient and cost-effective manners. During the recent formation of the *VTrans 2025* initiative, for example, Virginia's

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Secretary of Transportation, Mr. Whittington Clement, called attention to the need for (highway) management to “think differently” and “to be innovative”. As a result, VDOT’s *Policy for Integrating Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodations* is strong evidence of the department’s new effort to take a leadership role in providing more equitable consideration of bicyclists and pedestrians on Virginia’s roadways.

Regional and local public safety awareness programs / campaigns should be considered to offer practical, effective advice to help with common obstacles such as dogs running off leash. Dogs off leash was identified consistently across the region as an obstacle to bicycling, particularly in rural areas.

A “Bike Smart” safety-oriented program could be considered using the City of Rockville Maryland as a resource. The program is making its way in to Virginia and includes funding to educate teachers and students alike on bicycle basics and bicycle safety.

Maintenance of facilities is a critical element to a sustained bicycle program. Many agencies rely on the use of volunteers to “adopt a trail” to maintain off-road trails and greenways. On-street bicycle lanes are used more when monthly street sweepers remove debris.

To achieve the goals stated in Chapter One, a concerted effort will be necessary to retrofit corridors that have few, if any, bicycle-friendly facilities. This effort will take time and resources. A concurrent effort is equally vital; that is, for all seven local governments to adopt policies that will ensure that all future corridor projects and all new developments include facilities that provide for safe and convenient travel for bicyclists. Following are lists, in somewhat chronological order, of the recommended policies and programs that regional governments and all seven local governments should consider:

Policies – Regional Level

- ❖ Adopt the *West Piedmont Regional Bicycle Plan* as an element of the Danville-Pittsylvania Urban Area Long-Range Transportation Plan (2026) and of the West Piedmont PDC regional transportation plan.
- ❖ Establish a regional bicycle advisory committee to guide future planning and development efforts for bicycle facilities. It is recommended that the committee consist of representatives of each of the PDC member jurisdictions, including planners, engineers, landscape architects, economic development staff, citizens, and active bicyclists.
- ❖ Environmental justice is a term coined by the US Justice Department by way of Executive Order signed by President Clinton in 1993. It requires consideration for the potential disproportionate impact of a federally-funded transportation project on communities with a majority of low-income or minority population. Alternatives must be considered that do not have disproportionate impacts on these groups. If alternatives are not reasonable and feasible, then mitigation measures such as enhanced pedestrian and bicycle facilities should be considered.

Policies – Local Level

- ❖ Update Comprehensive Plan language stating support for improvements to bicycle mobility. The update should also consider statements of support for bicycle-friendly improvements including greenways, trails, share-use paths, and mixed (land) use districts to facilitate short bicycle trips between different land uses. Adoption of this plan as an element of the local Comprehensive Plan is strongly encouraged.

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- ❖ Adopt capital improvement programs and annual budgets that include funds for bicycle-related improvements.
 - ❖ Adopt residential land development ordinances which address street design standards and cross-sections that accommodate bicyclists.
 - ❖ Adopt commercial land development ordinances requiring bicycle racks (for parking) on-site.
 - ❖ Adopt commercial and residential land development ordinances to encourage use of multi-use paths and allow for their inclusion toward meeting open space requirements.
 - ❖ Review and strengthen animal-restraint (dogs) ordinance language and enforcement policies to encourage protection of cyclists from dogs off-leash.
 - ❖ Provide protection to regional corridors (i.e.: Route 122 corridor from Smith Mountain Lake to the Town of Rocky Mount) through the creation of a highway corridor overlay district or through amendments to current zoning ordinances to require the provision for bicycle facilities to any new construction along the corridor.
- ask participants to suggest the name of one or more friends to build interest. (by local agencies).
 - ❖ Recruit a major regional bicycle race (similar to past Tour DuPont) to come to the West Piedmont Region (by local or regional jurisdictions).
 - ❖ Advertise the plan through area colleges and universities and other institutions and organizations likely to have an interest in bicycling. Consideration should be given to continuing the use of a program website. (by MPO).
 - ❖ Obtain funds to conduct a regional rails-to-trails inventory and action plan (by PDC).
 - ❖ Conduct alignment study to identify feasible route to connect the Dan River trail with the Smith River trail. Such a study would involve multiple agencies, including some in the state of North Carolina if the confluence of the Dan and Smith Rivers is to be considered. (by MPO). Also evaluate feasibility of providing future connection to the Mayo River.
 - ❖ Protect the route 122 corridor in Franklin County. (by VDOT).
 - ❖ In the city of Danville, and elsewhere as public mass transit is initiated, consider installing racks to hold bicycles. Such measures have been effective nationwide in boosting transit ridership and extending the use of bicycles. (by Danville Transit System).
 - ❖ Designate rural road maintenance funds to re-stripe routes identified in this plan to “create” bicycle lanes, where safe and feasible. (by Counties and VDOT).
 - ❖ Consider conducting a focused level-of-service (LOS) study on the recommended network of bicycle routes

Implementation

- ❖ Adopt the plan (by MPO. Local agencies can hear a presentation and “receive” the document).
- ❖ Organize a one-hour long on-street bicycle ride in each community, using local enthusiasts as leaders and local law enforcement to ensure safety. Advertise the event extensively as a “fun family ride” and use it to build a mailing list of interested citizens. Consider monthly rides and continually

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identified in **Figures 4.1 through 4.7**. The LOS study would evaluate the factors most important to bicyclists and assign a letter grade (LOS) to each recommended route that corresponds to how well bicyclists would feel safe and enjoy the route (by VDOT).

- ❖ Consider implementing a demonstration project of the safe routes to schools program.

Funding Sources

There are various means through which bicycle strategies can be implemented, including

- ❖ Highway construction funds
- ❖ Transportation Enhancement Program
- ❖ Recreation Access Program
- ❖ Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Program
- ❖ Hazard Elimination Safety Program
- ❖ Revenue Sharing Program
- ❖ National Scenic Byways Program
- ❖ Public Lands Highways Program
- ❖ Transportation and Community System Preservation Program
- ❖ State Aid Transit Grants
- ❖ Virginia Recreational Trails Fund Program (RTP)
- ❖ 402 Highway Safety Program

Additional information for the programs listed above can also be found on VDOT's web site (www.virginiadot.org).

Appendix H in the full report contains a matrix which identifies 15 sources of federal funding along with the respective bicycle-related areas toward which each funding source can be applied. [It is important to note that because the West Piedmont Planning District Commission lies within an attainment area as defined by the

Environmental Protection Agency's National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), the region does not qualify for Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) funding.]

Other funding opportunities include:

- ❖ Small grants such as International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) grants and CLIF Bar grants
- ❖ Gifts from local businesses
- ❖ Donations from churches, community groups, etc.
- ❖ Cost-sharing with other agencies and volunteer groups