



## West Lafayette Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee

Minutes of Meeting held Thursday November 12, 2015 6:00 PM  
Board Room, West Lafayette Public Library

Present: Curt Ashendel (presiding), Jim Bethel, Stewart Frescas, and Rose Kaczmarowski.

### 1. The meeting was called to order at 6:03 pm.

2. **Corrections were requested for the minutes** of the previous meeting (September 10, 2015) which were posted to the WLBPC web site (<http://www.westlafayettebikeped.org/Committee/Minutes.html>) on September 28, 2015 and also provided at this meeting. No corrections were noted in the meeting.

### 3. News of developments since the last meeting

- a. The September meeting of the [APC Transportation Planning](#) Citizens Participation Committee involved several items including focused analysis of two intersections; fatal accidents; and the annual report of completed projects. The “Road Safety Audits” were of intersections at CR250E with CR430S and CR500N with SR43. The process was highly focused with many high level participants, and the resulting detailed reports and recommendations were generally praised for their high quality. But this proved to be very labor intensive and it is unclear how much the practice will be used in the future. The crash fatality report for the first 6 months of 2015 showed a potentially significant increase versus the prior five years. The numbers are small, and some of this may have to do with the excessive rainfall, wet conditions, and may be reflected in the increased moped/motorcycle fatalities. A report (<http://www.cdc.gov/MMWR/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6431a1.htm>) by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) titled “Bicyclist Deaths Associated with Motor Vehicle Traffic — United States, 1975–2012” was also briefly discussed. It shows a national 44% decrease in annual fatality rates. It also included an interesting table of state by state changes (Indiana at 52% decrease was slightly more the national decrease) as well as some changes in demographics of victims (older – ages 35 to 74 have the highest rate now and this is increasing vs under 33 previously; and increasingly male – from 79% to 90%). Nearly all the decrease was due to the age 14 and under demographic. The FY2015 report of completed projects is a nice compilation of projects completed (or nearly so) with before and after pictures as well as date, cost, funding information. The goal is to show “where everyone’s tax dollars have gone.” It is available on the APC website at this URL: <http://www.tippecanoe.in.gov/egov/apps/document/center.egov?view=item;id=13658>
- b. The continuing meetings about improving the safety of cyclists on the Harrison bridge and throughout the cities have resulted in a decision to do very little to improve safety on the bridge. Curt presented a written report about this (appended to these minutes), along with his ideas for what this means for advocacy, what this means for the bridge, and what the alternatives to acquiescence are at this point. One low cost may be a “super sharrow” (for more about this see article at the link in the appended report.) During the resulting discussion, the idea of having more people, include Opal Kuhl and the Mayors out riding bicycles (with advocates) on the bridge was suggested. Rose indicated that she has begun discussions with Mayor Dennis (WL) to do this, and others present including Curt volunteered to be involved in this. Rose also felt that Curt’s report was overly pessimistic and that a final decision has not been reached about what will be done about this bridge.
- c. Purdue created a bicycle transportation coordinator position and had hired Aaron Madrid for this.

- d. Andy Hirsch shared a report on mandatory helmet laws actually making riding less safe for cyclists, with the title: “Do Bike Helmet Laws Do More Harm Than Good? Some cycling advocates argue that helmet regulations can create long-term health problems.” The link for this is: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/do-bike-helmet-laws-do-more-harm-than-good-1444662837>. There was no additional discussion of this at the meeting.
- e. The current status of the federal highway funding bill was reported that it had passed the House and was finally moving with the Transportation Alternatives (which funds trails and other Bike-Ped facilities) and SRTS threatened.
- f. Follow up discussion to Sunday Parkways/Open Streets (<http://openstreetsproject.org/>) begun last meeting and continued for a while by email. While Rose was enthusiastic about the Committee taking on such a project and some ideas about locations mentioned (State Street), no one volunteered to take on such a large project and Curt expressed reservations that it would need to be done right or it would set back our efforts with a possible backlash by motorists.

#### **4. Open forum for problems and ideas for new actions**

- Curt reported that he is now on the PU Parking and Transportation Faculty and Staff Advisory Committee, which is chaired by Andy Hirsch, and that at the most recent meeting Holly Alexander, the Director of Parking Services reported that a request will be placed with Physical Facilities to put in covered bicycle parking inside the Northwestern Parking Garage.
- Curt also noted that Lindberg between Northwestern and Salisbury was resurfaced in a patch manner and as a result, plans to do its reconstruction in 2017 may be moved back, though there is no word on this from Dave Buck.
- Curt also reported that Phase 3 of Cumberland Ave was completed (Salisbury to Soldiers Home Rd with a ribbon cutting held on September 21. It includes a multi-use trail on the north side that extends the trail north of Cumberland from Yeager to Salisbury.
- Rose indicated that a “Ride Along” with Mayor Dennis is planned for some time soon (possibly during the winter).

#### **5. Projects of the Committee discussed**

None were discussed.

#### **6. Other business and announcements**

- The next meeting of the APC CPC ordinarily will be on Tuesday November 24, but the November meeting is often postponed due to Thanksgiving. It is held at 7:00 pm.
- The next meeting of this committee is scheduled for Thursday January 14, 2016 at 6:00 pm.

#### **7. The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:12 pm**

*These minutes were submitted to the WLBPC website on January 14, 2016 by Curt Ashendel*

## **How the accident on the Harrison Bridge that caused uproar failed to yield any safety improvements**

Earlier this year a cyclist crossing westbound on the Harrison Bridge over the Wabash River sustained severe injuries when struck by a motor vehicle who did not yield to the cyclist. The vehicle was entering the bridge traffic from Canal Road via a ramp with a yield sign posted. In addition to being distracted by trying to retrieve his cell phone that had been dropped in the vehicle, the driver was found to be driving without a valid driver's license. The accident resulted in a protest ride by hundreds of cyclists that lasted for several hours and garnered considerable coverage by the local press who asked "What can be done to keep these kinds of accidents from happening?"

Prompted to act on this, West Lafayette Mayor Dennis and Lafayette Mayor Roswarski joined with the Tippecanoe County Commissioners in forming a task force to examine what could be done to improve cyclist safety. The first meetings included these elected officials, the City Engineers for both cities, the Director of Highways for Tippecanoe County, members of the one or more local police departments, and some additional City and County staff members (including one from APC), and several local advocates for bicycle safety. After the first two or three meetings, a decision was made to request funds (\$30,000/yr) from Surface Transportation Funds (plus local matching funds) for safety education program(s) and a sub-task-force was formed to identify the scope of this and its priorities. In addition, during those first few meetings some ideas for improving the safety on the Harrison bridge were raised and discussed, without firm conclusions about any of them.

By the next meeting of the task force, the majors and Engineers were no longer in attendance. Though the discussion again raised numerous ideas for safety improvements to the bridge, they were deferred until a representative from an Engineering group could attend.

At the next meeting, held on October 15, 2015, a member of the WL Engineer's office was present for the discussion of possible safety improvements. **One by one the ideas for improvements were raised, and every single one was dismissed as inappropriate or too costly.** The first was **painting (repainting) sharrows on the bridge**. WL response: we can do it, but how far should they be apart and how far after the bridge should they extend, because if they should really extend after the bridge (west bound) if there are no bicycle lanes after the bridge (i.e., no change in bicycle facilities), but since there is no clear distance to take them (all the way to and beyond merging into Northwestern Avenue?) then they shouldn't be painted on the bridge. **Changing the yield signs at any of the on-ramps to be stop signs** was suggested. The WL response was that vehicle rear end collisions already happen too often with the yield, and this would only make that problem worse. Vehicles would have to accelerate from a stop and to merge into the traffic flow in a very short distance (available merging lane) – an impossible task. **What about painting crosswalks and/or yield to pedestrians for the on/off ramps?** WL response: this would require vehicles to stop for pedestrians in the crosswalk, which would mean the same problem with the acceleration to merge as the stop signs, with the additional problem that the vehicles would have to stop so far back from the traffic that they would have to then cross the cross walk to be able to see the oncoming traffic. Their solution is that pedestrians (and by implication also cyclists) must stop and wait for traffic to clear before crossing one of the ramps. **What about increased signage for on-ramp vehicle traffic to yield to pedestrians and cyclists?** The WL response to this had multiple parts. First, because people mostly ignore signs, they are largely ineffective. Second, too many signs limit visibility of the drivers. Third, forcing them to yield makes them slow down and be vulnerable to rear-end collisions.

**The possibility of narrowing the travel lanes enough to paint a bike lane on the right side of each half of the bridge was suggested.** This time Opal Kuhl (County Highway) responded that the deck slope towards

the drainage grates on the bridge did not allow enough room for a cycle lane that would keep cars at least 3 feet from the cyclists as they go around those drainage sites. Also, the cost of altering the slope towards the drainage grates was so expensive, this could not be done as a stand-alone project and would have to wait until the entire deck needed replacement in 10 to 15 years.

There was a discussion about simply **lowering the speed limit on the bridge**. The WL response was that the vehicle drivers would ignore it without adding some “serious traffic calming” to the bridge travel lanes. The WLPD representative commented that speed enforcement for traffic on the bridge is nearly impossible as there is no place for squad cars to sit and monitor speeds by radar. The one County Commissioner present asked what the speeds were before, on, and after the bridge. There was some initial disagreement, but westbound speed limits are 25mph on Salem before the last traffic signal, then 35 after the light and across the bridge spans, and then 30 on Fowler Ave by Lutz, while eastbound speeds are 25 on Northwestern Ave but then rise to 35 on Wiggins, crossing the bridge, and continuing on Union. Everyone agreed that the vehicles generally travel well over the speed limit when crossing the bridge. **Advocates asked for a speed study to see if the limit could be reduced**. WL responded that a speed study was done fairly recently and the results did not indicate that any change in the speed limit is needed.

**A suggestion was made to do a thorough hazard analysis and possible application for a large amount of hazard reduction/safety funding to revamp the entire system of ramps** for the bridge as well as fix the drainage grates to allow for striped bicycle lanes and narrower travel lanes. This was dismissed by Opal Kuhl as inappropriate, but there were no clear reasons provided. One possible reason might be that doing this would have to be backed by the entire technical transportation committee of the APC so that it could be programmed into the existing schedule of road improvements. Already funds for the next 5 or more years are committed and several high priority projects were not funded or only partially funded during that time period.

At that point in the meeting Opal Kuhl said that the only solution was many years off when the bridge deck would need replacing. At that time not only would the drainage be changed, but the travel lanes would be narrowed and the raised sidewalk on the right would be widened and a railing between the travel lanes and the sidewalk would be added protecting cyclists and pedestrians on the sidewalk. Of course, nothing was said about the fact that this would do nothing to improve safety at the ramp crossings, which was where the original instigating accident occurred.

Two other ideas raised in previous meeting were not raised in this meeting due to the likelihood of failure based on the trend so far in that meeting. These were (a) painting the bike lanes in green at least where they crossed the ramps (but there are no bike lanes) and (b) changing the warning signs (about the presence of cyclists and pedestrians) located where traffic goes onto the bridge deck in each direction so that the cyclist and pedestrian indicators are larger and more noticeable.

By the end of this meeting it was clear that there was not the political will to really address the problem this bridge presents for cyclists.

There are three lessons to be learned by advocates from this story:

1. The standard approach used by the bureaucracy always works: Woo the advocates into an apparent collaboration to serve on a task force, then have the bureaucrats on the task force kill all the ideas for improvements during the ensuing 6 to 12 months as the emotions from the instigating incident cool off. The only way to combat this is to hold the elected officials accountable for **DOING NOTHING** to solve the problem.

2. The real problem in the case of this bridge is that it is designed like a limited access highway with uncontrolled on and off ramps, including some unsignalized ramp entrances on River Rd that are also hazardous. This makes for very high speed traffic, limited sites for police enforcement, and great hazards for pedestrians and cyclists. The lesson here is that advocates should NEVER, EVER allow ramps like this in ANY URBAN area except for limited access highways (e.g., interstate highways) which prohibit cyclists and pedestrians on them. Once these ramps are built, they are too expensive to remove, both financially and politically.
3. For situations like this, we need some new and low cost engineering alternatives that will significantly help to improve safety. Most likely this will involve striping the surface somehow and/or placement of additional cautionary signage for motor vehicles.

Along the lines of the #3 in the above list of lessons, one idea is to paint a super sharrow onto the right travel lane of each bridge deck. What is a super sharrow? These are very new and still not yet approved road surface markings that are a hybrid of a “green bike box” and a sharrow. The middle 40% (or so) of the traffic lane is painted green and marked with sharrows. A picture of how this has been done in Oakland CA is pasted below.

The story about super sharrows (the source of this picture) is at this link:

<http://www.citylab.com/cityfixer/2015/10/can-the-least-loved-bike-infrastructure-be-improved/412180/>

