

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Town Council

FROM: Coalter Lathrop, Transportation Board

SUBJECT: Transportation Board Petition Regarding Bicycle Facilities Construction Policy in Town of Chapel Hill

DATE: February 26, 2003

This memorandum explains briefly the rationale on which the Transportation Board bases its petition to Council for a change to the existing bicycle facilities construction policy in Chapel Hill.

The existing bicycle facilities construction policy, as approved by Council on September 24, 2001 (Attachment 1) calls for the use of wide outside lanes on arterial and collector streets.<sup>1</sup> Only where several strenuous criteria are met, may bicycle lanes be constructed in Chapel Hill under the existing policy.<sup>2</sup> Those criteria are rarely all met on arterial or collector streets within Chapel Hill, and thus, the existing policy effectively disallows the use of bicycle lanes in our town. As an example of just how restrictive the existing policy is, under the existing policy bicycle lanes could not be used on Cameron Avenue.

The Transportation Board is petitioning Council to change the existing bicycle facilities construction policy in order to make bicycle lanes the default bicycle facility type for arterial and collector streets while allowing for the use of wide outside lanes in place of bicycle lanes where deemed appropriate (Attachment 2). This petition received a unanimous vote of support at the February 18, 2003 Transportation Board meeting and a unanimous endorsement by the Planning Board that same evening.

The Transportation Board bases its petition on a wide review of research on bicycle facilities, the preponderance of which indicates that bicycle lanes increase bicycle ridership and increase bicyclists' safety. The Federal Highway Administration, in its December 1999 report titled A Comparative Analysis of Bicycle Lanes Versus Wide Curb Lanes: Final Report, concluded that ***"BLs are more likely to increase the amount of bicycling than WCLs."*** This same conclusion is reached in many other studies that show a very strong correlation between high levels of bicycle infrastructure (lanes and paths) and high levels of bicycle use. Research also shows a strong correlation between high levels of bicycle infrastructure and improved safety for cyclists. Improved safety appears to occur as a result of the improved behavior of both cyclists *and* motorists in and around bicycle lanes.

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<sup>1</sup> Wide outside lanes, or WOLs, consist of two feet of extra, unmarked pavement along the roadside travel lane. WOLs are sometimes called wide curb lanes, or WCLs.

<sup>2</sup> Bicycle lanes, or BLs, consist of a minimum four-foot wide lane demarcated with a painted line and marked with symbols indicating bicycle use only.

The Transportation Board stands ready to provide as much information to Council as is requested, however, as a first step toward understanding the extensive research on this subject we respectfully suggest that Council Members review the several excellent memoranda prepared by Planning Staff in 2001. Those memoranda are dated April 24/May1, 2001; June 11, 2001; and September 24, 2001. They all address questions related to bicycle lanes and wide outside lanes. If you have the opportunity to review those memoranda and the staff recommendations included therein, you will notice a strong endorsement for the use of bicycle lanes by the Planning Staff.

As many of you are already aware, the Transportation Board's petition will not be received warmly by all segments of Chapel Hill's bicycling community. Some vehicular cyclists,<sup>3</sup> those cyclists who are willing and able to ride in the roadway following all of the rules and enjoying all of the rights of a motorized vehicle, feel that bicycle lanes will erode their rights to the roadway.

It is not the intention of the Transportation Board to erode cyclists' rights in any way, and we support all legislative, educational and enforcement efforts aimed at maintaining and enhancing cyclists' rights and cyclists' safety. Rather, it is the intention of the Transportation Board to create a balanced and truly multi-modal transportation system that will enhance mobility for *all* citizens of Chapel Hill, including non-vehicular cyclists. Non-vehicular cyclists are estimated to represent 95% of the bicycling population. This large group of actual and potential cyclists has consistently indicated its preference for marked bicycle lanes in research studies, letters to the editor, suggestion box comments, and letters to Town Council.

If the Town is serious about increasing cycling as a mode of transportation in Chapel Hill, it must focus on the needs of non-vehicular cyclists. These needs include the provision of a well-marked, well-maintained, extensive and connected network of bicycle lanes and bicycle paths. As a first step toward this goal, the Town must put into place a bicycle facilities construction policy that makes bicycle lanes the preferred facility type for roadway use in Chapel Hill. A Council vote in support of the Transportation Board petition would do just that, while maintaining the flexibility to use wide outside lanes where bicycle lanes are not desirable or not feasible.

On behalf of the Transportation Board, I look forward to presenting the Transportation Board petition to the Town Council on March 3, 2003.

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<sup>3</sup> Vehicular cyclists are estimated to represent only 5% of the bicycling population according to the 1994 Federal Highway Administration report titled Selecting Roadway Design Treatments to Accommodate Bicycles.

## ATTACHMENT 1

Current bicycle facilities policy as adopted by Town Council September 24, 2001

### A RESOLUTION ADOPTING A POLICY FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF BICYCLE FACILITIES WITHIN THE TOWN (2001-09-24/R-12c)

WHEREAS, it is the goal of the Town of Chapel Hill to accommodate the needs of existing bicyclists; and

WHEREAS, it is the goal of the Town of Chapel Hill to encourage greater use of bicycles as an alternative mode of transportation; and

WHEREAS, the Chapel Hill 2000 Comprehensive Plan includes the objective to "develop and maintain a system of safe and efficient bikeways (on-street bike lanes and off-street paths within greenways) designed to contribute to Town-wide mobility, connecting neighborhoods with activity centers, schools, parks, and other neighborhoods"; and

WHEREAS, the Comprehensive Plan recommends the Town "adopt revised roadway standards incorporating on-street bike lanes, including a commitment to install bike lanes in roadway resurfacing projects where feasible:"

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the Town of Chapel Hill, that the Town Council adopts the following policy:

- Wide outside lanes should be provided on arterial and collector streets within Chapel Hill
- Bicycle lanes should be provided on arterial and collector streets within Chapel Hill that meet all conditions of the following criteria:

Roads with 35 mph and 45 mph speed limits  
Intersections are minimal, with limited cross traffic  
Few driveway cuts  
Limited turning movements  
Descents with high speeds (>25 mph) are not an issue

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council directs the Manager to incorporate this policy in all design guidelines used by the Town to construct or improve roadways.

This the 24<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2001

**ATTACHMENT 2**

Language of petition adopted by Transportation Board 18 February 2003

**A RESOLUTION ADOPTING A POLICY FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF BICYCLE FACILITIES WITHIN THE TOWN**

WHEREAS, it is the goal of the Town of Chapel Hill to accommodate the needs of existing bicyclists; and

WHEREAS, it is the goal of the Town of Chapel Hill to encourage greater use of bicycles as an alternative mode of transportation; and

WHEREAS, research indicates that the provision of bicycle lanes and paths will encourage greater use of bicycles by casual and new bicyclists; and

WHEREAS, the Chapel Hill 2000 Comprehensive Plan includes the objective to "develop and maintain a system of safe and efficient bikeways (on-street bike lanes and off-street paths within greenways) designed to contribute to Town-wide mobility, connecting neighborhoods with activity centers, schools, parks, and other neighborhoods"; and

WHEREAS, the Comprehensive Plan recommends the Town "adopt revised roadway standards incorporating on-street bike lanes, including a commitment to install bike lanes in roadway resurfacing projects where feasible:"

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the Town of Chapel Hill, that the Town Council adopts the following policy:

- Bicycle lanes should be provided on arterial and collector streets within Chapel Hill
- Wide outside lanes may be used in place of bicycle lanes where deemed appropriate by Town officials

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council directs the Manager to incorporate this policy in all design guidelines used by the Town to construct or improve roadways.

This the \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2003.