

## **MOUNTAIN BIKING: OVERVIEW**

June 27, 2010

In the section that follows I've done my best to summarize the key arguments that have been made and I have not done so anywhere near as eloquently as others. Using the comment features of this website I invite everyone offer their own views on this issue.

### **The Mountain Bike Proposal**

The most controversial suggestion currently under consideration by the CCG is a proposal to create a mountain bike trail from the Chautauqua area south to the south end of the Mesa Trail on the road to Eldorado Springs. The most detailed, currently available (as of July 15) proposal was presented to the CCG by Mark McIntyre on May 3. Slides are available from the CCG website.

Mark made it clear that he viewed his proposal as merely a starting point for discussion and that he would be happy to consider suggestions for providing mountain bike access in ways which better address environmental issues and the concerns of other Open Space neighbors and other users. In presenting his ideas, he started by recognizing that, while mountain biking was a form of passive recreation recognized by OSMP, there were no mountain bike accessible trails in the Western TSA. He also emphasized that his proposal (if adopted) would allow mountain biking on only 10% of the Western TSA trail mileage.

In explaining his core goals, around which he's willing to negotiate, Mark emphasized the desire for a north-south connector that would run east of the Mesa Trail and west of the City. His initial proposal used a combination of designated trails, social (not currently designated) trails, and new trails. He also expressed a willingness to alter alignments and the relative proportion trail types being used.

There was also an assumption that mountain bike trails would be open to other users and mountain bikes would be responsible for yielding to pedestrians.

Mark also proposed adding mountain bike access to Chapman Drive in Boulder Canyon with the understanding that that would require acquisition of a right-of-way/easement which is not now available.

### **Concerns**

In general, concerns expressed about the proposal have focused around the following broad issues:

- **Safety** -- Some concerns revolved around safety issues resulting from speed differentials and the possibility that hikers and mountain bikers might not be able to successfully avoid one another. Special concerns were raised about children who may not know which way to jump, and those with disabilities (primarily the elderly who may not be sufficiently mobile). Concern had also been expressed about the possibility that

mountain bikers might not be sufficiently cautious when encountering more vulnerable users. Safety concerns have also been expressed about how bikes would interact with dogs and especially dogs on leash.

- **Visitor Experience** -- Concerns have been expressed about the perceived disruptions to the visitor experience associated with mountain bikers who because of their faster speed would tend to be encountered much more frequently than their numbers would suggest. Concerns were also expressed about disruptions associated with the fact many hikers feel that they always having to be looking over their shoulder for bikes coming up from behind.
- **Environmental Disruption** -- Another group of concerns addressed the possibility that mountain bike use would disturb wildlife and/or wildlife viewing opportunities. There appears to be some debate about the extent to which this is true. It seems clear that wildlife impact would be quite dependent on the exact trail alignment.
- **Neighborhood Impacts** -- Another major category of concern surrounds neighborhood impacts. Everyone seems to believe that this would be an extremely popular trail -- one that would draw mountain bikers from outside of the immediate Boulder area. It has also been recognized the proposed route for the northern segment of the trail (north of Lehigh/Greenbrier) and, especially, in the Chautauqua area is already extremely busy. Fears were expressed that adding a major new used to the area could compound this already serious problem. Still more concern was expressed about routing the trail so close to so many houses. (It seems likely that this problem will be compounded by NCAR's desire to route any trail along the periphery of its property.) Still more concerns were expressed about the possibility that mountain bike use would bring increased noise and traffic to relatively quiet local neighborhoods and trails. Ad, some were worried that a few misbehaved mountain bikers that might act in truly troublesome ways.
- **Visual Impact and Trail Sustainability** -- Finally, there concerns have been expressed that locating the trail on the front side of the mesas would visually impair the mountain backdrop. There were also questions about whether it would be possible to build a sustainable trail away from the houses on the relatively steep slopes of the mesa with their extremely-muddy-when-wet shale soils.

### **Potential Compromise**

The CCG is a collaborative body charged with seeking consensus solutions. This obligates us to look for ways in which the aspirations of the mountain bike community might be reconciled with the concerns expressed by neighbors and other OSMP constituents. At this stage in the process we're collecting ideas for doing this with the expectation that these ideas will be distilled into a one or more more formal proposals outlining what we hope will be the best mountain bike trail possible. The the challenge will be to see if this proposal is able to garner consensus support. If not, the issue will almost certainly be referred to the CCG's nonconsensus process and the city's other political decision-making bodies.

As a starting point we are interested in the community's thoughts on the following ideas for bridging the gap. We would be especially interested in any suggestions for crafting and even more broadly attractive compromise. Remember, at this stage, the goal is to craft the best

possible compromise. **It is still an open question whether that compromise will ultimately be acceptable to the various interest groups.**

- Consider plans for a trail north the urban boundary at Lehigh/Greenbrier separately from plans for a trail south of that boundary which has less difficult neighborhood impact issues.
- Continue to prohibit mountain bike access on all of the popular hiking trails in the area by constructing new, primarily mountain bike trails.
- To the extent possible route the new mountain trails out of the "viewshed" of immediate neighbors and another trails.
- Sharply limit the number of places where mountain bikes can access neighborhood streets (to Table Mesa Drive only, for example).
- Strongly encourage mountain bike visitors to bike and not drive to the already crowded trailheads.
- Avoid sensitive habitat areas as defined by OSMP's new Highly Suitable Habitat criteria.
- To limit mountain bike usage of the area and to better serve the mountain bike community, try to develop other mountain bike opportunities to the north, south, east, and west of the core Western TSA area.
- Encourage mountain bike visitors to spend as much of their time as possible in outlying areas and to use the new trails as a non-automobile route to get from Boulder to these areas.
- Encourage courtesy patrols and rapid response of law enforcement.
- Consider occasional bans on mountain bikes use on current hiking trails through something like an even/odd numbered day system.
- Avoid routing bikes through neighborhood streets.
- Consider allowing only "uphill" traffic to slow down mountain bikes.

We frankly have no idea whether folks on either side of this dispute will find measures such as the above acceptable. Our hope is that people will come up with better and more specific ideas that will ultimately lead to a plan that everyone can accept.

<https://west-tsa-neighborhood-comments.blogspot.com/2010/06/mountain-biking-overview.html>