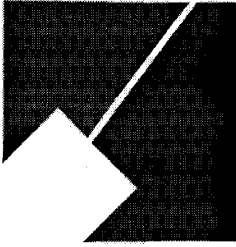


M-NCPPC



MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARK AND PLANNING

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3760

MCPB
Item No. 1
11-20-03

November 14, 2003

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Jeffrey Zyontz, Chief
County-wide Planning Division

Richard C. Hawthorne, Chief
Transportation Planning

RC

Callum Murray, Team Leader
Community-Based Planning

FROM: Charles S. Kines, 301-495-2184, for the Park and Planning Department

CK

PROJECT: MacArthur Boulevard Bike Path/Lane Improvements
From District of Columbia line to Old Anglers Inn

REVIEW TYPE: Project Prospectus

APPLICANT: Montgomery County Department of
Public Works and Transportation

APPLYING FOR: Agency Comments

COMMUNITY-BASED PLANNING TEAM AREA: Bethesda-Chevy Chase, Potomac

RECOMMENDATION: TRANSMIT COMMENTS TO DPWT

Staff recommends that the Planning Board transmit the following comments on the proposed project (see Attachment 1: Vicinity Map and Selected Spot Improvements) to DPWT:

1. The study report needs to better explain why Alternative 2 is preferred over Alternative 3 and how the particular details of Alternative 2 were decided, including clearly identifying the trade-offs between bicycle accommodation, environmental impacts and cost. Items needing clarification include:

- a) Why actions to accomplish the stated project goal of improving on-road bicycling are not included in the selected Alternative 2.
 - b) Why the proposed path width is less than the American Association of Transportation Officials' (AASHTO) standard.
 - c) Why the path would not be constructed to allow the future construction of on-road bike lanes. The report should document all alternatives that have been studied in this regard and the important trade-offs being made by DPWT Staff.
 - d) The report should identify existing motor vehicle traffic conditions, including volumes and speeds, and explain how these conditions affect on-road bicyclists.
2. For all locations where spot improvements are recommended, the existing conditions should be described and located on a map, and the need for improvements should be explained. These comments pertain to particular locations (See Attachment 1: Vicinity Map and Selected Spot Improvements):
- a) At Spot Improvement #2, consider installing signs to warn motorists on MacArthur Boulevard of bicycle crossings at Clara Barton Parkway.
 - b) At Spot Improvement #3, provide a bike-safe barrier where a substandard landscape panel would exist under I-495.
 - c) At Spot Improvement #4, identify as part of Alternative 2 some measures that would discourage patrons of Captain's Market from illegally parking on the shared use path.
 - d) At Spot Improvement #7, ensure that crosswalks at the parking lot entrance and exit are well designed and marked. Also, ensure a landscape buffer is provided between the parking lot and the shared use path.
 - e) At Spot Improvement #9, coordination with park path planners and DPWT traffic engineers will be required.
3. Provide the AASHTO-recommended vertical clearance of eight feet for the shared use path throughout the project length.
4. Coordinate with WMATA and Ride-On to determine the safest crossing locations for their patrons. Relocate existing bus stops within the project limits to these locations and eliminate bus stops where safe crossings cannot be provided. The maps in the prospectus should reflect these changes.

5. Refer to the recently published Public Hearing Draft of the Countywide Bikeways Functional Master Plan (October 2003) and identify all existing, proposed and planned countywide bikeways that could connect to the MacArthur Boulevard path and consider providing safe and convenient connections to these bikeways.
6. Evaluate the safety of all legal crosswalks, marked and unmarked, within the project limits and provide improvements where necessary. Ensure that all crosswalks cross streets at 90-degree angles, where feasible, particularly the on-ramp for Clara Barton Parkway.
7. When considering bikeway and roadway widths, trade-offs between safety and potential environmental impacts need to be explained, including:
 - a) Stream crossings: Whether building to the typical section is desirable where the path crosses a stream.
 - b) Steep slopes: Whether using fill to create additional surface area is necessary at locations where the pathway is adjacent to steep slopes
 - c) Tree cover: Additional preservation measures that could be taken to avoid the loss of tree cover along the road.
8. Evaluate the impact of the proposed improvements on County-listed historic sites and districts.

PREVIOUS BOARD ACTION: None.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This facility planning study is intended to result in a project that would improve bicycling safety along MacArthur Boulevard between the District of Columbia line and Old Angler's Inn, a distance of 7.3 miles. Improvements to both on-road and off-road bicycling are goals of the study.

Alternative 1 is the no-build alternative, essentially leaving existing conditions unchanged. Only immediate safety concerns would be addressed.

Alternative 2, the selected alternative, recommends upgrading the existing mostly substandard shared-use path and making select spot improvements throughout the corridor. The path would be widened to eight feet. A five-foot minimum offset to the roadway would typically be provided. Where this offset cannot be provided, a bike-safe barrier would be installed between the path and the road.

Alternative 3 would upgrade the shared use path for less experienced bicyclists and also provide bicycle lanes for more experienced bicyclists. The path would be widened to eight feet. A five-foot minimum offset to the roadway would typically be provided. Where this offset cannot be provided, a bike-safe barrier would be installed between the path and the road. In addition, five-foot wide bike lanes would be provided along MacArthur Boulevard to accommodate on-road bicyclists.

Both build-alternatives would improve connections to existing, planned and proposed bikeways and paths in the Potomac and Bethesda-Chevy Chase planning areas.

STAFF ANALYSIS

The project would greatly improve bicyclist and pedestrian accessibility and safety between the neighborhoods of Potomac, Cabin John, Glen Echo and Bethesda. It also would improve an important link to the District of Columbia bikeway system and on to downtown Washington. The improved bikeway would provide better connections to major park trails in Montgomery County including the C&O Canal Towpath, the Capital Crescent Trail and the Little Falls Trail.

Alternative 2 would provide the shared-use path recommended in area master plans and the 1978 Master Plan of Bikeways. The upgrading of the existing shared use path would benefit all bicyclists, especially beginner and intermediate levels.

MacArthur Boulevard functions not only as the major recreational bicycling route in this portion of the County, but also as the major commuter bicycling route. The consultant's bicycle and pedestrian counts indicate much higher levels of on-road bicycle use than off-road (see Attachment #2, "2003 Bicycle and Pedestrian Counts at Four Locations Along MacArthur Boulevard" from page 18 of the prospectus). The report also states citizens attending the second public meeting in April 2003 clearly were in favor of Alternative 3 (which includes bike lane improvements as called for in the Public Hearing Draft of the Countywide Bikeways Functional Master Plan (CBFMP) (October 2003). Although improving on-road bicycling conditions is stated as a major goal of the study, bike lanes would not be provided as part of the selected alternative. ***While staff recognizes that there are trade-offs in DPWT's decision to proceed only with improvements to the shared use path, DPWT needs to explain more clearly what those trade-offs are.***

Pedestrian Accommodation

Since MacArthur Boulevard does not have sidewalks, the shared use path serves as a de facto sidewalk. The path serves as the primary pedestrian facility along this road. Therefore, measures to improve pedestrian safety and reduce potential conflicts between bicyclists and pedestrians must be addressed. A wider path would improve pedestrian accessibility and safety by reducing the likelihood of conflicts between bicyclists and walkers.

Bus Stops and Pedestrian Crossings

Staff believes that it is important that the needs of the County's transit patrons are well integrated into this project. Safe, convenient access to the bus stops needs to be made part of the current plans. In addition to the need for marked crosswalks and good lighting at intersections, ensure that users of both transit and the path have safe access across the road.

The report states that the location and type of bus stops were examined but no recommendations to improve access to them are included. All bus stops should be identified on a map in order to determine locations for improved and safer crossings. Crossings at non-intersection locations that do not have marked crosswalks should be discouraged. In areas where mid-block crossings are necessary or desired, measures to enhance their safety should be identified.

Particular attention should be paid to the bus stops along MacArthur Boulevard to ensure that they are in the safest places for transit patrons to cross MacArthur Boulevard. ***Bus stops that are in locations where it would be unsafe to cross MacArthur Boulevard from the shared use path should be eliminated.*** The bus stops that are retained should be evaluated to determine whether shelters and/or benches are warranted and whether the nearest crosswalks should be striped.

Lighting

Providing adequate lighting for the path should be included in the study. Better lighting will help ensure that people can safely cross the side streets traversed by the shared use path and to safely cross MacArthur Boulevard to get to the path. Good lighting is also needed at bus stop locations. The existing lighting along MacArthur Boulevard is poor. While the proposed lighting along the shared use path may be sufficient to ensure users' safety on the path itself, the intersections that they have to cross to continue on or to access the path are poorly lit at present and the lighting needs to be upgraded. These existing conditions must be addressed to ensure that the proposed facility operates safely as a whole.

Signing

A signing plan should be created showing all proposed signage and all existing signage to remain. The sign plan should address ways to minimize conflicts between bicyclists and pedestrians using the path, and potential conflicts between bicyclists and motorists, especially at or near intersections.

Environmental

Environmental Planning staff offers the following comments:

1. Montgomery County resources for floodplains and historic places should be used as sources in addition to natural resources.
2. Streams in the Potomac Gorge are generally steep-sided and deeply incised. For this reason, efforts to widen or make additional stream crossings will create significant impact and cost, even if only for pathway crossings. Therefore, the many stream crossings should be individually evaluated to determine the improvements that are necessary for safety rather than meeting design standards.

3. In many locations, the existing pathway is along the edge of a steep drop-off on the south side of the road alignment. In these locations, efforts should be made to avoid using fill to create additional surface area. Generally, it would be preferable to place the path on a lower grade that is more widely separated from the road.
4. Where possible the option that allows the grassed separation to function as an infiltration trench to provide some water quality mitigation should be utilized.
5. Forest and tree impact should be evaluated, based not only on acres of impact but also on the size and quality of individual specimens and on the nature of the crown area. Additional preservation measures that reduce thermal impacts to water quality should be taken where forest or individual trees provide a significant overhang on the road.

Parks Impacts

Although briefly highlighted in Spot Improvement #9, improved access to the Capital Crescent Trail (CCT) from the upgraded path would be desirable and thus should be included as part of this project. The CCT is one of the premier off-road bicycle commuting routes in the County.

Historic Resources

The study report notes several National Register historic resources that are within the study area, including Clara Barton Parkway, C&O Canal Park, Cabin John Bridge (which is a National Historic Landmark), Glen Echo Park Historic District, Old Anglers Inn, Bonfield's Service Garage, Clara Barton School, and the Washington Aqueduct. The study report needs to reference all County-listed historic sites and districts as well. It appears, however, that none of these resources would be affected by the proposed improvements.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

An open house-style public meeting was held on January 22, 2003 to announce the project and solicit feedback from citizens on the scope of the project. A second public meeting was held on April 23, 2003 to discuss and solicit feedback on various alternatives. DPWT staff and consultants have also coordinated the proposed project with the affected property owners and met numerous times with various homeowner and community associations.

RELATED PROJECTS

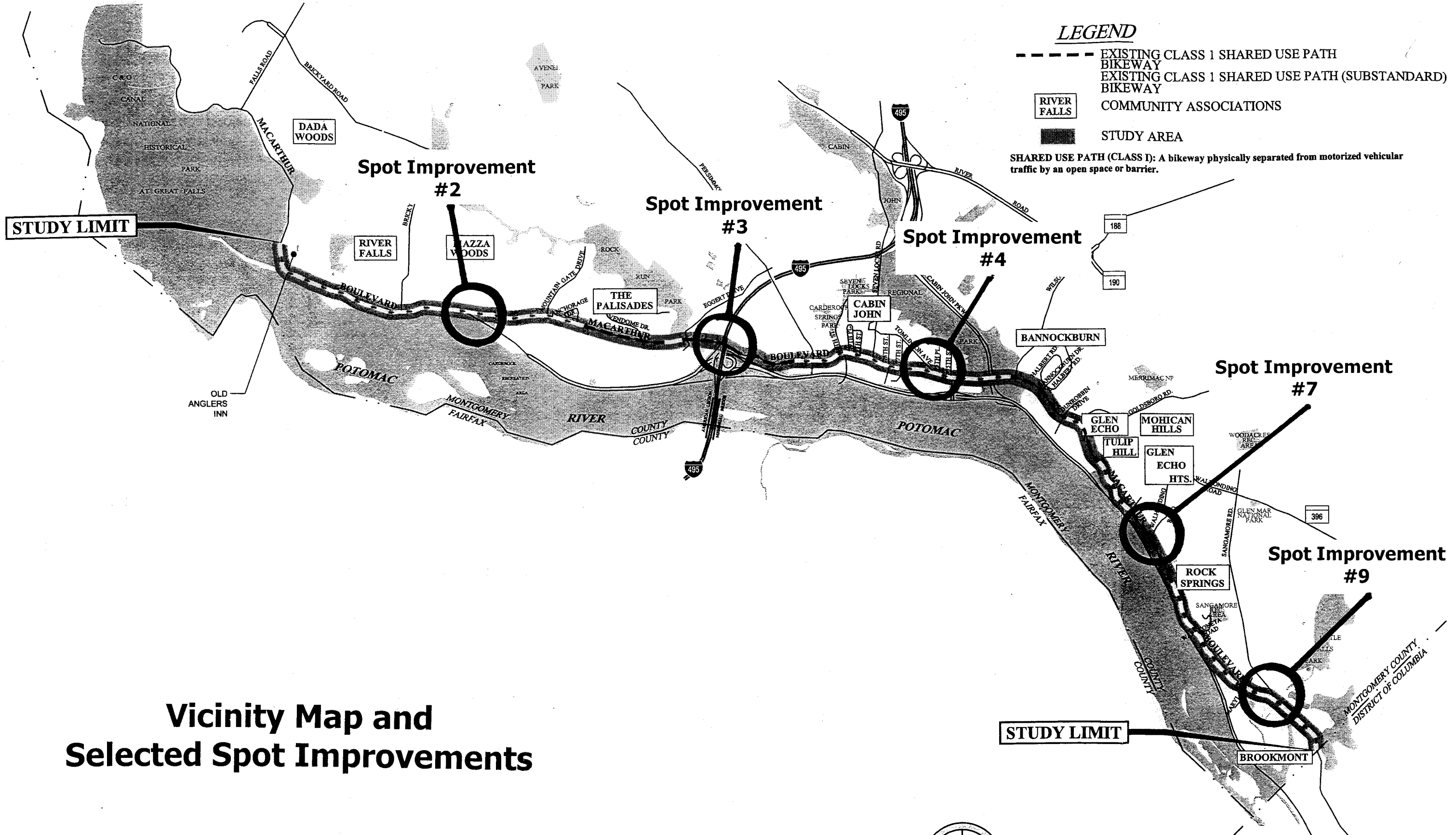
Falls Road Bike Path (#509521). This project would fill in the missing gaps for a continuous bike path from MacArthur Boulevard to the City of Rockville. The project involves the acquisition of land, a retaining wall, a pedestrian bridge over a small stream and an eight-foot wide hiker-biker path.

Glen Echo Storm Drain (#509637). This project provides for design and construction of a new storm drain system located along Bryn Mawr Avenue and the replacement of the existing system on University Avenue to the outfall at Clara Barton Parkway. The existing failing system is located within private backyards, without public easements. The improvements will collect runoff from MacArthur Boulevard and redirect it around the portion of the existing system where easements are not possible.

CK:kcw

Attachments

mmo to mcpb for public hearing.doc

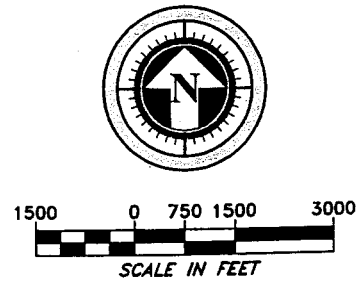


LEGEND

- EXISTING CLASS 1 SHARED USE PATH
 - BIKEWAY
 - EXISTING CLASS 1 SHARED USE PATH (SUBSTANDARD) BIKEWAY
 - [Box with 'RIVER FALLS'] RIVER FALLS
 - [Box with 'COMMUNITY ASSOCIATIONS'] COMMUNITY ASSOCIATIONS
 - [Shaded Box] STUDY AREA
- SHARED USE PATH (CLASS I): A bikeway physically separated from motorized vehicular traffic by an open space or barrier.

Vicinity Map and Selected Spot Improvements

Attachment #1



MACARTHUR BOULEVARD BIKEWAY STUDY <i>DRAFT: WORK-IN-PROGRESS</i>		
STUDY AREA MAP		
	DATE: OCTOBER 2003	 URS <i>Engineers/Architects/Planners/Surveyors</i> 4 NORTH PARK DRIVE, SUITE 300 HUNT VALLEY, MARYLAND 21030 TELEPHONE: 410-785-7220
	SCALE: 1" = 3000'	
	FIGURE: I-1	

PROJECT PURPOSE AND NEED

Table I-1
2003 Bicycle and Pedestrian Counts at Four Locations Along MacArthur Boulevard

Date	Sangamore and Madaket Road		Ericsson Road and Clara Barton Parkway Spur		Wilson Lane		Clara Barton Parkway	
	On-Road	Bike Path	On-Road	Bike Path	On-Road	Bike Path	On-Road	Bike Path
Monday 7/28/03								
Morning	29	7	15	13	35	28	20	6
Midday	19	21	17	21	24	15	21	0
Evening	13	35	18	9	0	0	9	5
Daily Total	61	63	50	43	59	43	50	11
Tuesday 7/29/03								
Morning	16	59	26	21	4	5	20	2
Midday	26	75	45	18	33	31	32	0
Evening	42	14	77	24	49	42	23	5
Daily Total	84	148	148	63	86	78	75	7
Wednesday 7/30/03								
Morning	NC	NC	28	17	74	35	28	4
Midday	NC	NC	73	42	99	42	65	0
Evening	NC	NC	27	50	81	24	30	0
Daily Total	NC	NC	128	109	254	101	123	4
Thursday 7/31/03								
Morning	37	20	14	43	18	29	15	2
Midday	14	27	42	21	59	27	37	1
Evening	7	7	37	16	53	18	14	1
Daily Total	58	54	93	80	130	74	66	4
Friday 8/01/03								
Morning	19	9	18	19	13	15	12	4
Midday	19	18	4	12	19	18	13	4
Evening	76	32	11	8	21	13	5	2
Daily Total	114	59	33	39	53	46	30	10

The bicyclist and pedestrian traffic counts were limited to weekdays and did not include a Saturday or Sunday count. The counts for Wednesday at the intersection of Sangamore and Madaket Road were unavailable and are reflected in the above table as NC (no count). During the morning period,

