

2009 Draft LA Bike Plan Leaves Mountain Bikers in the Dust

The Mountain Bike Policy Recommendations of the LA Bike Plan (www.LaBikePlan.org) are giant steps backward, not forward, for the mountain biking community.

Back in May Alta Planning released the first draft maps for the LA Bike Plan they have been developing for the city for the past 18 months. At the original meetings last year we were promised separate meetings to cover the needs of off-road cyclists, as the meetings we attended focussed solely on the urban bike routes, bike lanes and bike paths.

Those public mountain bike hearings never happened.

The draft plan which was released by ALTA was subsequently taken down off the internet (though the original versions can still be found online through other urban cycling advocacy groups such as [LA StreetsBlog](http://LAStreetsBlog)). They were replaced with watered-down versions that removed more than 100 miles of recommended bike lanes, marked other proposed bike lanes as "infeasible" and essentially gutted much of ALTA's recommendations.

So aside from the controversy surrounding the urban components of the draft plan, the Mountain Biking community has been promised much and delivered nothing. Their plan now deems mountain bike policy to be beyond the scope of the plan, and recommends developing a separate trail master plan.

Chapter 3 of the draft plan is devoted to off-road cycling policy. It covers the history of the off-road bicycling plan for the city of Los Angeles, and includes the following introduction and excerpt from [the 1996 off-road cycling plan](#):

"Several policies concerning mountain bicycle access on city trails were adopted by the Los Angeles City Council in the 1996 Bicycle Plan and readopted in 2002 and 2007.

Existing Mountain Bicycle Related Policy (1996 Bike Plan)

- *1.3.4. Acknowledge the growing demand for mountain bike trails and the absence of any such designated trails on City-managed land; and endorse staff review to study the feasibility of designation and development of:*
 - a. at minimum two dedicated mountain bike trails in Griffith Park and one dedicated mountain bike trail in Ernest Debs Park;*
 - b. at minimum two dedicated mountain bike trails in the Recreation and Parks Valley Region and two dedicated mountain bike trails in the Recreation and Parks Pacific Region*
 - c. mountain bike usage of DWP access roads/public utility rights-of-way and mountain fireroad in Hillside areas throughout the city*

Policy 1.3.4 calls for the addition of eight dedicated mountain bicycle trails to be built within the City of Los Angeles. Four of these trails have specific locations: Griffith Park and Ernest Debs Park. "

The current plan has the following recommendations, and completely drops the above 1.3.4 recommendations of the 1996 plan, which in 13 years have never been implemented:

3.3.1. Recommendations (Current 2009 draft)

While it is beyond the scope of this plan and the current financial means of the City to propose a network of unpaved mountain bicycling paths, the following actions can be undertaken to address multiple user groups' needs in the City's limited public park land.

1. Continue to permit mountain bicycling at Mandeville Canyon Park. At present, opportunities for mountain biking in the Los Angeles City Recreation and Park system are limited to Mandeville Canyon. This plan does not support any change in that condition.

2. Pursue opportunities for mountain bicycle access that may exist on land within and adjacent to the City of Los Angeles, under the jurisdiction of other agencies such as the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, Los Angeles County, State of California, etc.

3. Assess the viability and future availability of trails for mountain biking. Existing trails in the City of Los Angeles park system should be inventoried and assessed to determine their availability and use for equestrian and hiking activities.

4. Examine other jurisdictions to understand how they accommodate mountain biking and the extent to which conflicts in use, in particular concerns about safety, have been realized and addressed (See Appendix X).

5. Take the following steps to clarify and disseminate existing laws, regulations, and adopted city policies regarding the use of off-road bicycling in city parks and on other city-owned property:

- Develop a comprehensive database of all unimproved roads including City-owned trails and their allowed uses.*
- Develop a database of all non-City-owned trails within or directly adjacent to the City of Los Angeles where mountain bicycle use is allowed.*
- Conduct user counts on trails in Los Angeles City parks to indicate level of use for different groups.*
- Conduct comparison counts on shared use trails in other urban areas.*
- Research levels of user conflict on shared use trails in urban areas.*
- Identify urban parks where mountain bicycle use is restricted to a limited number of trails, to determine the level of containment (i.e. to what extent does mountain bicycle use spill over onto trails where mountain bikes are prohibited).*
- Identify a subset of trails with no existing equestrian use that may potentially be suitable for mountain biking based on trail width, grade and existing user counts.*
- Obtain information on levels of use by hikers and equestrians before and after the introduction of off-road bicycle access.*
- Develop a citywide master plan of trails for City-owned parks and open space.*

- *Report to City Council on environmental impacts of different trail uses.*

Clearly, this recommendation falls far short of what was outlined in the initial goals of the project, and at the initial public meetings during which the mountain biking community was promised public hearings (none were ever scheduled), and promised an opportunity to have input on greenbelt areas that are city-owned and currently off-limits to bicycles.

Instead there were private hearings held--*Policy Mediation Strategy*--in which the city invited selected representatives of different trail user groups, based on their:

- Being City of L.A. residents;
- Ability to address contentious issues with an open mind;
- Respect of all stakeholders and willingness to consider other viewpoint.

The invited equestrian representative is an avowed and vocal anti-mountain bike evangelist, who subsequently gloated in their association's newsletter about her success in shutting down the mountain bikers. That person has a history of denouncing and blocking anything to do with mountain bikes at any cost. With statements like "Mountain bikers...present a danger even after they've gone home" (recorded in Appendix H of the draft bike plan), this could hardly be considered an open-minded person with a willingness to consider other viewpoints. The "mediation strategy" therefore ended in a stalemate with absolutely no outcome other than holding up the process even longer.

So instead we ended up with the recommendations in 3.3.1 (reprinted above) that essentially pass the buck entirely, and make no efforts to meet the needs of a large and growing trail user group: mountain bikers. Instead of re-recommending the proposals of 1996 that have never been implemented, we are given even less.

The recommendations in 3.3.1 would be a welcome start, if there was any hope of them being completed in a reasonable amount of time. That is a unrealistic expectation, given the city's track record. We can assume that similar research to that recommended in 3.3.1 was done to support the 1996 proposals. Even then a need was found to research at least eight new trails to be opened to bicycles. Since 1996 the mountain biking population has grown. We can only assume that the need for trails for cyclists has also grown.

Literature and research is abundantly available on several of the steps outlined in 3.3.1 item 5 of the current draft proposal. Environmental impacts of different trail uses are well-researched and documented. There are ways the City could use existing research and volunteer-driven agencies to complete those steps much more rapidly than if they were to do their own research. We're confident that the need for new trails would then be even more evident than it was in 1996.

What is sad about this whole scenario is that Los Angeles is surrounded by some of the best, most under-rated off-road cycling in the country. There is a large variety of terrain, for a large range of skill levels. But most of it is inaccessible to much of the younger and lower income populations who are unable to drive and live geographically distant from the hinterland trails of the Santa Monica Mountains, the San Gabriels, Santa Susanna mountains, and other areas. Local scholastic mountain bike league teams are forced to travel just to train.

To have mountain biking opportunities on City-owned properties would help foster a new generation of youths who would be able to head to a more easily accessible city park to

hone their skills, improve their health, physical and mental well-being, and, arguably, keep out of trouble.

The City of Los Angeles needs to open some of its terrain to mountain bikers, one of the fastest growing trail user groups, for the sake of the community, for the sake of sustainable, health-promoting outdoor activities, and to improve the quality of life of its residents. Presently the City of Los Angeles has one of the poorest records of support for off-road cycling in the nation, if not the world. Los Angeles has not been able to implement a single recommendation of its 1996 plan after thirteen years, and is in fact, proposing to withdraw those recommendations completely.

We urge the City to extend the public comment period until at least January 31, 2010 and to hold public meetings specific to mountain bike use on city-owned property as promised. We also urge the City to immediately implement the recommendations of the 1996 plan, and further, to develop a trail master plan utilizing ready and willing volunteer agencies and resources, currently available research from other cities, land owners and jurisdictions, and internationally recognized agencies such as IMBA, to hasten that process.

The neighboring Cities of Glendale, Burbank, and Pasadena are already well on their way into that process, and making progress.

Public meetings are currently scheduled for:

Harbor Area

Date: Thursday, October 22, 2009

Location: Peck Park

Address: 560 North Western Avenue, San Pedro, CA 90732

Time: 5:00pm-7:00pm

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Central/South Los Angeles

Date: Saturday, October 24, 2009

Location: Exposition Park - Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune Regional Library

Address: 3900 S. Western Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90062

Time: 10:00am-12:00pm

San Fernando Valley

Date: Monday, October 26, 2009

Location: Marvin Braude-San Fernando Valley Constituent Services Center,
Conference Room 1B

Address: 6262 Van Nuys Blvd, Van Nuys, CA 91401

Time: 5:00pm-7:00pm

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West Los Angeles

Date: Wednesday October 28, 2009

Location: Felicia Mahood Multi Purpose Center

Address: 11338 Santa Monica Blvd Los Angeles, CA 90037

Time: 5:00pm-7:00pm

Please attend and make your voices as CORBA members and mountain bikers heard. Demand that we be given an opportunity to voice our needs and visions for the off-road portion of the master plan.