



Washtenaw County
Department of Planning & Environment

November 10, 2008

Eli Cooper
City of Ann Arbor
Ann Arbor, MI 48107-8647

Re: City of Ann Arbor Transportation Plan Update

Dear Mr. Cooper:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the City of Ann Arbor Transportation Plan update. In accordance with the Municipal Planning Enabling Act, Public Act 33 of 2008, the draft was reviewed by the Washtenaw County Planning Advisory Board and the Board of Commissioners. The Washtenaw County Department of Development Services, Department of Parks and Recreation, Road Commission, Department of Public Health, Office of the Drain Commissioner and the Washtenaw Area Transportation Study (WATS) were also given the opportunity to comment on the update.

Staff reviewed the proposed update in the context of *A Comprehensive Plan for Washtenaw County (County Plan)*, plans of contiguous local units of government and the current *City of Ann Arbor Master Plan (City Plan)*. Staff found the proposed amendments to be consistent with the County Plan and the plans for the contiguous communities.

The Draft City of Ann Arbor Transportation Plan Update includes many important recommendations that support the County Transportation Goals to “strategically plan for and invest in a transportation network that meets the need of future residents and businesses while promoting our sense of place and protecting the environment.” The focus on the movement of people rather than cars encourages transportation choices and sustainability. The Draft Plan also positively references the Washtenaw Access Management Plan and recommends the use of transit-oriented development principles, which is supported by the County Plan Transportation Recommendation 2.5: Develop Density to Support Transit. These two areas of the plan demonstrate a commitment to collaboration, building on past planning efforts, and long-term support for a viable transportation system.

Although the following recommendations are not applicable to the consistency with the County Plan, we strongly encourage the incorporation of the following to enhance the overall plan:

- Throughout the Transportation Plan are future visions and recommendations for various corridors. Terms used when referring to these corridors include “enhanced transit corridors”, “transit enhancement corridors”, “corridors for

increased transit service”, “high priority corridors” and “signature corridors.” The use of a variety of terms which appear to be often referring to the same corridors makes portions of the Transportation Plan confusing.

- The Transportation Plan identifies four corridors with the “potential signature/high quality transit improvements”, the Plymouth/Fuller Road and State Street corridors were designated as having highest priority because they “have the highest UM/AATA ridership, connect to high use activity centers, and have potential redevelopment opportunities that could be driven by transit improvements.” Based on these criteria, as well as others that should be considered including congestion severity, crash data and AATA capacity, Washtenaw Avenue should be given equal or higher priority for transit improvement studies and implementation.
- The Transportation Plan discusses the completion of the Huron River Off-road Path. It is unclear if this also refers to portions of the Border to Border Trail, which is not otherwise mentioned in the Transportation Plan. If the Huron River Off-Road path refers to the Border to Border Trail, or a section of, it should be noted in text, as well as on a map.

The attached staff report provides additional background regarding county comments and agency comments are provided containing additional detailed recommendations. On behalf of the Planning Advisory Board and the Board of County Commissioners, I would like to thank you for your contribution to promoting a shared vision for Washtenaw County.

If the Department may be of assistance to the City as you work to implement the policies included in your plan, please call me at (734) 222-6809.

Sincerely,

Patricia Denig, Planning Services Director
Department of Planning and Environment
Washtenaw County

Attachments

Staff Report

Washtenaw Area Transportation Study comments



Washtenaw County Department of Planning & Environment

Staff Report

RE: Draft City of Ann Arbor Transportation Plan Update

Staff Report Date: November 10, 2008

Background

The Washtenaw County Department of Planning and Environment (P&E) received the Draft City of Ann Arbor Transportation Plan on October 24, 2008. In accordance with the Municipal Planning Enabling Act, Public Act 33 of 2008, the County is to provide comments to the City, which must include two statements of consistency:

- A statement as to whether, after considering any comments received by contiguous local units of government, the proposed update is consistent with the plan of contiguous communities, as
- A statement as to whether the proposed update is consistent with the County Plan.

The proposed update was reviewed for consistency with *A Comprehensive Plan for Washtenaw County* (County Plan). The Washtenaw County Department of Development Services, Department of Parks and Recreation, Road Commission, Department of Public Health, Office of the Drain Commissioner and the Washtenaw Area Transportation Study (WATS) were also given the opportunity to comment on the document.

Summary of Update in context of County Plan

The Draft City of Ann Arbor Transportation Plan Update includes many important recommendations that support the County Transportation Goals to “strategically plan for and invest in a transportation network that meets the need of future residents and businesses while promoting our sense of place and protecting the environment.” The focus on the movement of people rather than cars encourages transportation choices and sustainability. Some examples of supportive recommendations include road diet feasibility studies, the coordination of traffic signals to reduce idling, parking management and pilot projects for new road designs and concepts. The specific recommendations to assess the interchange at US23 and Washtenaw Avenue addresses safety and improve non-motorized access are supported by multiple community plans and studies.

Recommendations which directly enhance public transit service and encourage land uses which support transportation options were also found throughout the plan. Signal prioritization equipment on AATA buses, improved stop amenities and queue-jumping lanes, and coordination with future commuter rail projects. Employing land use patterns which support transit and other alternative forms of transportation contributes to the

sustainability of the region, and is compatible with the recommendations of the County Plan.

Creating plan guidelines and/or land use practices to support Transit Oriented Development (TOD) overlay-type district, in addition to developing a form based code to “more strictly regulate form and character to support transportation improvements citywide” are two of the more significant recommendations of the plan. This is supported by the County Plan Transportation Recommendation 2.5: Develop Density to Support Transit. Washtenaw County encourages the creation of a TOD zoning district which “restricts additional auto-use development, gas stations and large shopping centers with vast parking lots, and encourage compact development with smaller parking lots, promote residential and employment densities which support transit, minimum height requirements, move toward form-based, density bonuses within ¼ mile of certain transit routes” as indicated in the Transportation Plan. The Mid-term recommendation to “increase density along enhanced/signature transit corridors to an average of 25-40 re/ac” on Page 3-15 is a strong goal toward achieving this vision.

Throughout the Transportation Plan are future visions and recommendations for various corridors. Terms used when referring to these corridors include “enhanced transit corridors”, “transit enhancement corridors”, “corridors for increased transit service”, “high priority corridors” and “signature corridors.” The use of a variety of terms which appear to be often referring to the same corridors makes portions of the Transportation Plan confusing. If there is a difference, it should be more clearly defined, and be consistent throughout.

Of the four corridors identified with the “potential signature/high quality transit improvements”, the Plymouth/Fuller Road and State Street corridors were designated as having highest priority because they “have the highest UM/AATA ridership, connect to high use activity centers, and have potential redevelopment opportunities that could be driven by transit improvements.” Based on these characteristics, Washtenaw Avenue should be placed at higher priority than State Street. This point is supported by WATS and discussed in the attached review.

Data shows AATA boardings along Washtenaw Avenue (1449) to be higher than those along State Street (983), and also higher traffic volumes. State Street has higher overall boarding numbers because it counts park and ride boardings. However, if the recommended short-term projects to add park and rides to Washtenaw Ave were put in, the boardings would likely be the highest in the County. Further, Chapter 5 says “AATA routes including the #2 Plymouth and #4 Washtenaw corridors – are experiencing overcrowding in the AM and PM peaks. Without transit investment, it is expected that ridership will increase between by 4,000 to 10,000 riders due to future population and employment growth, which will overwhelm most routes on the AATA system based on the existing service. Buses that accommodated passenger loads comfortably with two buses an hour just a few years ago could expect crush loads during AM and PM peaks if current trends continue with no changes to the AATA schedule or transit investment by the community.”

Washtenaw has more redevelopment and infill development potential than State Street, connects the two largest urban areas and many in Washtenaw County, and also has a higher critical crash rate than State Street. Factoring in congestion data which rates Washtenaw Avenue as severe, and Plymouth Rd as slight to moderate, further supports giving Washtenaw Avenue higher priority for corridor transit improvement studies. It is unclear why degree of congestion, although used as a criteria in the Multi-Modal Analysis Methodology detailed in Appendix D, is not used in prioritize transit corridor improvements.

The Transportation Plan discusses the completion of both the Washtenaw Shared Use Path and the Huron River Off-road Path. Indication of the location and extent of the Washtenaw Shared Use Path would make this recommendation more useful to the reader. Additionally, the Border to Border Trail is not mentioned in the Transportation Plan. If the Huron River Off-Road path refers to the Border to Border Trail, or a section of, it should be noted in text, as well as on a map.

Page 4-14 lists bus routes. Washtenaw Avenue data should be changed to accurately reflect the AATA bus route along this corridor is #4 not #3.

A strong point of the Transportation Plan is the reference to the Washtenaw Access Management Plan and the inclusion of specific implementation steps in both Chapter 3 and in Appendix A. Specifically, the recommendation to establish a protocol for an access management study prior to design of street project and establishing “standards in a City draft access management ordinance” to be consulting early in the development process will provide regular opportunities for addressing congestion and safety issues highlighted in the study. Planning for better management of corridor development and access management is supported by County Plan Transportation Objective 2: Maximize the capacity of the existing urban and suburban transportation systems.

Review of Plan in Context of Contiguous Community Master Plans

- Northwest (Ann Arbor Township): The Ann Arbor Charter Township General Development Plan states road improvements should be designated to support land uses, and should be consistent with the policies of the Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti urban areas. Both plans stress the importance of access management, and in many cases the policies of the Township plan are taken directly from the 1990 City of Ann Arbor Transportation Plan. The Township Plan mentions future widening of Plymouth Road, but does not mention its potential use as a transit corridor. Overall, the City Transportation Plan is compatible with the goals and policies related to transportation within the Township Plan.
- South (Pittsfield Township): Pittsfield Charter Township’s Comprehensive Plan places emphasis on providing a “balanced and coordinated multi-modal transportation system. Pittsfield designates Washtenaw Avenue and State Road as key corridors which call for transit friendly development design. Map 9 illustrates planned non-motorized pathways along major transportation corridors and connecting public recreation areas, community centers and schools. These

goals and recommendations closely align with those of the City Transportation Plan.

- Southwest (Lodi Township): The Lodi Township General Development Plan places emphasis on connecting residential areas with interconnected streets, sidewalks and multi-use paths so that uses are not isolated from each other. The township plan also encourages focusing development near existing infrastructure while minimizing curb cuts to encourage sustainable land use patterns and minimize negative impacts to roads and the environment. Such objectives to accommodate alternative modes of transportation and efficiently use existing infrastructure is also present in the City of Ann Arbor Draft Transportation Plan Update. These plans are consistent with each other.
- Northwest (Scio Township): The Scio Township Master Land Use Plan Draft 2008 sets a goals to create a township-wide non-motorized network and provide a variety of transportation choices. The Township Plan includes a Jackson Sub Area Plan with the vision of the corridor developing as commercial and mixed use, allowing for higher density residential, and redevelopment with an emphasis on encouraging pedestrian travel and public transit. This is compatible with the City Transportation Plan's designation of Jackson Avenue as a corridor with potential for future transit improvements.

Applicable County Department Comments

Washtenaw Area Transportation Study (WATS): See attached

Statement of Consistency

Washtenaw County Department of Planning and Environment find the Draft Ann Arbor Transportation Plan update consistent with the Comprehensive Plan for Washtenaw County, and those of adjacent communities.