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'Active Allegheny' plan aims to integrate walking, biking routes

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By Len Barcoucky, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Anyone walking or biking to Accord Park in Kilbuck from nearby Emsworth or Ben Avon risks death or serious injury.

That's because traffic is heavy on Camp Horne and Ben Avon Heights roads, and shoulders along both streets are often narrow or nonexistent.

Similar conditions exist in many other neighborhoods in Allegheny County. A \$300,000 study is under way to identify or create safer routes for pedestrians and cyclists who want to travel under their own power to parks, libraries and shopping districts throughout the county.

"We want to integrate walking and biking into the county's transportation system," Lynn Heckman said of the seven-month effort that began in May. She is assistant director for transportation initiatives in the county's Department of Economic Development.

The project is a joint effort between the county and the state Department of Transportation. Ms. Heckman successfully applied for a Pennsylvania Community Transportation Initiative grant to fund the study.

Michael Baker Corp. is the lead consultant with support from Olszak Management Consulting Inc.

"Investing in commuter biking and walking routes and providing additional and better linkages to other transportation modes will make a real difference in Allegheny County," County Executive Dan Onorato said in a statement.

The bicycle and pedestrian transportation effort has been named "Active Allegheny." When the study is completed in December, it will include four main elements:

- A plan to create and connect commuter bikeways that will link to "activity centers" -- like county parks -- and "transportation modes" -- like parking garages or bus ways.
- A pedestrian plan to improve walking routes.
- A "complete streets" plan to create roads that can be shared safely by cars, buses, bikes and walkers.
- An action plan for ranking improvements and listing possible funding sources.

Citizens will be invited to comment on ways to make the county friendlier to "people-powered transportation" at two meetings scheduled for this week. Additional public sessions will be scheduled later to review drafts of the plans, which are to be completed by December.

Active Allegheny should complement Pittsburgh's successful efforts to become a more bike-friendly city, Ms. Heckman said. Earlier this month Pittsburgh received a bronze award from the League of American Bicyclists. Since 2000, the city has purchased 200 bike racks and marked off 15 miles of street for bike lanes.

The final version of the county's plan will contain a list of project priorities and possible funding sources. The county could apply for another Pennsylvania Community Transportation Initiative grant to carry out its recommendations.

"The goal is to offer residents more sustainable and healthy commuting choices through excellent bicycle and pedestrian routes that connect our communities, businesses, schools, attractions and homes," Mr. Onorato said.

Residents interested in commenting on and offering suggestions to "Active Allegheny" will be able to participate in an online survey starting Wednesday at www.surveymonkey.com/s/ActiveAllegheny.

The first public meeting will be 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. Wednesday in the Point Park University Ballroom, 201 Wood St., Downtown. The second session will be at the same time Thursday in the Carnegie Borough Building, One Veterans Way, Carnegie.

Additional information is available at www.activeallegheeny.com.

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