

County wants bike trail plans changed

by: Sarah Melton
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Lincoln County Commissioners opinions were divided Monday when it came to endorsing a bicycle route around Lake Norman, but none of them were willing to accept a state proposal without significant changes.

The N.C. Department of Transportation (DOT) has contracted with Centralina Council of Governments (CCOG) to develop the Lake Norman Regional Bicycle Plan through Mecklenburg, Iredell, Catawba and Lincoln counties.

On Monday, Bjorn Hansen, transportation planner with CCOG, asked the Commissioners to support the plan. But commissioners were not as keen on the concept as presented and two wanted to reject the program completely.

Commissioner Carrol Mitchem said that the bike trail was not beneficial to residents. He suggested completely scrapping the state's plans for trails through eastern Lincoln County. "Why add the burden of more bicyclists?" Mitchem said. "The way to get around this is to forget about this and you go home," he told Hansen.

Fellow Commissioner Bruce Carlton said he had found very few residents in favor of the plan. "What you are asking us to do is turn our streets over to bike enthusiasts," he said, suggesting that existing cyclists Hansen said used the roads in question are residents of the area and not the outsiders who could be expected to use the new trails.

The proposed initial route for the trails through Lincoln County highlights existing roads, including 13 miles along Slanting Bridge Road from Catawba County, Campground Road, Old N.C. 16, Hagers Ferry Road, Club Drive and N.C. 73 into Mecklenburg County.

The remaining 8.7 miles proposed included a loop going east from N.C. 16 on Webbs Road and following Burton Lane, Blades Trail and Lake Shore Road back to N.C. 16.

The plan would fit on many of the county's secondary roads, Carlton said, but not the one's being recommended.

"This is a great idea in theory, but to put a bicyclist in East Lincoln County on Highway 16 is not a wise way to go," he said.

At a previous meeting, commissioners and Planning Board members expressed concerns about the safety of the bikers on the busy roads.

Hansen said the state legislature passed a law that could put traffic-calming devices on Lake Shore Road, Blades Trail and Burton Lane to ease those concerns. Commissioners were unimpressed with that idea.

Commissioner George Arena said he received several e-mails from drivers, bikers and Westport Home Association members opposing traffic-calming devices on Lake Shore Road.

"What are our other options?" Arena asked Hansen.

Hansen said certain sections of the plan could be taken off the initial route and moved to the ultimate route, which combines existing roads and future sections of the Carolina Thread Trail.

Commissioners questioned the county's financial commitment to the plan. Initially, Hansen said the county would not be burdened with paying for the plan.

On Monday, Hansen said some grants to fund the plan may require a match from the county. Funding for the plan would also come from DOT.

Mitchem made an initial motion to refuse endorsing the plan, but it failed 3-2, with only he and Carlton supporting it.

Arena came up with a second motion to endorse the plan with the following conditions:

- All indicated routes have either a paved shoulder or dedicated bike lane.
- Lake Shore Road is deleted from the plan.
- No county funds are to be used toward the development or construction of the plan.
- No signs are to be put up prior to improvements being made on the roads. (Under the state's proposal, signs would have identified routes without any improvements in the roadways.)
- No speed bumps allowed on the roads.
- Arena's motion passed 3-2, with the same split among commissioners. It was not clear how the Department of Transportation will respond to the stipulations included by commissioners.

To learn more about the Lake Norman Regional Bicycle Plan, visit www.lakenormanrpo.org and click on "Lake Norman RBP."

You can also call the Centralina Council of Governments at 704-372-2416.

<http://www.lincolntimesnews.com/current.asp?Story=21222&Sect=20&Y=2010&M=2&D=3>