

CITY OF LOS ANGELES
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

Date: March 20, 2014

To: The Honorable City Council
c/o City Clerk, Room 395
Attention: Honorable Mike Bonin, Chair, Transportation Committee

From:  John Kirk Mukri, General Manager
Department of Transportation

Subject: **BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN COUNTS – ENHANCED DATA
COLLECTION (CF 13-1195)**

SUMMARY

Council motion (CF 13-1195) continues a major effort by the City to support and improve bicycle and pedestrian transportation, known as “active transportation.” Increasing awareness by the public and by elected officials of the health, environmental and economic benefits of active transportation is driving demand for bicycle and pedestrian improvements.

The City seeks to develop safe, robust multi-modal transportation networks, enhancing the design and convenience of our active transportation infrastructure. Bicycle and pedestrian counts are one of the essential metrics for assessing the potential contribution of active transportation mobility toward achieving improved safety, congestion reduction, air quality, and public health objectives. Count metrics will also support prioritization of future transportation and infrastructure projects.

RECOMMENDATION

That the City Council, subject to concurrence by the Mayor:

1. Receive and file this report.
2. Direct LADOT to report back in eight months with a draft of a LADOT Counts policy.
3. Direct LADOT to prepare an assessment of the resources, budget and staffing required to establish standardized best-practices data collection and entry processes, data management and reporting protocols, and expand information technology capability to support an Annual Pedestrian and Bicycle Count and Pre- and Post-Evaluation of active transportation projects, and report back to Council in eight months.

DISCUSSION

Active Transportation Count Justification

With the City's increased emphasis on and demand for active transportation infrastructure projects and programs, institutionalizing standards for the collection, management and reporting of pedestrian and bicycle (active transportation) counts is fundamental to these objectives, which are consistent with those of SCAG and Metro:

- Assessing mode share shifts
- Analyzing the effect of bike and pedestrian infrastructure on walk and bike mode trends
- Determining existing travel patterns and demand
- Identifying corridors where current use and potential for increased use is high
- Tracking historic trends
- Evaluating the effectiveness of programs and projects and/or facilities to promote walking and biking (e.g., before and after studies)
- Improving safety and evaluating the impact of different design treatments on crash rates
- Identifying locations for bicycle facility improvements and pedestrian design appropriate treatments
- Creating facilities and apply treatments that increase user comfort and attract a wider range of walkers and bicyclists
- Assisting with forecasting pedestrian and bicycle travel demand

Consistent and robust multi-modal counts provide essential metrics for policymakers to make informed choices in prioritizing the appropriate transportation developments, and supporting Mayor Eric Garcetti's Budget Priority Outcome #4 for creating a more sustainable and livable city.

In addition, a formalized count program allows the City, in partnership with key regional stakeholders including the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), to contribute data to the National Bicycle & Pedestrian Documentation Project. This program, co-sponsored by Institute of Transportation Engineers' (ITE) Pedestrian and Bicycle Council, provides a consistent nationwide model of data collection and ongoing data for planners, governments, and bicycle and pedestrian professionals.

Current LADOT Data Collection Methodology

Currently, traffic data surveys are collected and utilized by LADOT both programmatically and for project-specific needs. Counts are collected by staff, LADOT consultants, or outside consultants. LADOT staff regularly conducts traffic surveys at intersections or midblock locations in response to constituent requests to the district

offices and others for site-specific projects.

Also, LADOT Planning reviews traffic surveys prepared by traffic consultants, as part of the requirement for new development projects over a certain size to prepare traffic impact studies in accordance to the "Traffic Study Policies & Procedures" (June 2013). These procedures require that "manual" intersection traffic counts be collected in 15-minute intervals during the peak travel times of 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., unless otherwise specified by LADOT. These intersection traffic counts include volumes for several vehicle classifications, bicycles and pedestrians. Planning also retains consultants do manual intersection vehicular only counts to support the requisite bi-annual Congestion Management Program.

Currently, LADOT does not have a centralized in-house repository for vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle counts data. Both in-house (internal) counts and consultant-prepared (traffic study) surveys are made available in Microsoft Excel spreadsheets or Acrobat PDF format, with the current protocol to make the data accessible on the intranet and public version of Navigate LA, the Bureau of Engineering's web-based mapping application.

The Bicycle Data Clearinghouse (BDC) established by SCAG has the potential to provide a regional repository for collecting and reporting on bicycle data, although additional funding is required to bolster the Data Clearinghouse to include pedestrian data. While being a valuable regional resource, the BDC should not be a replacement for a City of Los Angeles active transportation counts "infrastructure."

Adjustments of Methodology to Comport with BDC Standards

To support Metro and SCAG's BDC goals, LADOT staff in partnership with the staff of the BDC, at the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, developed a new LADOT/UCLA Bicycle Data Collection template to comport with the BDC's methodology.

LADOT recommends incorporating the new template into the standard package of intersection count templates to be used, to the extent feasible, by LADOT Survey Section and by traffic consultants to meet the requirements of the Traffic Study Policies & Procedures. Bicycle data will be summarized in excel spreadsheets and/or PDFs. While the City's bicycle data captured using this new template (attached) will meet BDC data entry parameters, the process and protocols to facilitate the transfer of the City's bicycle data into the BDC should be automated and remain to be established.

Building Citywide Active Transportation Metrics Capacity and Repository

Using the LADOT/UCLA Bicycle Data Collection template for select projects, as described above, is a first step "investment" in bolstering a citywide active transportation

count capability. However the increasing demand and need for projects that offer safer and balanced multi-modal transportation opportunities would suggest it is an opportune time for LADOT to establish a Citywide counts policy.

The Citywide counts policy will be formulated by an LADOT working group comprised of the District Research and Support, Development Services, Active Transportation and the Information Technology teams. The working group would also deliver an assessment of the resources, budget and staffing required to establish in-house processes, data management protocols, and expanded information technology capability expansion, among others.

The goal of the working group recommendations would be to ensure the formalizing of a consistent, active transportation count standards, methodologies, and reporting for projects, and the establishing of an Annual Pedestrian and Bicycle Count for the City of Los Angeles.

Best Practices in Counting Bicycles and Pedestrians

Materials are readily available to support the LADOT working group. The "Conducting Bicycle and Pedestrian Counts: A Manual for Jurisdictions in Los Angeles County and Beyond" developed by the SCAG, as part of the Bicycle Clearinghouse project, is an available resource that provides guidance and standardized methodologies based on national best practices for conducting bicycle and pedestrian counts. And, the forthcoming report from the Transportation Research Board (TRB) of the National Academics will provide guidance on the application of count technologies including, but not limited to, temporary and permanent automated systems.

A few types of temporary and permanent automated counting systems exist. Main temporary technologies include pneumatic tubes for bicycles and the pyro-electric sensor box for pedestrians. Permanent automated technologies are special inductive loops for detecting bicycles and pyro-electric sensors for pedestrians.

Similarly, there are national best practices and guidance available through the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project (NBPD) to support the LADOT working group in developing recommendations for institutionalizing an Annual Active Transportation Count to be "operationalized" by the LADOT.

The Manual for Conducting Bicycle and Pedestrian Counts developed by SCAG outlined many criteria for bicycle and pedestrian count best practices. These criteria include when to count, how many locations to count, count locations, and a recommended methodology for how to count bicycles and pedestrians.

Since 2009, the City has relied upon Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition's (LACBC)

bi-annual counts for sourcing citywide pedestrian and bicycle counts spearheaded by volunteers. In 2013, the LACBC and LA Walks count campaign tapped over 400 volunteers, scheduled across three count periods to collect data at 120 intersections across the City. Data collected in the April 2013 count will be transposed, through the in-kind staff support of the Department of City Planning, into a GIS format. The bicycle data, and not the pedestrian data, collected through this effort will be analyzed and included into the Bicycle Data Clearinghouse (BDC).

Active transportation counts play a critical role in project development and project evaluation. And, newly launched active transportation initiatives including People St site projects, Bicycle Friendly Business Districts, Bicycle Friendly Streets, Safe Routes to School Travel Plans, and the pending Broadway Streetscape Dress Rehearsal and other forthcoming Great Streets projects provide LADOT an opportunity to "trial run" best practices count methodologies, data collection and reporting.

Future Projects

In the 2013 Call for Projects, the Bicycle Program submitted the *Active Bicycle Counter Demo Project* that was renamed the *Interactive Bicycle Board Demo Project* and was selected for funding in the amount of \$654,366. The project is to be implemented over FY 2015 - 2018 and will use a variety of equipment to count and encourage the use of bicycles for transportation. The project will install permanent, semi-permanent, and temporary bicycle counters throughout the City. A total of 96 counters including 34 portable pneumatic tubes, 50 in-road inductive loop detectors, and 12 on-sidewalk display screen counters will be deployed throughout the City to assess the value of new bikeway facilities, count bicycle use on existing bike lanes, and support and encourage bicycle use through visual display on prominent projects in densely bicycled areas.

FISCAL IMPACT

Current staffing levels are appropriate for this interim approach to updating the LADOT's current methodology for capturing bicycle and pedestrian data, but it is recommended that this is only be considered a short term, interim solution. Staff will report back with long-term solutions and associated staffing and funding needs for equipment and consultant costs.

JKM:MO

c: Borja Leon, Deputy Mayor's Office