

Packard Bikeway Task Force Minutes

Virtual meeting -- June 15, 2021

Convened by Washtenaw Bicycling and Walking Coalition (WBWC)

Attendees:

Eli CooperAnn Arbor Transportation Program
Mike HoffmeisterYpsilanti Township Residential Services Director
Matt CatanzaritePittsfield Township GIS Manager
Jason MorganWashtenaw County Board of Commissioners
Ryan Buck.....Washtenaw Area Transportation Study (WATS) Director
Brent SchlackWashtenaw County Road Commission (WCRC) Asst. Dir. of Eng.
Elena YadykinaWashtenaw County Road Commission
Nathan VoghtWashtenaw County Economic Development Specialist
Roy TownsendWashtenaw County Parks & Recreation
John WatermanProgram to Educate All Cyclists (PEAC) Executive Director
Bob KrzewinskiYpsilanti Non-motorized Advisory Committee
Seth Peterson.....WBWC vice chair
Larry DeckWBWC board

Seth Peterson called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. After calling on the participants to introduce themselves, he gave a brief presentation on the issues and opportunities on the Packard corridor from Eisenhower Parkway to Cross Street reflecting what has been learned since the first Task Force meeting. He mentioned Ann Arbor’s plans to install bike lanes this year on Packard between Eisenhower and US-23. He also explained why the County Road Commission is unable due to current policies to do the same thing between Carpenter and Cross Street, even though the road is a bit wider in that section. Seth moderated the remainder of the meeting to address design alternatives, planning, funding, time frame, and coordination among agencies.

Nathan Voght asked what local plans say about Packard. He asked, since a lot of planning has been done on Washtenaw, whether that would be a preferable route for a bikeway between Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti if it were well done. He observed that Washtenaw is a more direct route. But he said that he would like to see good bicycle accommodations on both roads.

Seth Peterson answered that Packard seems easier to address because of all the difficulties on Washtenaw, but that there is no intention to discourage improvements on Washtenaw.

Jason Morgan said that Nathan’s question was a good one because of the ReImagine Washtenaw planning that has been done. He said that both corridors are important and one shouldn’t take away from the other.

Eli Cooper said that it shouldn't be an either/or question about the two corridors. Washtenaw is important because it has many destinations, but it is more intimidating because of the traffic levels and the US-23 interchange. Packard is more tranquil because of the lower traffic levels and the quiet underpass of US-23. Ann Arbor plans to install bike lanes on Packard this year between Eisenhower and US-23 as part of the Healthy Streets program. He said that Ann Arbor staff would be happy to provide advice to agencies working on Packard in Pittsfield and Ypsilanti Townships.

Ryan Buck said that there has been momentum on improving Washtenaw due to the planning that has been done, but that seeking to improve Packard doesn't detract from that. Efforts to improve Washtenaw have been complicated by the need to deal with MDOT (since it is a state road) and by the need to deal well with the heavy AAATA bus traffic. Ryan asked what the Road Commission goals are for Packard; for example, would the Commission prefer standard or protected bike lanes?

Brent Schlack said that if Packard were reconstructed in the future, the Road Commission would consider a "complete street" with bike lanes and sidewalks in the way that Carpenter was done between Packard and Washtenaw. If a separate pathway were desired, the townships would have to initiate it, and it would be their facility, but the Commission would work with them in planning it.

Nathan Voght reiterated that he supports bicycle improvements to both Washtenaw and Packard.

Seth Peterson moved the discussion forward to planning and funding issues.

Brent Schlack said that the Road Commission follows the state's policy to use the 85th percentile to establish speed limits. The fact that Packard is a principal arterial requires certain design standards to be met. It would be possible in the future to have both bike lanes and a shared-use path. He pointed out that much of the Commission's funding is used for the county's extensive preventive maintenance needs, and that any expensive rebuild of Packard would need to be weighed against other pressing needs.

Ryan Buck said he thinks the Road Commission is doing all it can within its constraints and is not trying to obstruct bicycle improvements. But planners outside of the Commission need to figure out what would be best to build so that everyone can react to a specific proposal and decide on a path forward.

Seth Peterson said that a sidepath has advantages for many bicyclists, but that vehicle speed is a problem for cyclists whether they are on-street or off-street. He asked how the townships and Road Commission should coordinate.

Brent Schlack said that there need to be goals and priorities as a basis for interaction between the Road Commission and townships.

Seth Peterson moved the discussion to time frames and coordination.

John Waterman said that the corridor needs to handle all users. There needs to be a plan for what facility would be desirable. Then the challenge will be to get that plan funded and into an implementation schedule.

Nathan Voght asked whether WBWC has reviewed current local plans. **Seth Peterson** answered yes and said that those plans are linked to in the agenda.

Larry Deck asked whether a hybrid design approach in the townships might meet needs at reduced cost. Within the existing curbs, there could be a protected westbound bike lane, since the many intersections with streets and driveways may make the north side unsafe for a sidepath. The south side, with fewer intersections, could have a sidepath to accommodate eastbound cyclists (and any westbound cyclists who felt uncomfortable in a protected bike lane).

Brent Schlack answered that that approach may be problematic because the crown of the road would no longer be in the center of the left-turn lane.

Seth Peterson asked whether the townships should hire a consultant to develop a plan. **Brent Schlack** answered that they have done that in the past. **Seth** asked what that might cost. **Ryan Buck** guessed that a conceptual plan for the entire four-mile stretch (including the two miles in Ann Arbor) might cost about \$50,000 to \$75,000. **Seth** asked whether WATS could get funding into its plan. **Ryan** said that it is not in this year's budget, but it's possible it could be in next year's.

Matt Catanzarite said that an incremental approach might be a good way to make progress. For example, building new connected sidewalks or bike lanes where feasible could build momentum at low cost for comprehensive long-term improvements.

Eli Cooper said that all agencies need to work together to make a bikeway happen. He asked whether a road diet (5-to-3-lane conversion) would be possible in the townships. He mentioned that Ann Arbor has done successful road diets on roads with 19,000 vehicles per day, and he said the traffic figures that Seth showed earlier were less than that in the townships. An updated vehicle count may make a planning study unnecessary.

Elena Yadykina said that the Road Commission does a traffic count every summer and will again this year. Her recollection is that last year's count for Packard was 18,000, but it wasn't clear where on the corridor that was done.

Seth Peterson reminded people to fill out the follow-up form (which is linked from the agenda) if they are willing. WBWC will circulate the responses together with the minutes so that people have a common base of information. Seth thanked participants and concluded the meeting just after 3:00 p.m.