City of Takoma Park
Maryland

Bicycles and Wheelchairs on Sidewalks

Dan Sonenklar
City Planner

Bicycling on Sidewalks Today

In the State of Maryland: riding bicycles on the sidewalk is prohibited unless it is allowed by local laws

Montgomery County: Permitted
Prince George's County: Permitted

Takoma Park: Bicycling on the sidewalk is prohibited

... but the law is not enforced

1. Cyclists are required to travel in traffic lanes or designated bicycle facilities, but this can be dangerous on high-capacity roads with no bicycle facility

New Hampshire Ave. Section Rendering
Takoma/Langley Crossroads sector plan

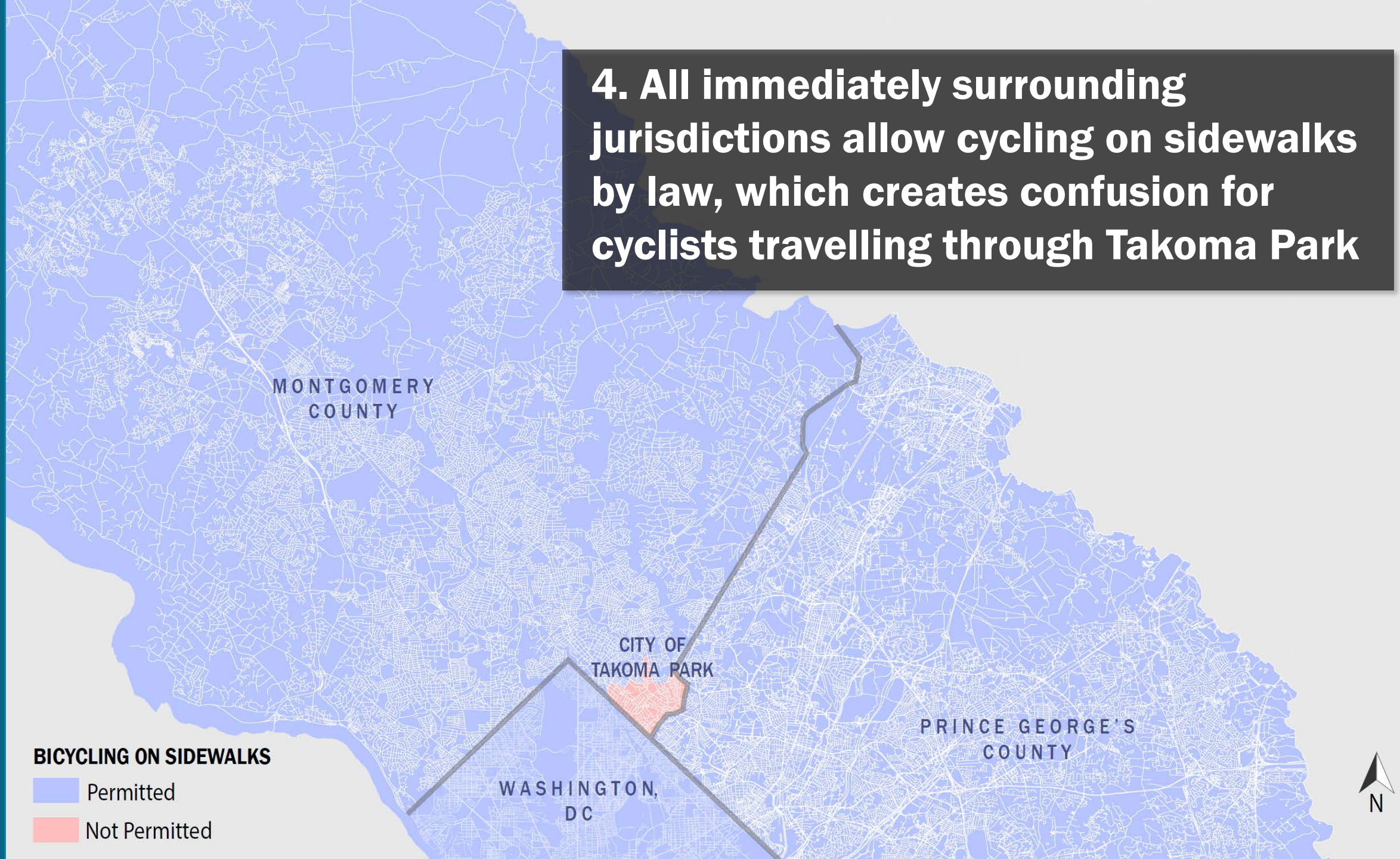
2. State ownership of major roadways limits what the city can do to change lane alignments and accommodate bicyclists

Carroll Ave. (MD195)

3. Narrow Rights-of-Way (ROW) make it difficult to designate adequate, dedicated roadway space for bicyclists (i.e. bike lanes)

Philadelphia Ave. (MD410)

4. All immediately surrounding jurisdictions allow cycling on sidewalks by law, which creates confusion for cyclists travelling through Takoma Park



5. Update in Maryland State Law provides protections to cyclists that will not apply in Takoma Park, unless the code is changed

On October 1, 2017 – MD law will grant the right-of-way to bicyclists riding through a crosswalk **connecting sidewalks on which bike riding is permitted**

Safety / Planning Considerations

From safety and planning perspective, bicycling on sidewalks is a mixed bag…

Pros	Cons
Cyclists can legally avoid dangerous vehicular conflicts on particular stretches of roadway	Can make bicyclists invisible to motorists who don't expect them at driveways and crosswalks
Can induce more cycling	Bicyclists feel safer, but could make pedestrians feel endangered
Cyclists can avoid confusion about conflicting rules and determinations of right-of-way when an incident occurs	Bicycling on sidewalks is generally not recommended in areas with high pedestrian traffic, if there are other options
Provides a safe option for younger riders	

Safety / Planning Considerations

1. **There is not one fix for all circumstances:** Research does not indicate total support for or opposition to biking on sidewalks
2. **Allowing biking on sidewalks is not ideal:** Modifying this provision does not preclude continued advocacy for separated, protected bike lanes wherever possible
3. **Allowing bicycling on sidewalks under certain circumstances might just be a growing pain:** It may be a necessity to ensure safety of all riders until a better solution is viable

Wheelchairs on Sidewalks

- **City Code currently also does not accommodate wheelchairs or mobility devices on sidewalks**, though this provision is not enforced against those that use them.

- Since **this is currently in conflict with federal accessibility laws**, council has expressed interest in updating the City Code to clearly state that all mobility devices are allowed on sidewalks throughout the city

Council Discussion

Options:

1. Permit bicycles on sidewalks in general
2. Permit bicycles on sidewalks where permitted as indicated by signage (i.e. on MD State Highways)
3. Permit bicycles on sidewalks in general, and restrict as indicated by signage (i.e. in Old Takoma)
4. Permit only children on smaller bicycles to ride on sidewalks
5. Permit Capital Bikeshare riders to ride bicycles on sidewalks in close proximity to Bikeshare stations
6. Clarify that wheelchairs and other such mobility enabling devices are permitted on sidewalks