National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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October 27, 2006

Linda Stewart-Byrd
Chair, Commuter Connections Subcommittee
Maryland Department of Transportation
Office of Planning and Capital Programming
7201 Corporate Center Drive
PO Box 548
Hanover, MD 21076

Dear Ms. Stewart-Byrd,

I understand that the Commuter Connections program is about to carry out a comprehensive upgrade of its commuter information system software.   The Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee of the Transportation Planning Board Technical Committee would like to propose and request that Commuter Connections incorporate a bicycle route-finding capability in this software upgrade.

A major deterrent to riding a bicycle to work, according to a survey of participants in the regional Bike to Work Day, is a lack of safe and direct routes. But because safe routes often follow minor streets, many people have difficulty finding the viable routes that currently exist. A Mapquest-style web-based software would enable a potential bicycle commuter to enter origin and destination addresses, and get a detailed cue sheet and a highlighted route on the map, together with the trip distance and estimated travel time.

Until recently, the cost of building an on-line bicycle route-finding capability has seemed prohibitive. However, the ByCycle.org trip planner has done it at a reasonable cost in a number of cities, including Portland, Oregon and Milwaukee, Wisconsin.   The Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee would like to see a web-based trip planner with the capabilities and features of ByCycle.org made available to the residents of the Washington region. We believe that Commuter Connections is the best place to host such a capability.

A web-based bicycle route-finding system should if possible have the following characteristics:

- Includes GIS street, path and facility data from entire COG region as available
- Allows users to enter in starting and ending addresses to determine routing
- Highlights route on a map
- Provides a turn-by-turn cue sheet
- Allows for share- use path, bike lane, and signed route availability to be used in prioritizing for route formulation
- Interface shows all streets
- Interface has ability to superimpose satellite photos for easy landmark identification
- Interface allows users to show official bicycle route networks
- Interface allows users to show other facilities (metro stops, bike shops, Washington Area Bicyclist Association office, etc.)
- Interface allows users to choose routes based on different criteria, such as shortest distance, or safest routes
- Interface allows users to plot crash locations to be collected by local DOT's and WABA
- Includes links to additional commuting resources(WABA mentor program, area maps, safety info, etc)
- Quarterly data updates

For maximum public awareness, a live version should be launched by April 1, 2007, in time for the May 2007 Bike to Work Day event.

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee strongly recommends that the consulting team examine the ByCycle.org program, along with the data integration services of the Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin. Estimated cost for setting up a system similar to ByCycle.org for the Washington region is about $20,000, plus $15,000 per year in maintenance and license fees.

If the Commuter Connections Subcommittee agrees that incorporating a bicycle route-finding capability into Commuter Connections is a desirable goal, we would follow up with Commuter Connections staff to discuss feasibility and schedule. Members of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee would be willing to serve as an advisory group to the software consultant.

Sincerely,

Kristin Haldeman, Chair, Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee
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