

Richmond approves plan for future of bicycles

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Contra Costa Times

Posted: 11/06/2011 01:00:00 AM PDT
Updated: 11/07/2011 12:10:20 PM PST

Getting around Richmond on two wheels will be easier and safer if the city succeeds in its quest to revamp its bike routes, but some worry that getting around by car will be difficult.

Richmond's newly approved Bicycle Master Plan aims to put its roadway system, designed to accommodate industrial production during World War II, on what planners call a "road diet."

The 210-page document the City Council approved Tuesday details existing conditions for bicyclists and proposes ways to increase bicycle safety and to get more residents on wheels.

Its recommendations include:

- Adding 105 miles of bike paths, more than double what the city has now.
- Narrowing or reducing the number of lanes on Carlson Boulevard and installing physically separated bike lanes
- Improving bike accessibility around the Plunge and tunnel entrances in Point Richmond.
- Restricting the use of motorized vehicles on the Bay Trail.

- Some residents and business representatives worry that eliminating traffic lanes to accommodate bike paths will create congestion that will waste commuters' time and money.

Mayor Gayle McLaughlin said that the plan is an example of smart urban design and emphasized that the city was actively seeking to slow traffic on some main thoroughfares.

"The

- only way people will stop for businesses is if it's not these fast, four-lane freeways," she said.

- The critics say that LSA Associates, the consultant that did an environmental review of the plan, did not take their concerns into account.

LSA sought input at more than two dozen public meetings over the past two years, but the critics say it did not publicize these meetings.

"It's real easy to say nobody showed up," said Councilman Corky Booze, who voted against the plan along with Councilman Nat Bates. "There are not that many people on bikes in Richmond -- they do it for recreation, but they don't do it every day to the point where you take away lanes from your streets."

Environmentalists, community advocates and bicycle enthusiasts are applauding the plan, which they say is a step toward a healthier city.

"Despite attempts to obfuscate the real issues, a solid 5-to-2 majority of the City Council voted to make Richmond a city with safe, healthy biking and walking opportunities," said Tom Beyaert, of the Trails for Richmond Action Committee.

Richmond will need more than \$40 million in grant and government funding to realize its bicycle wish list. A master plan is required to apply for much of the money.

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