



March 6, 2012

Mr. Barry Brucker, Mayor
Mr. John Mirisch, Councilmember
Ms. Lili Bosse, Councilmember
Dr. Julian Gold, Councilmember
Dr. William W. Brien, Councilmember

455 North Rexford Dr.
Beverly Hills, CA 90210

Dear Mayor & Members of the City Council,

As an organizer of Better Bike and a resident of the city, I would like to put my full support behind improvements to make cycling safe in Beverly Hills. Safe street for all road users is a necessary precondition if we are to make the transition from auto-centric vehicular circulation to multi-modal mobility (as envisioned in our city plans). While change is never easy, it does mean considering the long-term land-use and transportation implications of existing development, and then making changes in how we develop in order to limit energy consumption and reduce the amount of time people spend in vehicles.

You needn't take my word for it: that latter statement is lifted almost verbatim from our city's Sustainability Plan (2009). Noble goals indeed. But if our goal is the development of an energy-efficient, walkable community where the car is not paramount, as suggested by the Plan, then we must translate those goals and objectives into plans, programs and actions. We must change how we plan so that we're encouraged to "walk and ride a bicycle whenever possible" and "consolidate errands" (as the Plan suggests).

Making the right mode choice in large part depends on the transportation opportunities provided by the city. "If there are safe bicycle routes and if secure bicycle parking is available," the Plan says by way of guidance, "then people will bicycle more." Indeed.

Better Bike and members of the cycling community have worked over the past year with the Traffic & Parking Commission's ad-hoc Bike Plan Update Committee and the Transportation division to develop several initiatives to put Beverly Hills on a pathway to more sustainable mobility solutions. These include:

- 1) Installation of bike racks in commercial districts throughout the city to accommodate demand and to encourage greater use of bicycles for local trips and commuting (in concert with the Sustainability Plan's goal);
- 2) Creation of a bike rack-on-request program to ensure that a rack be provided in the public right-of-way free of charge to any business in Beverly Hills that considers cyclists to be a potential additional source of foot traffic (in keeping with the spirit of the Small Business Task Force's 'shop local' recommendation);

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- 3) Continuation of the region's bike route system with on-boulevard bi-directional bike lanes on Santa Monica Boulevard (in coordination with the Westside Cities Council of Governments 'gap closure' effort); and perhaps most important,
- 4) Formulation of a "citywide bicycle and mobility plan" to identify "innovative approaches to encourage bicycle use" and create "innovative bikeway treatments to avoid conflicts between motorists and bicyclists."

Our General Plan's Circulation Element envisions an "integrated, complete, and safe bicycle system to encourage bicycling within the city," and we in the cycling community see encouraging signs of movement toward that sustainability goal. The problem is that the initiatives before the City Council today only begin to take us in that direction. Where are the innovative measures that would get us there?

For example, the bike rack proposals presented to the bike community this past January fall far short of peer city efforts. Indeed they don't even meet today's demand for bike parking. Better Bike has been critical on a number of points:

- New rack installations were evaluated according to a criterion ("bicycle density") which is not a generally accepted method for assessment, and in any case our city has completed no bike counts or surveys by which to establish that kind of a baseline;
- Identified rack designs included several that don't conform to today's standards, while suggested installation/location specifications don't conform to practices in place elsewhere nor do they appear to draw on available (i.e., online) guidance;
- The rack-on-request program as presented departs from existing programs in Los Angeles and Santa Monica by imposing both a cost-share and a more rigorous review than is necessary, while 'need' would be determined "by city staff with knowledge on bicycle rack implementation" - - knowledge does not exist in our Transportation division today.

Perhaps of greater concern is the conclusion that some parks don't even need racks. We should be considering how people access parks before deciding on rack locations – an holistic approach missing from these initiatives. I've posted at greater length on suggested specific measures to improve them: <http://betterbike.org/2012/01/bh-bike-plan-meeting-recap-part-2-bike-racks/>

Transportation also presented to the bike community four identified Pilot program bike routes – Charleyville, Carmelita, Crescent and Beverly Drive – that are a great start on a bike route network as envisioned in our Circulation Element. This should be a preliminary structure around which a larger system of local bikes can be created.

The problem is that the feasibility analysis was scoped restrictively to preclude the innovative treatments that we see in other cities (or indeed those that are suggested in our plans). It precluded any change to motoring or parking patterns (measures that are essential to safer

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streets for cyclists) which took many worthy improvements such as road diets off the table. And it took the cycling by surprise because we were not informed that the scope would be so restricted.

In practice, that scoping precluded bike lanes on most segments of the identified routes. Only measures like sharrows and share-the-road signage would be practical on heavily trafficked corridors like Charleyville and South Beverly (where cyclists need them most). We're already sharing the road, of course, so the feasibility study offers little prospect of safer streets by providing us with a mode-separated facility.

For a more detailed discussion about the Pilot routes and the feasibility study, as well as Better Bike recommendations for improvements, please read the Better Bike post: <http://betterbike.org/2012/01/bh-bike-plan-recap-1/>

From a process perspective, the Pilot is problematic too: our cycling community has been relegated to a minor role akin to consultation or placation. Outreach has been minimal; agendas were bare-bones and provided only the day before the meeting; and a substantial deliverable like the Fehr & Peers feasibility study was furnished at the meeting without an opportunity for prior review. Of course, we could not provide useful feedback (nor was it invited).

Even the meeting date & time has been set without regard to our community's needs. The Committee has maintained a third-Wednesday schedule, a monthly date that means no Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition representatives could attend (as it conflicts with the LACBC's monthly board meeting). Moreover, the 5 pm meeting time precludes those who work a regular workday.

Better Bike will wholeheartedly support the Committee's work and Commission's recommendations if they produce real improvements that increase road safety for cyclists. Indeed we look forward to working with staff to implement the best practices we see in other cities here in Beverly Hills. Likewise, Better Bike will support our City Council's efforts to move Beverly Hills beyond an auto-centric past and into a multi-modal mobility future (as envisioned in our plans) when we see plans that serve that purpose.

I respectfully suggest that City Council provide direction to the Transportation division and to the ad-hoc Bike Plan Update Committee to return to the cycling community to improve upon this good start and coordinate the development of innovative (or at least workable) programs for new bike racks, a rack-on-request program, and most importantly, a Pilot bike route program. As our Sustainability Plan says, "If there are safe bicycle routes and if secure bicycle parking is available then people will bicycle more." I hope that's a goal that we can all agree upon, but we're not there yet.

Sincerely,



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