St. Charles Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Plan

A Cooperative Planning Project

Report of the St. Charles Bike Facility Plan Task Force
April 2003
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The Task Force gratefully acknowledges the input it has received from the citizens of our community, especially the members of the Fox Valley Bicycle & Ski Club and those who participated in the Focus on St. Charles program.
Introduction

In the Beginning...

St. Charles had been settled for nearly a century when comprehensive planning began with *The Official City Plan* of St. Charles, Illinois in 1928. There was little discussion of transportation issues at that time, except for a call for more bridges crossing the Fox River – nine of them, to be exact – and a call for a continuous riverwalk in the downtown area. The population at that time was just more than 5,000 persons. While the plan does not state any projections for residential growth, the ambitious annexation and development plan clearly anticipates rapid development.

However, with the onset of the Great Depression a year later, the projected development never materialized. By 1950, the population had reached only 6,709 residents, but the potential for growth in the postwar period was obvious. The St Charles Plan Commission was reconstituted by Mayor I.G. Langum on July 9, 1951. And for the next 20 years, the Commission worked to guide the community’s growth.

By 1970, the population of St. Charles had reached 12,945, and it was obvious that a new plan was needed. Under the guidance of the Plan Commission, a group of elected officials, civic leaders, and citizen planners began meeting to provide for a new development plan. The *Comprehensive Plan of the City of St. Charles* was adopted by the City Council on September 30, 1974. For the first time, a city plan made specific recommendations about bicycle paths. Under the *Transportation* portion of the plan, the following statement was made:

**Bicycle Routes**

The increasing importance of alternate forms of transportation have placed emphasis upon the use of bicycles for transportation and recreation. The Comprehensive Plan recommends a series of bicycle routes throughout the St. Charles planning area, with a system of routes following the various open space sites and corridors and a separate system of bicycle paths and routes so as to provide connections between places of residence and places of work and commercial services. Such bicycle routes should be established as a priority element in the improvement of the streets or existing open spaces, and should also be designed into all future residential developments wherever possible. The plan incorporates the need for bicycle routes; however, the location and design of the routes should be determined by (1) detailed studies as a part of public facility planning and (2) in the review of private residential, commercial and industrial developments submitted for public review and approval.

The Comprehensive Plan was updated in 1990 with a revision in 1996. By the time of the 1996 revision, the Comprehensive Plan had broken new ground by considering these paths under *Open Space and Recreation* as well as under *Transportation*. Under the former, the plan states:
In addition to these greenways, access corridors are needed to provide pedestrian and bicycle connections for neighborhoods and open space facilities. These include:

- From the bike trail along the east side of the Fox River to the Prairie Path
- From the Cambridge neighborhood to a major bike path.
- From LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve northerly along Randall Road and Silver Glen Road to Blackhawk Forest Preserve.
- From LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve south to Kane County Judicial Complex at Peck Road and Route 38, connecting to Geneva Park District’s Peck Farm Park
- From the Great Western Trail to the East Fox River Trail.
- From Red Gate and Timbers neighborhoods to downtown St. Charles.

Under *Transportation*, 1996 plan states:

Sidewalks and bicycle paths provide connections between places of residence, places of work, commercial services, and recreational facilities. NIPC’s Resource Management Plan recommends that local transportation programs be coordinated with open space and greenway planning in order to encourage joint use and landscape enhancements of rights-of-way, as well as assure the continuity of greenways, trails and bikeways. This plan supports this recommendation. The Open Space and Recreation Chapter describes such linkage routes.

Sidewalks and bicycle paths also promote the small town character of the community. Such routes should be established as a priority element of streets and the development and enhancement of open spaces and should be planned as part of all future developments. Areas where there is an evident need for connecting routes include the following:

1. The near northwest side (including Timbers, Red Gate and Thornley on the Fox) has limited pedestrian connections with other parts of town, particularly to the downtown area.
2. Bike routes need to be developed and strengthened through the downtown area, particularly for continuity of the east and west Fox River bike trails. This is addressed more fully in Chapter 9, “Commerce”.
3. Bike routes need to be established on the northeast side to tie into the Prairie Path.

In 1996, the St. Charles Park District developed its own *Comprehensive Master Plan*. This plan addresses bicycle and pedestrian facilities in similar detail, generally within the context of a vision for greenways. The plans are complimentary to one another.

As of the time of the development of these two plans, St. Charles had already developed an arterial system of bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The principal “spines” of the plan are the trails along the Fox River, both of which connect to trails in neighboring
jurisdictions, and the Great Western Trail, beginning just west of Randall Road and running west to Sycamore in Dekalb County. The 1996 Park District Comprehensive Master Plan contains a map showing these trails, as well as noting the city-designated “on-street” facilities along State/Dean Streets between downtown and the Great Western Trail, along Prairie Street between 7th Street and Randall Road, along 2nd and 3rd Avenues connecting the two portions of the Fox River Trail, and along portions of Oak Street, 7th Avenue, and Illinois Street/Avenue.

Finally, the Downtown St. Charles Partnership adopted the Downtown St. Charles Strategy Plan in 2000, and the City adopted it in December, 2002. This plan included many goals for making the downtown district more pedestrian friendly, and a high priority is placed on the development of a continuous riverfront loop.

The Formation of the Task Force

The City and the Park District moved to build a number of new bike/pedestrian facilities in the late 1990s. Among the planned links completed (or currently nearing completion) are:

- From LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve northerly along Randall Road to Silver Glen Road, then easterly to Blackhawk Forest Preserve
- A spur off of the Randall Road path along the south side of Bolcum Road to Primrose Farm Park.
- From LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve south to the Kane County Judicial Complex at Peck Road and Route 38, connecting to Geneva Park District’s Peck Farm Park.
- From Timber Trails Park to the East Fox River Trail via a bicycle bridge over the Fox River at the Union Pacific Railroad bridge.

Other portions of bike/pedestrian facilities have been planned or developed within new subdivisions, such as the preservation of Mosely Lane as a bikeway in the Majestic Oaks development. But as the Plan Commission reviewed more development proposals, it became clear that a larger, more comprehensive study of the need for bicycle and pedestrian bikeways was needed. The Commission was eager to site more bikeways, the Park District was interested in working with the City to expand the network, and developers were seeing the value of providing such amenities. However, it wasn’t always obvious where a bikeway should go on a particular property.

An example of this was the annexation and development of the Meijer/Bricher Commons property. The Commission knew that a north-south link was planned to the west near Lincoln Highway and the Kane County Judicial Center, and the Commission also knew
that a linkage back east to the Fox River Trail would be desirable. However, there was nothing in the Comprehensive Plan to indicate where the bikeway should go, what other bikeways might be nearby, or even what other features in siting the bikeway might be considered (such as access to shopping, mass transit, or other amenities).

On July 11, 2000, the St. Charles Plan Commission unanimously adopted a work plan that included the development of a master plan for bicycle and pedestrian facilities. At the July 25 meeting of the Commission, two members volunteered to become part of a newly forming St. Charles Bike Path Plan Task Force; the City of St. Charles was also represented by a member of the City Council and several members of the professional staff. The St. Charles Park District became a partner in the planning process, represented by a Park Board Commissioner and two staff members. Other groups represented on the task force were Kane County Division of Transportation and the Downtown St. Charles Partnership.

The Task Force held its first meeting on September 5, 2000 and has met eleven times. Many different resources were used, ranging from the guidelines of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) to data collected from the Focus on St. Charles focus group process.

This report contains our findings and recommendations for adoption by the City of St. Charles, the Downtown St. Charles Partnership, and the St. Charles Park District.

**Goals of the Plan**

The task force finds the existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities network is one that would be the envy of many communities and is a good start for our master plan. Some of the positive features of the existing bike facility system include:

- Linkage of the existing bikeways to one another
- Landscaping along the bikeways
- Unique bikeway along the riverfront
- Design of the system
- Maintenance of bikeways
- Safety

However, despite the positive aspects that are already present, the task force finds that there is room for improvement. Items identified for improvement include:

- Difficult bikeway crossings of roadways because of road width, traffic volume, and/or speed of traffic
- Gaps in the system
- Lack of road improvements to accommodate on-road facilities

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• Poor accessibility of outer areas to downtown via the bikeway system
• Neighborhoods within the City limits which do not connect to the bikeways
• Lack of designated, secure bicycle parking areas for bikes along the bikeways
• Comprehensive Plan to describe developers’ responsibilities for contributions
• Making the community aware of the bikeway system
• Connection of the downtown bikeways to the Great Western Trail

With these goals in mind, the task force recommends the map dated April 8, 2003 as a guide for the physical placement of bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The map is to be considered a guide for the placement of facilities, exhibiting the overall goals of the plan. The exact corridor or bikeway shown on the map is a representation of the general goal, not necessarily the only bikeway to accomplish the goal.

This map contains three general types of bike/pedestrian facilities:

• **Major off-street trails, such as the Fox River or Great Western Trails:** These trails are the arterials of the system and should be designed to carry the greatest amount of traffic. Blind corners should be minimized to reduce the potential for accidents. AASHTO’s Guide for Development of Bicycle Facilities recommends that the paved width of a two-directional, shared-use path is 3.0 meters (about 10.0 feet). However, under certain conditions, AASHTO advises that a width of 3.6 meters to 4.2 meters (about 12.0 feet to 14.0 feet) might be desirable depending upon trail use, grade and maintenance requirements. In rare instances, a reduced width of 2.4 meters or 8.0 feet can be adequate. As these trails are rebuilt in the future, upgrading to current AASHTO standards should be explored. The pathways should have a hard surface (such as asphalt) unless it would negatively impact the surroundings, such as in a forest preserve or sensitive park area; in such cases, the trails should be crushed limestone or a similar material. Benches, bike racks, and trash containers should be located at regular intervals along these main arterial trails.

• **Minor off-street trails, such as connections or spurs into neighborhoods:** Wherever possible, these trails should be a minimum of 8.0 feet in paved width with two-foot shoulders adjacent to each side, with a recommended width of 10.0 feet. The trails should have a hard surface (such as asphalt) unless it would negatively impact the surroundings, such as in a forest preserve or sensitive park area; in such cases, the trails should be of crushed limestone or a similar material. Amenities such as benches are less necessary but are still desirable.

• **On-street routes:** Routes on public streets (within the existing curbs) are the least desirable ones, but they are also the least expensive to site (cost of the paint and/or signage) and maintain. However, as St. Charles has been platted and built for more than 150 years, on-street routes may be a necessary option due to the lack of alternatives. While all other facilities are intended for both bicycles and pedestrians, the on-street routes are not intended for pedestrian use.
These are two types of on-street routes: Those with striped “bicycle-only” lanes, and those marked with signs. The city engineering office conducted an extensive examination of the existing street system and concluded that there are no opportunities for striped “bicycle-only” lanes that are advantageous to the system. Therefore, the task force recommends that on-street linkages be marked with appropriate signage as recommended by the engineering office.

Commentary on Specific Paths

The American Association of State Highways and Transportation Officials’ (AASHTO) Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities identifies three different classifications for bicycle bikeways:

CLASSIFICATION OF BIKEWAYS
These guidelines define three basic types of bikeway facilities that differ in the degree to which the bicycles are separated from motor vehicles. This, of course, creates a difference in cost, safety, and desirability that must be considered in selecting the type of facility. The three types are as follows:

BIKE TRAILS (Class I) These are the highest level of bicycle facilities. The bike trail is separated from the edge of pavement by at least 20 feet or by a physical barrier and is often located completely independently.

BIKE LANES (Class II) The bike lane is a portion of the roadway or shoulder that has been designated for the preferential or exclusive use of bicycles and motor vehicles are separated by pavement markings, mountable curb, or other similar devices.

SHARED ROADWAY (Class III) These are existing roads or streets where signs are used to indicate the facility is also a bikeway but no bicycle lanes are designated.

Whenever possible, all new trails should follow the American Association of State Highways and Transportation Officials’ (AASHTO) Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities. Following these standards is necessary if the bikeways are to be funded by federal or state grant monies.

Structured Bicycle Crossing at Kirk Road This proposal for a grade-separated crossing would be located in the vicinity of the Wrebling Middle School/St. Charles East High School campus. The City recently applied for federal funding for this project, but the funding was denied. The likelihood of a structured crossing (defined as bridge or a tunnel) does not seem possible in the next five years. In lieu of a structured crossing, a traffic signal at the intersection of Kirk
Road and Fox Chase Drive was built in 2000. The signal is intended to facilitate pedestrian and bicycle traffic crossing Kirk Road in the vicinity of Wredling Middle School and St. Charles East High School.

Union Pacific Railroad Right-of-Way  The Union Pacific Railroad owns a spur that extends from Kautz Road on the east to the Cardinal Industries property near the intersection of Peck Road and Main Street. This plan does not intend to cause a premature end to this rail spur. However, if the spur is ever abandoned, the City and Park District should work to acquire it and develop it with a bicycle/pedestrian facility, including the Fox River bridge crossing. This has the potential of becoming a major east-west arterial bicycle facility, connecting the Illinois Prairie Path on the east to the Great Western Trail on the west.

Red Gate Road Bridge  Kane County is currently moving towards building a sub-regional bridge over the Fox River, roughly between Route 31 at Red Gate Road and Route 25 at Pinelands Road. When it is built, the City and Park District should work together to ensure that a separate lane capable of carrying bicycle and pedestrian traffic is built at the same time. The lane should have viable connections to the existing Fox River Trail on the east side of the river, the existing trail on the south side of Red Gate Road on the west side of the river, and the contemplated trail along Route 31.

Division Street to Gray Street Crossing  For the past 75 years, the possibility of a vehicular bridge over the Fox River at this location has been contemplated by both St. Charles and Geneva. This crossing is not in either city’s current Comprehensive Plan, and this document does not call for such a bridge. However, if one is ever built, the City and Park District should work together to ensure that a separate lane capable of carrying bicycle and pedestrian traffic is built at the same time. The lane should have viable connections to the existing Fox River Trail on the east side of the river, the existing north-south bikeway on the west side of the river, and the on-street bikeway proposed by the City of Geneva.

From Main Street to Division on 7th Avenue:  Currently the St. Charles Bike Facility Map shows a planned bikeway that would run on 7th Avenue from State Avenue, which is north of Main Street, to Division, which is south of Main Street. There are portions of the bikeway along 7th Avenue that already exist; the existing bikeway is on-street. Consideration should be given to acquiring rights to locate an off-street bikeway on 7th Avenue between Main Street and Division as property becomes available. There are some areas where the City already owns the right-of-way, such as the Public Works Facility – Langum Park and the open space north of South Cemetery; the City should take steps to provide an off-street bikeway in these locations.
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<th>Strategy</th>
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<td>Acquiring land for bikeways in new developments</td>
<td>The City of St. Charles should wherever and whenever possible require developers to provide appropriate bikeways in new developments, whether residential, commercial or industrial</td>
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<td>Acquiring land and/or right-of-way space for bikeways in public projects and in existing areas</td>
<td>The City of St. Charles should work to provide for bicycle and pedestrian facilities in new public works projects (for instance, on the new Red Gate Road bridge) and work to make public projects friendlier to bicycle and pedestrian uses (such as the rebuilding of Main Street east of 7th Avenue.)</td>
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<td>Building new bikeways outside of downtown St. Charles</td>
<td>The governmental agency, which either owns or controls, via a long-term easement, the property should assume responsibility to construct the off-street bikeway when deemed appropriate for a specific parcel of land. Ownership or control is absolutely essential in order to qualify for State and Federal grant acquisition and development funding. Thus, the Park District should be responsible for portions of the bikeway on property it owns and/or controls, and the Forest Preserve, City, or Kane County Division of Transportation should be responsible for property that it owns and/or controls. Depending upon the situation, joint project may be appropriate. In an instance when a piece of property is not owned/controlled by a government entity, all units of government should work together to investigate the best approach to accomplish the objective of acquiring land for and developing the bikeway.</td>
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<td>Building new bikeways in the downtown area</td>
<td>The City of St. Charles and the Downtown St. Charles Partnership are responsible for this item, which generally consists of the riverwalk portion of the bikeway system. The St.</td>
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<td>Obtaining grant funding for bikeways</td>
<td>Grant money should be pursued whenever possible. The St. Charles Park District should be the lead agency in obtaining grant monies for bikeways that would be under its control. The City of St. Charles and other governmental entities should be the lead agency for bikeways under their control. All entities shall work together to assist one another in the planning process. Most State and Federal grant programs allow a specific governmental unit, only one acquisition, and one development grant per year. If only one governmental entity were to assume the responsibility for being the lead agency for all grants, it would greatly limit our potential to seek additional grants. Also, all grants have funding limits. Multiple grants to more than one governmental agency certainly are preferred and would allow additional funding to flow to the community.</td>
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<td>Ensuring that bikeways in the St. Charles community and those of other communities intersect at common locations and form a cohesive regional plan.</td>
<td>The St. Charles Park District, which includes both city and unincorporated county areas, should have the primary responsibility, with the City of St. Charles providing assistance, when siting bikeways in new developments.</td>
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<td>Maintaining bikeways</td>
<td>Bikeways should be maintained by the local governmental unit that owns the trail and/or right-of-way. Snow removal is not anticipated except where it already takes place, which is generally by the City in the downtown area. All units of government will work together to identify obvious maintenance problems and inform the other governmental units, so the bikeways can be properly maintained. By way of history, the local portion of</td>
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