



Local News

Walk and roll

4 forums this week offer chance to discuss alternate transportation wants

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STEVENSVILLE - Like any dog walker, Pamela Whitehead knows a little about reading traffic patterns, which is why she'd like to see some changes.

When Whitehead is out in her neighborhood at the corner of Washington Avenue and Marquette Woods Road in Lincoln Township, she feels nervous about the drivers who speed past - because there's often no alternative to being in the road.

"It's just subdivisions," Whitehead said of her neighborhood. "They're driving so fast on Washington Avenue, I'm wondering, 'Is it really necessary, with all the kids and the bus stops?'"

That's why Whitehead stopped Monday at Lincoln Township Hall for a special "walk and roll" forum sponsored by the Twin Cities Area Transportation Study, or TwinCATS. The forum was intended to get detailed comments about the best sites for bike lanes, bus stops, sidewalks and trails.

Forum schedule

Here is the schedule for the other forums this week, which all run from 4 to 7 p.m.: today, Maud Preston Palenske Memorial Library, St. Joseph; Wednesday, Michigan Works office in Benton Harbor; Thursday, Bridgman Public Library.

Visitors Monday were encouraged to fill out surveys, which will be summarized and compiled into a long-range transportation document, said Suzann Flowers, an associate planner for the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission.

The commission serves as the metropolitan planning agency for TwinCATS. Flowers was present to take comments on Monday, along with fellow planners Anna Rahtz and Trevor Thomas.

To give visitors a complete picture of local transportation needs, SWPC staff also prepared maps that showed percentages of households without cars and of residents 65 and over; total number of children; and statistics for bike-pedestrian accidents and fatalities from 2000-2009.

Whitehead planned to fill out two surveys - one for herself and the other for her sister, who uses a wheelchair. "I'm just (going) back to the speed. Is it necessary to go that fast?" she said.

Lincoln Township Patrolman Ralph Bansen said that Glenlord, John Beers and Ridge roads - as well as Lincoln and Washington - are prime candidates for improved bike paths and walking areas.

Asked which area is most pressing, Bansen responded: "By far, I think, Ridge Road, because of the schools and the foot traffic. A lot of people bike and run in that area."

Such comments will help local road agencies and municipalities in setting priorities for nonmotorized transportation projects, according to Flowers - which is why staff will compile the comments into a

document that can be distributed to them, she said.

"It really goes back to the communities, because the communities are responsible for creating and implementing (relevant) projects and finding the funding," Flowers said.

Gas prices also factor in, he said. "As gas prices continue to go up, people are going to be walking, biking and using (public) transit more," she said.

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