

Countywide bike plan ready for public comment

By Steven Mayer, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, June 10, 2012

Imagine being able to bike your way around Isabella Lake protected by painted bicycle lanes, or better yet, a paved path separated from the highway.

Or visualize new bike lanes in Oildale and east Bakersfield designed to help make commuting by pedal-power more feasible for everyday people.

These and other visions for the future are what local planners, consultants, cyclists and politicians have been talking about and working on for the past eight months.

On Tuesday, the public will have a chance to review and comment on the results: a 235-page report known as the Draft Bicycle Master Plan & Complete Streets Recommendations for Kern County.

"This is the conclusion of the project, which began last fall," said Peter Smith, a planner for Kern Council of Governments, a transportation planning agency. If everything remains on schedule, he said, the plan will be approved by the KernCOG board in September.

But establishing a basic plan is just the first step. Obtaining funding, engineering the designs, securing land access, working with multiple jurisdictions -- that's where the bicycle tire rubber meets the road.

Until those hurdles are overcome, the plan is in essence just "lines on a map," Smith said.

The plan recommends improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities that would be implemented over the next 20 years. If implemented and funded, the plan would expand bikeways and bike lanes in unincorporated Kern County from 55 miles currently to 664 miles.

"It's a big step in the right direction," said Bike Bakersfield founder Bob Smith, who has advocated for improvements in bicycle infrastructure for years.

"This is the first modern bike plan in Kern County since the late 1970s and early 1980s," he added.

The avid cyclist noted that there will be a lot more bike lanes on "slower streets," rather than on the large vehicle arteries that have been more common locally.

And bike paths may be developed alongside irrigation canals and old railroad grades.

Richard Cayia Rowe, president of Kern River Valley Revitalization, has been involved in the process for months and is a member of the bike plan's steering committee.

Rowe said he wanted to make sure communities around Isabella Lake received their fair share during the planning process.

"Most plans in Kern County are Bakocentric, so we tried to get involved early," Rowe said.

KernCOG's Smith said it's a valid complaint.

"Metro Bakersfield is the 400-pound gorilla," Smith said. "KernCOG is sensitive to that. We make sure it's spread around."

But there's no getting around it, metro Bakersfield remains the highest priority when it comes to needs for improvements in transportation.

Advocates say more cyclists on the streets can improve the quality of life for everyone in Kern by reducing air pollution, cutting traffic congestion, improving the overall health of residents and slowing the "brain drain" caused when educated young people leave the area in search of more livable communities.

Funding the projects, as always, will be an issue. But proponents say the master plan will open doors to new infrastructure funding sources not currently available locally.

Tuesday's workshop will be held from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. in the conference room at KernCOG's downtown offices, 1401 19th St., Suite 300. Alta Planning + Design, a nationwide company that helps transform cities into bike-friendly communities, was contracted to produce the bicycle master plan for the unincorporated areas of Kern, as well as 11 cities outside of the Bakersfield metro area.

The city of Bakersfield is expected to create a separate plan.

GET INVOLVED

Kern Council of Governments will hold a public workshop from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday at 1401 19th St., Suite 300, to review the Draft Bicycle Master Plan & Complete Streets Recommendations for Kern County, developed by Alta Planning + Design. To download the draft bike plan, go to kerncountybikeplan.com/index.php/download_file/view/1109.

Kern River Valley Revitalization will hold a public meeting to discuss the new recommendations 2 p.m. June 16 at Cerro Coso Community College, 5520 Lake Isabella Blvd. in Lake Isabella.

Public comments on the recommendations may also be provided by going to kerncountybikeplan.com. The deadline for comments is July 6.

Group says Calif. air regulations discriminate

Associated Press

San Francisco Gate, Sunday, June 10, 2012

Fresno, Calif. (AP) -- A coalition of environmental groups is alleging that California's Cap and Trade program violates the 1964 Civil Rights act.

The groups filed a complaint Friday against the California Air Resources Board charging that minority groups will be disproportionately harmed by the program that allows polluters to discharge more emissions by buying credits from other less-polluting industries.

The complaint alleges that African-Americans, Latinos and Asians are more likely to live in the low-income neighborhoods near refineries and power plants and will not receive the benefit of emission reductions intended under Cap and Trade.

The groups are asking the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to intervene.

Ozone and particulate pollution emitted by industrial facilities can cause asthma and lead to heart disease.

The EPA did not respond to a request for comment.