

Fellow Concerned Citizens,

Currently, SEMCOG and MDOT, to their credit, are trying to map out a regional trail system for Southeast Michigan. We, the population of Michigan, have been asked to participate in the process by looking at existing and planned trail systems and drawing suggested routes on maps provided, so the information can be placed into a data base.

Once the process is completed, a plan will be presented to the SEMCOG membership for approval. Although it is claimed that the “plan” will not be in stone, once it gets SEMCOG member approval, the document will undoubtedly be final. Seldom do measures or processes taken like this, with such a formal approval process still have flexibility once in place. The plan will have the stamp of public consensus because unscientific surveys, producing skewed results, would have been conducted to solicit community input. In other words, a plan will be in place that is said to be justified because it had public input.

We need to keep in mind that what we currently have is a disorderly system of trails that were mainly developed for recreation, more specifically for biking. It is safe to say that many trails were designed to serve individual communities and some, in whole or part, have limited concerns for safety. These trails generally circle rather than link our communities, and by their very design, in some cases, can contribute physical injury to users.

While the Community Development Cooperative, a non-profit organization, has been advocating a regional trail system, its philosophy differs from what is being proposed or suggested.

The regional trail system envisaged by the Cooperative has the potential to do the following:

- Support sustainability
- Encourage healthier lifestyles while fighting obesity and diabetes
- Reduce air pollution
- Link our communities
- Provide opportunities for the physically challenged to be mobile
- Facilitate the mobility of seniors who are no longer able to drive
- Accommodate technologies other than just bicycles
- Provide alternate disaster evacuation routes
- Facilitate speedy implementation of the system by using the infrastructure already in place
- Promote daily use of the trail, not just for recreation, but for activities such as shopping, going to school, going to work since the system will no longer be community bound
- Provide a safe and healthy means of alternative transportation by encouraging safety standards and practices as done for vehicular traffic.

The trail system philosophy supported by the Cooperative is partially based on the following facts:

- 47% of Americans say they would bike more with more bike lanes. (NHTSA, 2008)
- 50% of all trips are less than 3 miles (National Household Travel Survey, NHTS, 2009)
- 41% of all trips undertaken are shorter than 2 miles (NHTS, 2009)
- 28% of all trips undertaken are shorter than 1 mile (NHTS, 2009)
- Automobiles are used for about 74% of all trips shorter than 2 miles
- Cars are used for 64% of trips shorter than 1 mile
- 100% of the population will eventually be disabled, requiring assistance with mobility in the community, unless they suffer a catastrophic event like a stroke, heart attack, accident, or cancer.
- By 2030, over 78 million boomers will be 65+, and research shows that men will outlive their driving abilities by six years and women by 10. (AARP)
- A 20 mile car trip produces about 6 pounds of carbon and more than 18 pounds of carbon dioxide contributing to global warming and roadside particulate air pollution

Based on the data, several things become obvious. If we are to get a better, less expensive and more efficient alternative transportation system, we need to invest the time in thoroughly thinking through what we need from this system and think beyond just bicycle users and pedestrians, as is the current stated SEMCOG/MDOT goal. We certainly would not want an alternative transportation system that limits our range of choices, the people who can use the system, or affects our health simply because it is located where users will be inhaling dangerous exhaust fumes or the system puts them into dangerous situations.

We encourage you to read the three articles below on air pollution that were published in the medical journal *The Lancet*. Anyone can access the full articles at no cost by registering on the journal's web site, at www.thelancet.com.

Air pollution: Europe's avoidable health risk

<http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736%2813%2960656-X/fulltext>

stating that ...”Even more worrying is that these effects may exist at low levels of air pollution and that there is no safe threshold level, rather a linear concentration-response relationship.”

Air pollution and health

<http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736%2802%2911274-8/abstract>

“Effects have been seen at very low levels of exposure, and it is unclear whether a threshold concentration exists for particulate matter and ozone below which no effects on health are likely.”

Particulate air pollution and acute health effects

<http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736%2895%2990173-6/abstract>

“Epidemiological studies have consistently shown an association between particulate air pollution and not only exacerbations of illness in people with respiratory disease but also rises in the numbers of deaths from cardiovascular and respiratory disease among older people.”

Even the popular press is taking note:

“Even low levels of air pollution can lead to lung cancer and heart failure”, by Katharine Walker.

“Car Exhaust: The World’s Second Fastest Growing Cause of Death”, by Andrew Meggison.

“Air pollution and its effects on heart attack risk”, by boston.com

http://www.boston.com/lifestyle/health/articles/2011/02/28/air_pollution_and_its_effects_on_heart_attack_risk/?page=1

If the Government continues to advocate having road lanes or routes along major drags, with heavy traffic, users will be exposed to exhaust, tire dust, brake pad dust and more. We now know that these, once breathed deeply into the lungs could cause strokes and heart attacks, among other health problems. This is known, scientific, and undisputable. Concentration of air pollution, as stated in one of the above cited papers, could not be greater than at the side of vehicle exhaust pipes. As far as possible, we need to identify alternative routes that make use of existing infrastructure, allows greater use of the system by a varied population, and that reduces or eliminates these dangers and safety hazards.

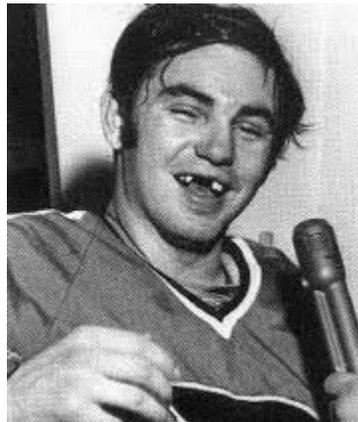


The roadside bike trail.

This photo below is of limestone being eaten as a result of vehicle traffic exhaust and pollution. (This is stone; just imagine the impact on lung or other tissue.)



Let us remember that there was a time when hockey goalies played without masks, people played with mercury in their hands, and people installed fiber glass in their attics without masks. We now know the dangers of these practices and we have made the necessary changes. Let us not continue to make the same mistakes in designing the routes when we have the knowledge ahead of the “game”.



Another concern for the Cooperative is the time that the project will take. Our approaches will generally shorten the planning and design process, and in turn, project costs will be reduced and various other social problems will be addressed. However, these issues are to be discussed in a subsequent document that suggests ways to implement the alternative transportation system in a very short time, using existing infrastructure. We should do all that is necessary to get the best socially, economically, and financially out of the proposed project.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at return email or at 313-255-7429.

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