



**LATE
WEEK**

SINCE 1786

THE PRINCETON PACKET

SOLUTIONS

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Planning for future of town's streets

In October 2013 the town of Princeton joined with the state and other municipalities to begin implementing a Complete Streets program. In our town, this program has been a response to the approximately 21,000 commuters that arrive on week days, another 6,000 who commute out of town, and the estimated 125,000 vehicles that make their ways through our streets.

With the town's available land approaching saturation, and with residents expressing desire to preserve neighborhoods, quality of life, diversity, open spaces, and the vibrancy of the town's center, it became clear that traffic, transportation, and parking issues would have to be addressed. Complete Streets saw that this would require a reduced dependence on the automobile and more support of, and availability of, infrastructure for walking, biking, and public transportation.

Now Princeton, using a grant from New Jersey's Department of Transportation, and hiring the planning/engineering/management firm, Parsons Brinkerhoff of Lawrenceville, is exploring ways to implement a Bicycle Master Plan as part of the Complete Streets concept, but going beyond it as well.

To lead and participate in the development of the plan, a Study Advisory Committee (SAC) has been formed, including our mayor and many other town leaders. The SAC's purpose is to formulate a vision of where the town wants to go, its specific goals and what those changes will look like on the ground. It will integrate communication among residents, businesses, schools, and other organizations, with all, hopefully, proposing new ideas and offering feedback as the plan is pieced together.

Importantly, municipal engineer Deanna Stockton and Parsons Brinkerhoff are in accord on the necessity of hearing ideas and views from as many residents and merchants as possible. If substantial numbers of the public will express their insights and concerns relating to this plan, their input will offer the best chance for the plan to be widely satisfactory.

Indeed, in a time when the efficacy of governments, of all types and sizes, is being

questioned, here is an opportunity for a democratic entity to go beyond voting by asking its citizens to participate directly in the town's discussion and selection of ideas.

In order to encourage this participation, the town has set up a number of ways for residents to hear or read about the ideas under consideration and/or to suggest additional ones. They include:

- Mail written or printed comments, observations, or suggestions to: The Engineering Department, 400 Witherspoon St., Princeton 08540.
- Complete the online survey at: <http://princetonbikesurvey.com/>
- Participate in public meetings to be announced as they are scheduled. Meetings have already been held Sept. 17, Oct. 27 and Nov. 12.
- Use the wikimapping application at <http://wikimapping.com/wikimap/PrincetonBicycleMasterPlan.html> to draw routes, upload photos, identify problem areas and destinations, and comment on other user's responses.
- Review the minutes of SAC meeting No. 1 – Brainstorming goals, brainstorming barriers, brainstorming successes.

To date there is no set roadmap for the plan, and Ms. Stockton reassures residents that all changes and innovations will be "context sensitive" and analyzed for "the level of stress" accompanying changes.

But some ideas stemming from the Complete Streets vision and incorporated into the Master Plan have been completed or are approaching implementation. Last summer, the repaving of Mt. Lucas Road, with partial state funding, allowed the town to install both a dual-purpose sidewalk, for pedestrians and bikes, and parallel painted bike lanes running in both directions.

Recently, as reported in this paper, the town announced it will be sharing with the university several bike-docking or sharing stations where riders may pick up a bike at one location, use it, and return it to another location.

Ms. Stockton noted that the town received a \$196,000 grant from the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission to pay for the bikes and covered stations.

Other envisioned improvements include educating drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians on safe practices. The Police Department will be drafting a Strategic Safety Plan, with a particular eye on student safety, stressing that with community and school membership comes responsibility.

Another step, to insure voicing of views and participation, is a meeting with the town's merchants to hear thoughts and recommendations, now scheduled for after the New Year and holiday shopping.

Already available are updated maps showing where existing and planned sidewalks, trails, bike paths, and dual usage roads run and will run as the plan comes together.

And in some ways as important as the physical improvement to the town's streets, walks, and paths is an increased, educated awareness of the current traffic volume, of all the distractions that can afflict drivers, bikers, and pedestrians, of the advancing age of many driving and walking residents, (the return of tricycles may lure older bikers back to the outdoors,) and the opportunities for interaction among residents once they get out of their cars.

Princeton has already made progress in the directions that the Bicycle Master Plan is assembling. Those steps led, in October 2013, The League of American Bicyclists to confer upon the town its Bronze Level of Bicycle Friendly Communities. In just the last year, and particularly during the summer, this bicyclist has noticed a modest increase in the numbers peddling along its streets and the country roads outside.

As the residents ponder and experiment with the Master Plan's steps, they will have opportunities to express their approval, or disapproval, of some or all of the plan's many innovations, which are responses to the changes that have already arrived.

Huck Fairman is a Princeton author who writes about the environment in Solutions.