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Ferry, bike paths, trails plotted for Richmond's future

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A ferry. More bike lanes. Trails coursing through the city. A city streetcar or shuttle connecting major stops such as schools and hospitals.

Richmond is looking at how to make this city less car-dependent and instead more alluring to bicyclists, pedestrians and mass transit

users. The need is there, residents say.

"A lot of people would ride, but there's not a safe passage from one place to another," said longtime bicyclist Brian Drayton, head of Richmond Spokes, an advocacy group that also runs a youth job-training program.

Under the draft general plan update out for public review until

Sept. 30, ideas to limit congestion and make it easier to get around include:

■ Studying how to ease congestion along Central Avenue, San Pablo Avenue, 23rd Street and other busy corridors and intersections.

■ Reviving the ferry. The state approved funds for an environmental report on expanded ferry service

in the Bay, including at Richmond, but state budget woes put the money on hold. City officials hope to know by the end of this month if funding will resume.

■ Developing citywide bicycle and pedestrian plans that identify gaps and safety improvements. Officials have secured state grants for

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these. They would design streets so they are safer for bicyclists and pedestrians, such as by creating bike lanes, wider sidewalks and plazas where people mingle.

■ Expanding trails and greenways.

■ Exploring a city shuttle that links destinations such as schools, BART, parks and hospitals. The shuttle also would connect schools to after-school activities including ball fields and museums.

■ Improving safety at railroad crossings and consider putting railroad tracks underground, if railroad traffic increases. This venture would be pricey. A 20-mile trench that connects the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to rail yards east of downtown Los Angeles separates tracks from the streets and eliminates 30 grade crossings with bridges cost \$712 million to design and build.

Bicycle and pedestrian advocates see the draft general plan update as a chance to make Richmond safer for commuters, they said.

In 2002, Richmond ranked second in pedestrian-involved car crashes among similarly sized California cities, according to the state Office of Transportation Safety; it ranked first in crashes

READ THE PLAN FOR RICHMOND'S FUTURE

Richmond's draft general plan update, which consists of 15 elements ranging from land use to historic buildings, can be reviewed at the Planning and Building counter at Richmond City Hall, 450 Civic Center Plaza. Copies also can be purchased there. The document is available online at www.cityofrichmondgeneralplan.org.

The written public comment period has been extended to Sept. 30. The document is missing the Housing Element, which is expected to be released in mid-September for public review. The environmental impact report will be released by October or November, followed by a 45-day public comment period. Public comments also will be accepted at hearings before the Planning Commission and the City Council.

This article is part of a series on the draft general plan update.

involving pedestrians 15 or younger.

The multipronged Richmond Pedestrian Safety Project sought to change those numbers. From 2005 to 2007, police sent plainclothes cops into crosswalks and ticketed 419 drivers who failed to stop. The city made crosswalks more obvious. Experts shared safety tips in classrooms and before community groups.

By 2007, accident numbers dropped: There were 20 pedestrian injuries that year, compared with 43 in 2004 before the project began.

"They've come down and they've stayed down," said Richmond resident Nancy Baer, project head. "We're poised to do the planning work that will set the stage for more comprehensive improvement."

Sixty-one bicyclists were

killed or injured from 2004-07, according to OTS. Most are from the Iron Triangle, South Richmond and North and East neighborhoods, and are ages 5 to 12 and 40 to 49, Drayton said.

The shortage of safe biking routes with ample signage and reduced car speeds is a big part of the problem, he said. More education and enforcement also is needed.

Bicyclists in the Iron Triangle, a neighborhood hemmed in by railroad tracks, are particularly affected because they must ride farther on streets without proper signage to get to a store, to downtown or to the auto-free Ohlone Greenway and Bay Trail.

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