

## **Introduction**

A brief summary of the purpose of the Transportation Focus Group was presented by Dennis Madsen, Manager of Urban and Long Range Planning. He noted that, rather than adhering to a formal meeting structure, the transportation focus group was established to provide an opportunity for open discussion and dialogue with local citizens on various transportation issues.

## **Significant Transportation Issues**

To begin the discussion, Mr. Madsen reviewed the following list of issues which were cited at the last focus group meeting as some of the most important transportation issues facing the Huntsville community:

1. The need for alternative modes of transportation
2. Colocation of land uses and facilities
3. Affordable local and regional public transit system
4. Appropriately sized streets and sustainability of our roadway infrastructure
5. Growth and its impact on our transportation infrastructure
6. Need for updated engineering design standards which accommodate multi-modal transportation options and encourage better parking facility designs
7. Lack of walkability
8. Narrow roads with trees located too close to the road
9. Connectivity
10. Planning for public transit

When asked if any additional issues should be added to the list, the following topics were noted:

1. High speed broadband would ease traffic issues by limiting both business and personal trips
2. The relationship of speed and safety is a key concern on our roadways

## **Speed and Safety**

As part of an extended discussion, the following concerns and opinions regarding speed and safety were noted:

1. Several streets have inappropriately high speed limits
2. Speed is the most significant determinant of accident severity
3. The Vision Zero movement, aimed at unilaterally reducing speeds on roadways, would be a good source of information on this topic
4. Bikes should not be on streets with speed limits above 35 mph and, when feasible, routes for bikes and cars should rarely intersect

## **Speed Limits**

The following issues were noted with regard to speed limits:

1. Special consideration should be given to lowering speeds on city streets going through university campuses such as UAH, Alabama A&M and Calhoun Community College; Technology Drive between Sparkman and Wynn was noted as a specific roadway segment which needed such changes.
2. Dan Sanders reviewed the generally accepted process for establishing speed limits which is based on the 85th percentile of speeds being traveled by motorists. It was noted that other factors, such as roadway character, should also be considered.

## **Bicycle Safety**

David Stone, referencing a study on cycling safety currently being prepared for the Bicycle Advisory and Safety Committee (BASC), provided the following information:

1. The study includes 9 years of data and information on 181 accidents in the community
2. Most crashes are on streets with speed limits less than 25 mph
3. Experienced cyclists are generally not the ones involved in accidents
4. 35% of those involved in accidents were unemployed
5. Alcohol is often involved
6. Cyclists are at fault in two-thirds of the accidents
7. Areas like Bankhead Parkway and Cecil Ashburn Drive have few bicycle related crashes

Based on this information, he noted that perceived safety issues may not be consistent with actual data. In addition, several differences of opinion exist regarding bicycle safety in general. For example, while some people advocate separate bike lanes, others suggest that such facilities may actually increase accidents.

## **Pedestrian Safety**

The issue of pedestrian safety was discussed with particular emphasis on a segment of University Drive near the Northwoods public housing complex. This area was noted as having significant pedestrian and vehicle conflicts. It was suggested that retrofitting the road with raised medians would provide a safe zone for pedestrians. It was also suggested that Governors Drive between Memorial Parkway and Triana Boulevard, with its median and landscaping, might be a good model on which to base changes to University. However, it was stated that such changes would impact vehicular access to adjacent businesses and thus would likely be met by objections from business owners.

## **Developing a Hierarchy of Streets**

It was suggested that a hierarchy of streets be developed which would prioritize users of various roadways in the city. Such a system should note the primary and secondary users of streets throughout the community. This information could then be used to guide street design and the establishment of appropriate speed limits. The goal of this effort would be to determine how to best accommodate motorists, cyclists and pedestrians who travel at different speeds and to then establish a functional network for each. The hierarchy could also be used to help ensure the most efficient allocation of resources. For example, the data might discourage spending funds to retrofit certain streets such as University Drive, which by their inherent design and usage, may not be corridors on which we should encourage cycling. It was suggested that a Barriers Map, identifying access points for pedestrians and cyclists to cross Memorial Parkway should also be generated. In addition, it was also suggested that an overall Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan is needed.

## **Traffic Calming**

Attendees were asked to suggest the most effective tools for traffic calming. Comments and responses included:

1. Installation of Medians- Some attendees said that adding medians, especially with trees and other plantings, is an effective tool for reducing speeds. However, others expressed concern that medians and plantings could reduce visibility for cyclists and pedestrians.
2. Right-of way Landscaping- It was suggested that trees and other landscaping not only make roadways more attractive but also help reduce speeds.

## **Future Planning**

It was suggested that 4 or 5 corridors or hubs be identified which would be conducive to transit oriented development. Regulations and standards should then be implemented to influence development in these areas. Doing so would create the densities needed to support alternative modes of transportation. In support of this concept, it was noted that even though we may not think that Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) or other mass transit options are feasible in Huntsville in the near term, the time to plan for them is now.

## **Summary**

It was noted that, after emphasizing group discussion and citizen input at the initial focus group meetings, future activities will be oriented toward accomplishing specific tasks. These may include developing ideal cross-sections for new streets as well as developing standards for retrofitting existing roadways to accommodate multiple modes of transportation.