

# Takoma Park Safe Roadways Committee<sup>1</sup>

## Recommendations to Takoma Park City Council to Improve Bikeshare

November 15, 2015

### Executive Summary

The first few years of Capital Bikeshare in Takoma Park have seen great success and accelerating interest in the program. Residents have another transportation option for getting around town, riding with visiting friends and family, and getting exercise, and it's a transportation option consistent with City Council's direction to the Safe Roadways Committee to "encourage Takoma Park residents to use alternatives to driving, including walking, bicycling, and transit." See Takoma Park Municipal Code, [Chapter 2.16, Article 5](#).

There is tremendous current and planned growth in and around the city, including new mixed-use development in Takoma DC, future development at Takoma Junction, the Langley transit center, and the entire Purple Line Corridor. Expansion of Capital Bikeshare should be included in all growth planning, and Takoma Park should take an active approach to increasing Bikeshare usage. The most efficient way to do that is to increase connectivity and coverage in the Bikeshare system.

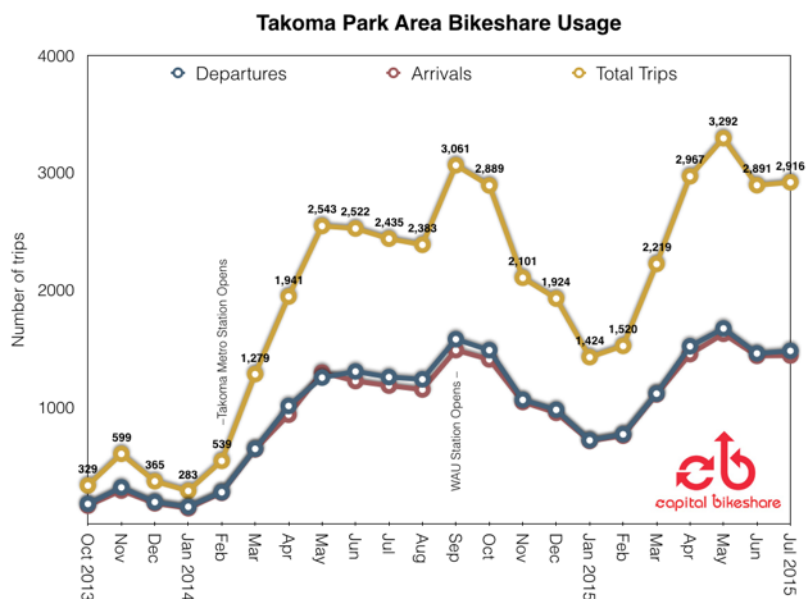


Figure 1. Data only available through July, 2015.

**The Safe Roadways Committee recommends that the city take four steps to increase Bikeshare usage and make Takoma Park a better place to live and bike. The City should work with transportation partners and change city codes to:**

1. [Add additional Bikeshare stations](#),
2. [Expand and relocate some existing stations](#),
3. [Allow people who bike to use sidewalks within the city limits](#), and
4. [Develop partnerships with local colleges and universities](#).

<sup>1</sup> The Safe Roadways Committee is Liz Cattaneo (Ward 2), Frank Demarais (Ward 5), Joe Edgell (Ward 2), Nick Finio (Ward 3), Kacy Kostiuik (Ward 3), Mike Moore (Ward 6), and Wren Rogers (Ward 3). Former Committee member Ryan Morden contributed to this report.

Detailed information about each of these recommendations can be found below.

Elly Blue's [Bikenomics](#) notes that both bikes and bike lanes have a calming effect on a car traffic. When traffic on city streets is slowed down a little — even if there are the same number of cars — streets become nicer places for residents and visitors (see The Local



*Figure 2. Bike lanes and bikes can have a traffic-calming impact for neighborhoods*

Government Commission's Center for Livable Communities' Report, 2000). More people come to those communities and everyone — whether walking, biking, or driving — has a little more freedom to look up and see what storefronts have to offer instead of focusing on staying alive. Neighborhood pride increases, as does private investment, retail sales, property values, and number of businesses. There are also fewer traffic crashes. These are all quantifiable ways of saying that areas with increased bike infrastructure lead to thriving communities.

## Detailed Discussion

### 1. Add More Stations

Takoma Park should work with [Montgomery County's Department of Transportation](#), the State of Maryland, and [Capital Bikeshare](#) to install more Bikeshare stations. Any transportation network will function more efficiently when there are more opportunities for use. These expansions should be completed by December 2016.

Takoma Park currently has five stations, and there are three stations nearby, but just outside city boundaries. These stations are:

- Carroll Ave/Ethan Allen Ave (Takoma Junction)
- Maple Ave/Ritchie Ave
- Philadelphia Ave/Maple Ave (community center)
- Carroll Ave/Westmoreland Ave (gazebo)
- Washington Adventist University
- Takoma Metro (in D.C.)
- Montgomery College (in Silver Spring)
- Garland Ave/Walden Road in Long Branch (in Silver Spring by the Long Branch Library)

The most recent data shows a peak Bikeshare usage of 3,292 trips at all Takoma Park-area stations. (see figure 1). If all those riders were driving, there would be about 3,033 drivers on Takoma Park roads.<sup>2</sup> If all these bike riders rode buses, there would be about 82 more buses on Takoma Park roads.<sup>3</sup> All those buses and cars would make our already congested streets more so. Capital Bikeshare is good for cars. Every Bikeshare rider removes vehicles from Takoma Park roads.

<sup>2</sup> Based upon an average vehicle occupancy rate for Maryland of 1.085535 people per car. Data from University of South Florida at <http://www.nctr.usf.edu/clearinghouse/censusavo.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Based upon 40 passengers per bus.

Data obtained from Capital Bikeshare and analyzed by the committee show that people use these stations in patterns that focus on transportation to and from the Takoma Metro. (see figure 3). People use certain stations in the morning hours primarily as pick-up locations, meaning these stations see more departures of bikes than arrivals, while other stations serve the opposite function, where they are more popular as drop-off destinations after work.

The City should work to expand the network of stations by adding additional stations at popular destinations. Additional stations will make trips shorter and easier, and additional stations between Silver Spring and Takoma Park will encourage bike travel between these two communities.

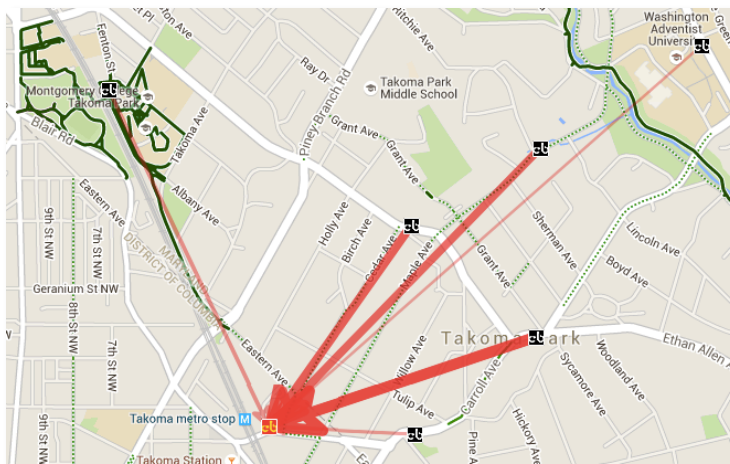


Figure 3. Map shows relative quantity of trips from Takoma Park stations to Takoma Metro station.

The committee recommends that new stations should be added to the network in the following locations, due to their status as notable city destinations for shopping, entertainment, recreation, or residential density. (see figure 4). We note that two of these stations, the Recreation Center station and the station near the transit center, have already been approved and funded.

- MD-410 and New Hampshire Avenue
- The Recreation Center on New Hampshire Avenue
- The Langley transit center at New Hampshire and University Avenues<sup>4</sup>
- Flower Avenue near Houston or Hudson Avenues

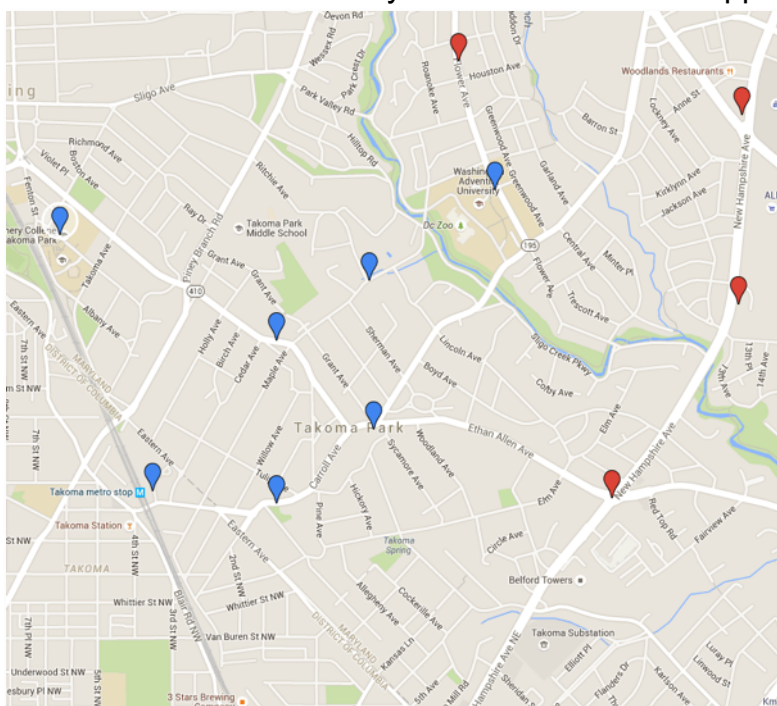


Figure 4. Red markers denote suggested new station locations and blue markers denote existing stations.

<sup>4</sup> City staff proposed locating the transit center station a block away from the transit center because the location was in Takoma Park. The Committee strongly recommends, however, that the station be located at the transit center on the north side of University Blvd. This requires that we work with the transit agencies, of course. But failure to locate the station at the transit center will result, the Committee believes, in substantially lower usage. Committee members communicated this to City staff during a site visit to the original planned location at the south side of University Boulevard at Anne Street.



## 2. Expand and Relocate Some Existing Stations

The City should add additional docks at the Takoma Junction station and the “Old Takoma” (gazebo) station, as these stations see the highest ridership and frequently are either full of bikes (during times when people are primarily commuting to that location) or empty (during times when people are primarily commuting away from that location using Bikeshare bikes). Full or empty docks substantially reduce the number of trips to and from those stations.

The City should consider relocating the Old Takoma station to a more prominent location in Old Town, as long as doing so does not negatively impact the proposed expansion of the Bikeshare system, as discussed in this report. One possible location for the relocated station is the intersection of Carroll and Laurel Avenues, in the two parking spaces across from the Dolci Gelato shop.<sup>5</sup> This location would function better for Old Town because:

- (1) The prospective spot at Carroll and Laurel Avenues is centered within one block of a majority of Old Takoma businesses in Maryland as well as the EF Language School on Laurel Street, NW. By contrast, the current gazebo location is near the edge of the Old Takoma business district.
- (2) The Laurel and Carroll location is both highly visible and symbolically important, marking a repurposing of two car-parking spaces to instead house 15 docked bikes. (see figure 5).
- (3) A number of cities, including Washington, D.C., New York City, Pittsburgh, Boston, and others, use some curb parking spaces for bike parking, including Bikeshare. (see figures 6 and 7). Safety concerns are easily



Figure 5. Green rectangle indicates station location.



Figure 7. Boston Hubway Bikes using in-street parking.



Figure 6. Pittsburgh Healthy Ride Bikes using car parking spaces.

answered: Car drivers already walk unsheltered in the street to enter and exit their vehicles much like a Bikeshare rider would do.

<sup>5</sup> The committee notes that this recommendation is different than our earlier recommendation. At the time of the earlier recommendation, the Committee believed the money to relocate the station would be better used to create new stations. Since new stations were never created, it is now time to increase the prominence of Bikeshare throughout the City, including Old Town. The Committee wants to ensure, however, that any move of the Old Town Bikeshare station does not negatively impact the proposed expansion discussed herein.

- (4) There is typically enough available metered street parking spaces in Old Town; two car spaces won't be missed. The reduction in the City's carbon footprint, however, will be welcomed.

Outside of city limits, the City should work with local surrounding governments to ensure that:

- (1) The Garland Ave/Walden Road station be moved to a more visible location near the Piney Branch/Flower Avenue intersection. Its current location is too far from the node activity in Long Branch. As a result, usage numbers are very low.

- (2) The Takoma DC/Metro Bikeshare station receives significant additional bikes and docks to better accommodate demand. Since the Metro station is a key destination for many Takoma Park residents using Bikeshare, it is important that the Takoma Park work with Washington, D.C., officials to increase the capacity at this station. Additional capacity here could greatly increase use of Bikeshare by Takoma Park residents.



*Figure 8. Takoma Metro Bikeshare station with lone bike.*

### **3. Allow Bicyclists to Ride on Sidewalks**

Takoma Park should make a technical correction to municipal code section 13.16.050(B) to allow people to ride bicycles on sidewalks. All Bikeshare stations in Takoma Park are located on sidewalks, and many riders feel safer on sidewalks. Much of Takoma Park's desirable routes for bikes are on narrow state highways where riders feel unsafe. (see figure 9). Additionally, other nearby municipalities (D.C. and Montgomery County as a whole) already welcome



*Figure 9. Huge trucks and heavy bus and car traffic make riding on Takoma Park arterials extremely risky. Many cyclists take to the sidewalk, like this one, along Ethan Allen Avenue.*



people to ride bicycles on the sidewalk, so this change would bring Takoma Park in line with the regulations of other places cyclists frequent. Furthermore, people already do it. There have been no major bicycle/pedestrian collisions resulting from this frequent practice.

While it's ideal for people to ride in the street, many roads are a hazard to ride on, especially because of the lack of bike lanes on major streets in Takoma Park. By allowing access for cyclists to ride on the sidewalks, Takoma Park could encourage hesitant riders to make more use of Bikeshare and cycling in general as a mode of transportation, thus further reducing automobile traffic. Safety can be ensured by limiting bike speed on sidewalks to 10 miles per hour and requiring that bikes always yield to pedestrians.

#### **4. Develop Partnerships with Nearby Colleges and Universities**

The City should work with [Washington Adventist University](#) (WAU) and [Montgomery College](#) to develop a program that gives each student a Bikeshare membership. Most colleges provide students with the benefit of riding a Metro bus for free when they show

their student ID, and this program could build on that concept to encourage greater use of bicycles for college students in Takoma Park. If cost is a concern for the schools or City, the membership could be part of the mandatory student fees.



*Figure 10. Washington Adventist University & its Capitol Bikeshare station.*

According to the data, the stations by WAU and Montgomery College see an uptick in users in the fall. This is likely the result of new students coming to campus and exploring ways to get around. Ridership dips in the winter, but that's to be expected system-wide due to cold weather. Giving students the benefit of free or reduced access to the Bikeshare system would increase ridership, and encourage students to make use of the system throughout the year. It would also allow students at WAU in particular to more freely travel to the Junction, Old Town, Langley Crossroads, Flower-Piney Branch, Silver Spring, and the Takoma Metro. This could result in more students frequenting local businesses and spending money in the Takoma Park community.

While this would be an experimental program that Takoma Park could highlight as a key accomplishment, it is not without precedent. MIT, for example, [subsidizes Boston's Bikeshare program](#) for faculty and students to reduce the annual rate to \$25. Takoma Park is the right size for a new program like this and its unique situation with two campuses of higher education within its borders. Takoma Park could tout the success of such a program as a model for other higher education institutions in the Capital Bikeshare network to replicate. Takoma Park can be a model for our region, and our region could turn around and become a model for other cities with Bikeshare programs.