

Staff Memorandum

October 16, 2019

Council Work Session

Prepared by: Chapel Hill Planning Department

Overview: Council members and members of the public recently asked questions about bicycle and pedestrian projects in Town – specific projects, funding sources and process for implementing them, and how can the Town become more bicycle and pedestrian friendly. Below are answers to questions that staff has received related to bicycle and pedestrian transportation.

1) What are the statuses of current bike and pedestrian projects?

Response: There are currently seven bicycle and pedestrian projects underway in Chapel Hill, all in various stages of design and construction (see Attachment A). All projects originated in adopted plans and were funded through the processes described in question 3 below.

2) How are bike and pedestrian projects prioritized for implementation?

Response: The Town has adopted plans – Mobility and Connectivity Plan, Greenways Master Plan, Streetscape Master Plan, etc. – that went through significant public and Council input processes. These plans contain numerous bike-ped projects included as recommendations, and many included priority projects. The Mobility Plan, for example, has over \$40 million in recommended projects and includes a list of 20 priorities. These priority projects were the most requested in the public input sessions or those that would have the greatest impact on safety and mobility in Chapel Hill if constructed or implemented. We look for opportunities through development proposals, NCDOT and Town resurfacing schedules, and specific funding sources to build the infrastructure more efficiently than relying solely on federal or Town bond funding.

3) What is the process for implementing the bicycle and pedestrian projects?

Response: Every project that receives federal funding must be in an adopted plan (i.e. Mobility and Connectivity Plan, Greenways Master Plan, Streetscape Master Plan), as required by NCDOT. The process for implementing the project depends on the funding source. Projects with solely Town funds are only subject to Town policy and procedure, such as public bid process and contract requirements. When projects have federal funds, there are additional requirements and approvals every step of the way, from bidding the project for design to closing it out after construction. The federal funding adds layers of approval and documentation that extends the timeline and requires significant staff time to manage. All projects involve public engagement and meetings at various steps throughout the process. See Attachment C for an overview.

4) How are bike and pedestrian projects funded?

Response: Chapel Hill has two primary funding sources for bike and pedestrian projects: federal funding filtered through NCDOT and Bond funding. Often these two sources are combined to fully fund projects since federal funding is limited to 80% of a project cost. When a project receives federal funding, the Town must identify the local match, which must be non-federal funds.

Bond: Much of the 2015 Bond funds for bike-ped projects have been used for the local match to federal funding, though there have been some standalone new projects built. Of the original \$16.2 million in bond funding for Streets and Sidewalks, \$7.8 million was earmarked for bike-ped projects specifically. See Attachment B for details.

Town: The Town also requires developers to construct bike-ped projects that are in adopted plans as part of their developments. This happens all over Town, but a good example of the requirement's effectiveness is in the Blue Hill District, where the new developments are constructing a good amount of the Fordham Blvd. sidepath network.

The Town does not have an annual budget for bike-ped projects other than small amounts from Public Works accounts, which are primarily used for small projects like crosswalks, signs, bollards, striping, etc. Staff submits funding requests annually through the Town's Capital Improvements Program (CIP) Prioritization Process, but no funding has been allocated to standalone bike-ped projects through that process to date. The CIP Prioritization Process is set up to score capital projects based on a number of criteria related to Council strategic goals and the project's value to the Town. Finally, there is not Town funding dedicated to analysis, design, or engineering necessary to determine feasibility of projects or to make them "shovel ready" for when funding or other opportunities for implementation become available.

Future Need: There are two Chapel Hill bike-ped projects that have been programmed for federal funding in the near-term for which the local match has not yet been identified – Estes Drive Extension from MLK to the Carrboro border and Fordham Blvd. Multiuse Paths to fill in gaps from Willow to Old Durham Road. The options for identifying the local match for these projects are through the next issuance of Bond funds or through the CIP Prioritization Process.

5) How much have we borrowed for the 2015 Bonds, how were they used, and how much is left for new projects?

Response: The 2015 Bond included \$16.2 million for Streets and Sidewalks and \$5 million for Trails and Greenways (see Attachment B for information about how the funds have been spent). The next issuance, currently planned for spring 2022, includes \$7.7 million for new Streets and Sidewalks projects. The bond funds were allocated to projects that were in Town plans – the Bike Plan, Mobility and Connectivity Plan, Greenways Master Plan, Streetscape Master Plan, and the Council-approved Sidewalk Prioritization List, and prioritized street resurfacing list, (reviewed each year by internal staff teams and the TCAB). The CIP Leadership Team provides oversight and assists staff with sequencing projects based on cost estimates, schedules, coordination with other agencies, opportunities to leverage outside funding, and debt capacity. As noted in response #3, about two-thirds

of the bond funding for bike-ped projects was used for the local match for federally funded projects – Estes Drive, Old Durham-Chapel Hill Road, Fordham Blvd. Sidepath, and Friday Center Drive.

6) What can the Council do to move bicycle and pedestrian projects forward?

Response: This is a question that has come up a number of times recently. Here are some thoughts:

- a) *Funding:* There is no dedicated Town funding stream for bike-ped projects outside of the Bond funds. Chapel Hill residents are demanding more bike-ped facilities in Town, and we do not have the ability to do more than we are currently doing. Further, there is not funding available to do the studies necessary to tackle lower cost projects like lane reallocations or temporary pilot projects to test the effectiveness of larger projects. Staff is working on a five year budget strategy, which includes transportation as one of the focus areas that Council will be able to evaluate as part of that process.
- b) *Trade-Off Guidance:* Chapel Hill has a policy statement on Complete Streets, and there are requirements for bike-ped accommodation written into the LUMO. Beyond this there are not policies to guide staff in making daily decisions related to transportation priorities. The Town has adopted plans to guide investment in bike-ped infrastructure, and staff is responsible for implementing the plans. However, there is also great demand for managing vehicular traffic flow, which results in competing needs for our road network. Staff must weigh current conditions and the needs of all travel modes with the recommendations and priorities set forth in existing adopted plans. This is something that the Transportation and Connectivity Advisory Board is interested in and could potentially provide a recommendation.
- c) *Urge State policymakers to advocate for bike-ped funding:* NCDOT does not have funding for bike-ped projects. A law passed in 2013 eliminated State funding for bike-ped projects. Discretionary federal funding for bike-ped is managed by NCDOT, and it allocates just 4% of its total funding to non-highway projects and another 2% can be flexed to any mode. The funding formula and prioritization criteria do not match with our region's alternative mode priorities, and many of our projects do not receive funding.

7) What is the Franklin Street Lane Reallocation project?

Response: Lane reallocations, otherwise known as road diets or lane reductions, is when vehicle lanes are repurposed for bike lanes, parking, or turn lanes. They are relatively low cost ways to achieve safety, mobility, and access for all transportation modes. Many lane reallocation projects have resulted in significant increases in the number of pedestrians and bicyclists, more customers and higher sales revenue for local businesses, and decreases in speeding and crashes along the corridors.

W. Franklin St.: Town staff have been considering W. Franklin St. for lane reallocation for a number of years, and it is a recommended project in the Mobility and Connectivity Plan.

NCDOT will be resurfacing Franklin St. in spring 2020, providing an opportunity to implement the project at an even lower cost since they will do the pavement markings. The Town of Carrboro is considering a lane reallocation for East Main St., which, if implemented, would provide an important connection.

NCDOT requires a traffic analysis and engineering drawings in order to consider a lane reallocation on a state-maintained road. The Town does not have the capacity to do this work in-house; the study and drawings will cost an estimated \$35,000. A preliminary traffic analysis and several conceptual drawings were done in 2015 but will have to be updated to reflect current conditions. In order to take advantage of the NCDOT resurfacing, staff will need to engage a consultant to do the analysis as soon as possible. The funding for this study has not been identified.