

Alternate Modes of Transportation

The 1990 Plan of Conservation and Development contains an extensive series of transportation-related recommendations, including road improvements, the encouragement of alternate means of transportation, ride sharing, non-motorized modes of transportation and air quality.

As discussed in the prologue to this plan, the number of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) per person has a direct correlation to negative quality of life and environmental impacts. In the year 2008, with gas prices near \$5.00 a gallon, traffic congestion, poor air quality and concerns over global warming, there is a need to expand the discussion regarding alternate modes of transportation. Even though 47% of Middletown residents work in town and their commutes are relatively short, there is a significant amount of out-bound and in-bound commuting traffic that simply passes through the city, resulting in traffic congestion and air quality impacts.

The dramatic increase in the cost of gasoline will hopefully reduce the per capita VMT in Middletown, but that alone is not enough. Cities such as Davis, CA; North Hampton, MA; and Portland, OR; have all transformed themselves from communities with no measurable bicycle ridership (like Middletown today) to thriving bicycle-friendly communities.

In addition to promoting a more compact land use pattern, the city should actively promote alternate modes of transportation by encouraging increased bus ridership and a bicycle friendly community. The bus routes must be planned with the city's bike routes in mind to ensure convenient transfer from bike to bus for longer commutes. Buses equipped to carry bicycles will increase ridership, since bicycles facilitate passengers transportation from bus stops to homes and work places.

The Middletown Area Transit (MAT) provides bus service in Middletown and the surrounding community. It links residential centers to shopping and employment centers. The city has been successful in securing federal funding to construct approximately six (6) miles of exclusive bike path between the city's most dense residential center and largest employment center.

Figure B displays the existing bus routes, bike routes and urban and suburban neighborhoods. As is readily apparent bus routes serve the majority of the city's urban and suburban neighborhoods and some areas are served by both bus and bike routes.

The city Planning and Engineering Departments have identified future bike paths and those are displayed on Figure C. Constructing the bike paths identified in Figure C would service bike catchment areas which would connect 80% of the

homes in Middletown to the downtown and to the bus routes for transport to employment centers in Middletown and beyond.

For instance, implementation of this infrastructure network would allow a person living in a neighborhood to comfortably and safely bike to a bus route, lock their bike at a bike rack or load their bike onto the bus and ride the bus to one of the many business in downtown, on Industrial Park Road or even in the vicinity of the Meriden Mall or the businesses on RT 372 in Cromwell.

In a study, published in the Transport Reviews, Vol. 28, No. 4, July 2008, entitled “Making Cycling Irresistible: Lessons from the Netherlands, Denmark, and Germany” John Pucher and Ralph Buehler of the Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University point out that cycling after years of decline in the Netherlands, Germany, and Denmark is more than ten times higher than in the United States and truly for everyone and for all trip purposes. They conclude that the main reason for the higher level of cycling is that cycling is much safer there than in the USA.

The study indicated the most important lesson learned was the need for a coordinated, multi-faceted approach. Including the following:

“Bike Paths and Lanes- *The bicycling networks in all the cities studied include numerous off-street short cut connections for cyclists between streets and traversing city blocks to enable them to take the most direct possible route from origin to destination.*

Traffic Calming- *It is neither possible nor necessary to provide separate bike paths and lanes on lightly traveled residential streets, European cities have traffic-calmed most streets in residential neighborhoods, reducing the legal speed limit to 30km/hr (19mph) and often prohibiting any through traffic.*

Intersection Modifications- *Intersection modifications vary, of course, from city to city, but they generally include many of the following:*

- *Special bike lanes leading up to the intersection, with advance stop lines for cyclists, far ahead of waiting cars*
- *Advance green traffic signals for cyclists, and extra green signal phases for cyclists at intersections with heavy cycling volumes*
- *Turn restrictions for cars, while all turns allowed for cyclists*
- *Highly visible, distinctively colored bike lane crossings at intersections*
- *Special cyclist-activated traffic lights*
- *Timing traffic lights to provide a “green wave” for cyclists instead of for cars, generally assuming 14-22km/hr bike speed, depending on type of route*

- *Insertion of traffic islands and bollards in roadway to sharpen turning radius of cars and thus force them to slow down when turning right*
- *Realigning bike pathways a bit further away from their parallel streets when they approach intersections to help avoid collisions with right-turning cars*

Bike Parking- *Aside from the large number of bike racks throughout these cities, the most visible and most innovative aspect of bike parking policy is the provision of state-of-the-art parking facilities at train stations.*

Integration with Public Transport- *Public transport systems and city planners in northern Europe have increasingly recognized the key role that bicycling plays as a feeder and distributor service for public transport.*

Training and Education- *Dutch, Danish, and German children receive extensive training in safe and effective cycling techniques as part of their regular school curriculum.*

Traffic Laws- *For the most part, traffic laws intended to protect cyclists and pedestrians from motor vehicles are far more strictly enforced by the police and courts in the Netherlands, Denmark, and Germany than in the USA. Moreover, cyclists disobeying traffic laws are also more likely to be ticketed than in the USA.*

Promotional Events- *The key approach to promoting cycling, virtually all Dutch, Danish, and German cities have various programs to stimulate interest and enthusiasm for cycling by all groups.*

Complementary Taxation- *Sales taxes on gasoline and new car purchases, import tariffs, registration fees, license fees, driver training fees, and parking fees are generally much higher in Europe. Overall, the expenses associated with car use and ownership are two to three times higher in Europe than in the United States.*

Car Parking- *Roadway and parking supply has been deliberately reduced in many Dutch, Danish, and German cities over the past few decades in order to discourage car use in the city center*

Land-use Policies- *Land use and urban design policies in Dutch, Danish, and German cities are generally much stricter than in the USA and provide more government controls on low-density sprawl and the long trip distances that usually generates. Moreover, mixed-use zoning and transit-oriented developments have a long history in Europe.*

The city should:

- Ø Establish by ordinance a permanent committee on biking in Middletown. Their charge would be to develop a formal bike plan and work to implement recommendations as discussed above.
- Ø Expand the city's sidewalk network in suburban areas to connect neighborhoods, schools, shopping areas and parks.
- Ø Make the downtown more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly, with enhanced bike racks, crosswalks, bump outs and clear directional signage to parking areas and signage along attractive pedestrian/bicycle ways to major destinations.
- Ø Amend subdivision and Zoning Regulations to allow the Commission to require sidewalks, bike lanes and bike paths when and where appropriate.