CITY OF MERCED
Development Services

TO: Bicycle Advisory Commission
FROM: Bill King, Principal Planner
DATE: October 23, 2012
SUBJECT: Draft 2013 Merced Bicycle Transportation Plan, Section 1

ACTION REQUIRED:

Bicycle Advisory Commission vote on draft and recommended language for Section 1.

BACKGROUND

The Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG) drafted Section 1 of the *2013 Merced Bicycle Transportation Plan* (BTP). Section 1 is the plan's introduction and describes the planning area's setting, land use, population, climate, and the plan's purpose and development process.

The purpose statement includes an estimate of the number of bike commuters in Merced, as well as the anticipated number of bike commuters with implementation of the plan.

ACTION

Staff requests the BAC to review the draft language and to recommended approval as presented or with modifications.

Attachment

A. Draft 2013 Merced Bicycle Transportation Plan, Section 1

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Setting

The City of Merced is the largest urbanized area in Merced County, a predominantly agricultural county. The City of Merced is about 23 square miles in area, and measures approximately 7 miles in north-south direction and 6.5 miles in east-west direction. Unlike many San Joaquin Valley cities, Merced is fortunate to have several natural creeks running through the city. Merced is home to the Merced Junior College, the ever-expanding U.C. Merced, and various technical training facilities.

Bicycles are an important mode of transportation in the community. Merced has utilized the natural creeks to construct bike paths alongside them, and has set up bike lanes and routes along major streets. Merced has both a favorable climate and a relatively-flat terrain to encourage the use of bicycles for both recreation, for fitness, and for transportation.

Land Use

Merced residents enjoy Merced's compact size, its small-town feel, the abundant shopping, the pleasant neighborhoods, the beautiful tree-lined streets, the creekside bikeways, the parks and historic structures, the close proximity to the junior college and the U.C., and the surrounding agricultural and open space land. In the City's General Plan, in 2030, parks and open spaces will link residential, commercial, and employment centers in such a manner as to provide an attractive pedestrian and bicycle alternative to driving. Convenience, safety, and quickness of bicycle facilities will benefit bicycle usage.

Population

The City of Merced was incorporated as a Charter City in 1889. Since incorporation, the City has grown to a population of 80,542, as cited on the City's website. According to the City of Merced 2030 General Plan, Merced's population will approach 115,000 persons by 2020, and 155,000 by 2030.

Area Climate

The City of Merced has moderate climates during most of the year making year-round bicycling possible. The most extreme weather conditions are the summer heat, which could rise beyond 110 degrees Fahrenheit and the winter fog, which can reduce visibility to below 20 feet.

Summer Heat

Clear skies and dry air are typical from April to October, with temperatures averaging around 95 F. Peak summer can bring uncomfortable heat to Merced County. Abundant shade trees and water fountains could provide relief for bicycle commuters.

Winter Fog

November through March brings rain and fog to the San Joaquin Valley, and accounts for approximately 90 percent of the area's annual average precipitation of 11 inches. In the winter, the area is susceptible to significant amounts of fog. The dense fog creates hazardous conditions for all types of commuters. Highly visible and frequently placed bicycle signs would create a safer environment for cyclists riding in the fog and rain.

Purpose

The purpose of the City of Merced Bicycle Transportation Plan is to provide a comprehensive, long-range view for the development of bicycle facilities and programs within the City.

The City of Merced Bicycle Transportation Plan is designed to reduce single-occupant vehicle travel by providing an integrated bicycle network and to help the City become eligible for funding. It is anticipated that development of bikeways in accordance with this plan will significantly increase bicycle ridership, thereby, reducing citizen's reliance on motor vehicles. From the U.S. Census 2006-2010 American Community Survey, there are an estimated 373 bicycle commuters in Merced, or 1.3% of the work force (these figures do not include students commuting to school). The implementation of this plan will result in a comprehensive, continuous, and well-maintained bikeway network, maximizing bicycling benefits to the area's cycling and non-cycling public. Therefore, the implementation of this plan will raise the percentage of bicycle commuters (employees and students) to 5%. This increase will be supplemented by a ridership growth of other bicyclists (recreational, avid, short-trippers, etc.).

As bicycle use increases, adequate bikeways and facilities must be provided.

Plan Development

The Merced Bicycle Plan has been created as an extension of Merced's General Plan, the Regional Bicycle Plan and the Regional Transportation Plan. This bicycle plan uses the guidelines set forth in the four referenced documents to create more specific direction for the development of bicycle facilities in the plan area.

2003 Bike Plan

The 2003 bicycle plan was originally developed over the course of five years with the input of a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The Committee consisted of: City of Merced staff representing the Park and Recreation Department, Planning Department and Engineering Department, the Merced County Association of Government staff, an Education facility representative, and business leaders. The committee focused on two main tasks.

Target Areas
The TAC identified five areas within the City of Merced as target areas. These areas around the City have been identified as major trip generators, which are not currently served by adequate bicycle facilities. The target areas include: The Westside Industrial Park, Merced College, South Merced including Airport Industrial Park, Eastern Merced including Golden Valley High School, and Downtown Merced.

Bikeway Needs Assessment
After determining the areas of Merced most likely to benefit from a bikeway infrastructure, the Committee evaluated existing bikeways for their safety and connectivity between residential areas and the target areas. Bikeway needs were identified in terms of route improvements, preferred projects, incentives to commute, safety concerns, and support facilities.

2008 Bike Plan

The 2008 Bike Plan Update utilized a simpler process that involved staff input and a public workshop seeking public comment.

2013 Bike Plan

The development of the City of Merced 2013 Bicycle Plan was designed to be a dynamic process built on: 1) realistic assessments of past and future bike-related conditions; 2) consistency with the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* and other guiding documents; 3) local community engagement and comments; and 4) professional planning and engineering guidance.

Five general planning phases were established around these elements:

- Organize the Planning Process
- Describe the Existing Setting
- Identify New/Adjusted Bike Facilities
- Hearing Preparation Tasks
- Formal Adoption Process

Phase 1:
<u>Organize the Planning Process</u>
Step 1: Project Kick-off Meeting with Bicycle Advisory Commission
Step 2: Establish a Planning Process and Public Outreach Plan
Step 3: Implement Planning Process and Public Outreach Plan

Phase 2:
<u>Describe the Existing Setting</u>
Step 1: Map and Describe Existing Land Uses, Bike Routes, Lanes, Paths, and Parking Facilities
Step 2: List past Bike Expenditures
Step 3: Estimate number of current bike commuters
Step 4: Assess Bike Plan Consistency with other Plans
Step 5: Map and Describe “Mobility Connections” and “Changing and Storage Sites.”
Step 6: Describe affect of Education and Enforcement on Bike-Related Accidents

Phase 3:
<u>Identify New/Adjusted Bike Facilities</u>
Step 1: Describe and Map proposed Bike Routes, Lanes, Paths, and Parking Facilities
Step 2: Map and Describe proposed “Mobility Connections” and “Changing and Storage Sites.”
Step 3: List anticipated Expenditures for Bike-Related Projects
Step 4: Prioritize Bike-Related Projects
Step 5: Estimated increase in number of bike commuters

Phase 4:
<u>Hearing Preparation Tasks</u>
Step 1: Prepare Admin Final Draft of Plan
Step 2: Prepare CEQA Document
Step 3: Collect Letters of Support

Phase 5:
Formal Adoption Process
Step 1: Plan Comments from Parks Commission
Step 2: Plan Comments from Bicycle Advisory Commission
Step 3: Plan Recommendation from Planning Commission
Step 4: Plan Adoption by City Council
Step 5: Plan Certified by MCAG and Submitted to Caltrans

A detailed *Phase* and *Step* narrative description of the development of the plan, emphasizing citizen and community involvement, is provided for in **Appendix F**. Supplementing this narrative are copies of public meeting agendas and public comments received at meetings and events that occurred during the development of the plan; these are also found in **Appendix F**.

APPENDIX F
PLANNING PROCESS NARRATIVE

PLANNING PROCESS NARRATIVE

The planning process narrative describes all required tasks to complete a plan in conformance with Streets and Highway Code Section 891.2. The applicable code section, indicated by a letter in parenthesis, for example, (a), denotes how each planning step aligns with this Streets and Highway Code. The narrative is arranged by phase and steps that describe how the order in which the plan was crafted. Responsibilities and public participation and also provided. A project schedule follows the narrative. The following acronyms are used:

CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
BAC	Bicycle Advisory Commission
BTP	Bicycle Transportation Plan
MCAG	Merced County Association of Governments
City-DS	City of Merced Development Services Department

The BAC served as the Project Committee and recieved inputs from Plan Stakeholders and Technical Staff. Input was in the form of public comments and staff reports, respectively, that were offered at regularly scheduled meetings of the BAC. As the Project Committee, the BAC advised the Technical Staff concerning the content of the BTP, and reviewed the draft BTP. The endorsement of the BTP by the BAC was presented to the City's Planning Commission, who made the formal recommendation on the Plan to the City of Merced City Council.

Plan Stakeholders Included:

- Merced Bicycle Coalition
- Building Healthy Communities
- Merced/Mariposa Asthma Coalition
- UC Merced Transportation
- Merced County Public Health Department
- Merced City School District and Merced Union High School District

Technical Staff Included:

- Ty Phimmasone, MCAG Planner
- Matt Fell, MCAG Transportation Planner
- Natalia Austin, GIS Technician (MCAG)
- Bill King, Principal Planner, (City-DS)
- Kim Nutt, Planning Technician (City-DS)
- Ken Elwin, Acting City Engineer, (City-DS)
- John Sagin, Senior Architect, (City-DS)
- *Representative,* City of Merced Police Department
- Frank Quintero, (City of Merced Parks Department)

Phase 1: Organize the Planning Process

Step 1: *Establish a Planning Process and Public Outreach Plan*.

MCAG and City Staff established a planning process and public outreach plan, which is provided for in Appendix D of the plan. It sets dates for public meetings and related deadlines for plan development by City Staff and MCAG. This description includes the extent of citizen and community involvement in development of the plan, and was reviewed and commented on by the BAC on June 26, 2012, at a public hearing. (h)

Step 2: *Implement Planning Process and Public Outreach Plan*.

In this ongoing task, MCAG took the lead role to implement the planning process and outreach plan by: 1) placing ads and notices in the local newspaper; 2) prepared separate invitation letters of plan-related meetings to various community groups (as identified by the City); and 3) contacting local employers for the purposes of collecting plan-related data.. Supplementing MCAG's work, the City of Merced posted public meeting notices of commissions and committees who were engaged in the planning process, and posted draft sections of the plan on the City's website for public review and comment. (h)

Phase 2: Describe the Existing Setting

Step 1: *Map and Describe Existing Land Uses, Bike Routes, Lanes, Paths, and Parking Facilities*.

MCAG created a map depicting several features of importance to bike transportation including, but not limited to:

- existing and proposed locations of residential neighborhoods, schools, shopping centers, public buildings, and major employment centers (b);
- location of existing bike routes, lanes, and paths (c), (based on inventory by MCAG); and
- existing end-of-trip bicycle parking facilities including, but not limited to, parking at schools, shopping centers, public buildings, and major employment centers. MCAG contacted local employers regarding bike programs and incentives, and bike parking (d).

A written description of these three features was crafted by MCAG and accompanies the map in the plan. The general public and plan stakeholders were invited to review and comment on the map and description during the BAC's regularly scheduled meeting of June 26, 2012, at a public hearing. (h)

Step 2: *List Past Bike Expenditures*.

A list of bike-related improvements that were installed since 2008 was crafted by City Staff. For each project, the City Engineering Division applied a cost estimate, using actual costs when available (k).

Step 3: *Estimate Number of Current Bike Commuters*.

MCAG estimated the number of current bike commuters (a). This estimate was calculated ------- describe ------- for example, using the US Census data.

Step 4: *Assess Bike Plan Consistency with Other Plans*.

The draft bike plan was examined to assure consistency with other local plans and programs that provide incentives for bicycle commuting. MCAG compared the bike plan with: 1) the regional transportation plan; and 2) _____ air quality plan. The City of Merced compared the bike plan with the: 1) Merced Vision 2030 General Plan; 2) Martin Luther King Jr. Way Revitalization Plan; and 3) Climate Action Plan. A written description of how the bike plan is consistent with these plans was crafted and placed in the bike plan (i).

Step 5: ***Map and Describe "Mobility Connections" and "Changing and Storage Sites."***

MCAG crafted a map showing existing bike support facilities:

- bicycle transport and parking facilities for connections with and use of other transportation modes including Greyhound, YARTS, the BUS, CatTracks, Amtrak, park and ride lots, etc.) (e); and,
- facilities for changing and storing clothes and equipment including but not be limited to, locker, restroom, and shower facilities near bicycle parking facilities (f).

A written description of these features was crafted by MCAG and accompanies the map in the plan. The general public and plan stakeholders were invited to review and comment on the map and description during the BAC's regularly scheduled meeting of ___, at a public hearing. (h)

Step 6: ***Describe Affect of Education and Enforcement on Bike-Related Accidents*****.**

To document and assess bike accident prevention, City Staff drafted a written description of:

- bicycle safety and education programs that were conducted in the plan area;
- efforts by the law enforcement agency having primary traffic law enforcement responsibility in the area to enforce provisions of the Vehicle Code pertaining to bicycle operation; and
- the resulting effect on accidents involving bicyclists (g).

Phase 3: Identify New/Adjusted Bike Facilities

Step 1: ***Map and Describe proposed Bike Routes, Lanes, Paths, and Parking Facilities*****.**

Using data provided by the City, MCAG created a map depicting several features of importance to bike transportation including, but not limited to:

- existing and proposed locations of residential neighborhoods, schools, shopping centers, public buildings, and major employment centers (b);
- location of proposed bike routes, lanes, and paths (c, j);and
- proposed end-of-trip bicycle parking facilities including, but not limited to, parking at schools, shopping centers, public buildings, and major employment centers (d, j).

A written description of these features was crafted by MCAG and accompanies the map in the plan. The general public and plan stakeholders were invited to review and

comment on the map and description during the BAC's regularly scheduled meeting of ___, at a public hearing. (h)

Step 2: ***Map and Describe Proposed "Mobility Connections" and "Changing and Storage Sites."***

Using data provided by the City, MCAG crafted a map showing proposed bike support facilities:

- bicycle transport and parking facilities for connections with and use of other transportation modes including Greyhound, YARTS, the BUS, CatTracks, Amtrak, park and ride lots, etc.) (e, j); and
- facilities for changing and storing clothes and equipment including, but not be limited to, locker, restroom, and shower facilities near bicycle parking facilities (f, j).

A written description of these features was crafted by MCAG and accompanies the map in the plan. The general public and plan stakeholders were invited to review and comment on the map and description during the BAC's regularly scheduled meeting of ___, at a public hearing. (h)

Step 3: ***List Anticipated Expenditures for Bike-Related Projects*****.**

A list of bike-related proposed projects in the 2013 plan was crafted by City Staff. For each proposed project, the City Engineering Division applied a cost estimate, creating a description of future financial needs for projects that improve safety and convenience for bicycle commuters in the plan area (k).

Step 4: ***Prioritize Bike-Related Projects*****.**

The list of proposed projects was prioritized by City Staff (j). The general public and plan stakeholders were invited to comment on this task during the BAC's regularly scheduled meeting of ___, at a public hearing. (h)

Step 5: ***Estimated Increase in Number of Bike Commuters*****.**

MCAG estimated increase in the number of bicycle commuters resulting from implementation of the plan (a).

Phase 4: Hearing Preparation Tasks

Step 1: ***Prepare Admin Final Draft of Plan*****.**

Finalizing the preceding work, MCAG prepared an "administrative draft" of the 2013 Bicycle Transportation Plan, including any new information since the draft language was prepared (d).

Step 2: ***Prepare CEQA Document*****.**

City Staff prepared a CEQA Notice of Exemption (NOE) for the bike plan.

Step 3: *Collect Letters of Support*.

Letters of support and resolutions were collected from Plan stakeholders as follows (h):

By City of Merced

- Merced Bicycle Coalition
- Building Healthy Communities
- Merced/Mariposa Asthma Coalition

By MCAG

- UC Merced Transportation
- Merced County Public Health Department
- Merced City School District and Merced Union High School District

Phase 5: Formal Adoption Process

Step 1: *Plan Comments from Parks Commission*.

City Staff presented the administrative draft of the 2013 BTP to the City's Park's and Recreation Commission at its regularly scheduled public meeting to obtain a resolution of support.

Step 2: *Plan Comments from Bicycle Advisory Commission*.

City Staff presented the administrative draft of the 2013 BTP to the City's Bicycle Advisory Commission at its regularly scheduled public meeting to obtain a resolution of support.

Step 3: *Plan Recommendation from Planning Commission*.

The BTP contains bike-related policies and the City's Official Bicycle Circulation Transportation Map, making it an extension of the City's Merced Vision 2030 General Plan. The update to the BTP is considered to be an amendment to the General Plan. In order for the City Council to act on changes to the General Plan, it must consider the recommendation of the Planning Commission regarding the plan and associated CEQA review. City Staff presented the administrative draft of the 2013 BTP to the City's Planning Commission at its regularly scheduled public meeting to obtain a recommendation.

Step 4: *Plan Adoption by City Council*.

At its regularly scheduled public meeting, City Staff presented the administrative draft of the 2013 BTP and associated CEQA document for formal adoption by resolution to the City of Merced City Council.

Step 5: *Plan Certified by MCAG*

At its regularly scheduled public meeting, MCAG Staff presented the City of Merced City Council adopted 2013 BTP to the MCAG Regional Planning Transportation Planning Authority (RPTA), locally known as the MCAG Governing Board to certify the plan for "Completeness/Compliance" with Streets and Highways Code Section 891.2.

Step 6: Submit Adopted and Certified Plan to Caltrans

Upon certification, MCAG Staff delivered the Plan to Caltrans for review and acceptance.

Table ____: City of Merced BTP Plan Development Schedule		
Phase and Task	Due Date mo/yr	Meeting Dates
Phase 1: Organize the Planning Process		
1. Establish a Planning Process and Public Outreach Plan.	6/12	6/26/12
2. Implement Planning Process and Public Outreach Plan.	Ongoing	
Phase 2: Describe the Existing Setting		
1. Map and Describe Existing Land Uses, Bike Routes, Lanes, Paths, and Parking Facilities.	8/12	8/__/12
2. List Past Bike Expenditures.	9/12	
3. Estimate Number of Current Bike Commuters.	9/12	
4. Assess Bike Plan Consistency with other Plans.	9/12	
5. Map and Describe "Mobility Connections" and "Changing and Storage Sites."	10/12	12/__/12
6. Describe Affect of Education and Enforcement on Bike-Related Accidents.	11/12	
Phase 3: Identify New/Adjusted Bike Facilities		
1. Map and Describe proposed Bike Routes, Lanes, Paths, and Parking Facilities.	2/13	2/__/13
2. Map and Describe proposed "Mobility Connections" and "Changing and Storage Sites."	2/13	2/__/13
3. List anticipated Expenditures for Bike-Related Projects.	3/13	
4. Prioritize Bike-Related Projects.	4/13	4/__/13
5: Estimated Increase in Number of Bike Commuters.	4/13	
Phase 4: Hearing Preparation Tasks		
1. Prepare Admin Final Draft of Plan.	5/13	
2. Prepare CEQA Document.	5/13	
3. Collect Letters of Support.	5/13	
Phase 5: Formal Adoption Process		
1. Plan Comments from Parks Commission.	6/13	6/__/13
2. Plan Comments from Bicycle Advisory Commission.	7/13	7/__/13
3. Plan Recommendation from Planning Commission.	8/13	8/__/13
4. Plan Adoption by City Council.	9/13	9/__/13
5. Plan Certified by MCAG	10/13	10/__/13
6. Submit Adopted and Certified Plan to Caltrans	10/13	10/__/13

MCAG task shown in blue; City of Merced task shown in red. Shared tasks shown in black