

STAFF RECOMMENDATION



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NCPC File No. 7147A/B

CAPITAL BIKESHARE VARIOUS LOCATIONS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE OF THE CENTRAL AREA

Washington, DC

Submitted by the District of Columbia Department of Transportation

August 26, 2010

Abstract

The District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT) proposes to install a system of new smart bike rental stations in accordance with its 2005 Bicycle Master Plan action agenda. The new system, called BIXI for short, will replace the District's existing SmartBike stations and expand the total bicycle rental fleet in the District to 1,000 bikes from the current 100. The system will be unrolled as part of a cooperative effort with Arlington County, Virginia to form a District of Columbia/Arlington County joint smart bicycle rental system. The bike stations range in size from 30 feet to 60 feet in length with a standard width of 6 feet. The stations are solar-powered and use wireless technology; therefore no excavation, utility hook-up or grade work is needed. A system-wide map will be provided at each station. There are 85 locations currently proposed to be installed in the street rights-of-way for the initial roll-out of the District of Columbia portion of the system. Two additional bicycle stations, one on the grounds of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building and another on the grounds of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management headquarters, are being approved this month through delegated action of the Executive Director. The District anticipates installing bike stations at 13 additional locations this year.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of preliminary and final site development plans pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) for sites outside of the Central Area of Washington, D.C.

Approval of preliminary and final site development plans pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (e) for sites within the Central Area of Washington, D.C.

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves the preliminary and final site development plans for the proposed Capital Bikeshare system located within and outside of the Central Area of Washington, D.C., as shown on NCPC Map File No. 00.00(40.00)43123, with the exception of the two bike stations located at the intersection of 15th Street, NW and New York Avenue, NW, and on the National Mall, and **delegates final approval** of these two sites, as well as any subsequent sites identified by DDOT, to the Executive Director following further coordination with the National Park Service and other stakeholders to resolve planning issues at these locations.

Commends the District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT) for its efforts to expand the Capital Bikeshare program from 100 bikes to 1,000 bikes in order to increase the potential of bike sharing as an alternative mode of transportation for residents, workers, and visitors, including federal employees living in the District of Columbia, thus supporting the goals of the federal and District elements of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital.

Notes that the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and NCPC have concurred that the project will have “no adverse effect” on historic properties conditioned on further site-by-site coordination of the proposed bike share stations with NCPC, SHPO, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, the National Park Service, and with Advisory Neighborhood Commissions and other neighborhood organizations, as necessary.

Notes that DDOT states that it considers “flexposts” around bike share stations located in the parking lane of the street rights-of-way to be critical for cyclist safety while drivers become accustomed to the presence of these particular bike share stations, and has committed to re-evaluating the safety, effectiveness and visual impacts of flexposts one year after installation and to report back to the Commission with its findings and recommendations.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

The focus of staff's analysis is on 85 Capital Bikeshare stations located at various locations throughout the District of Columbia, within and outside the Central Area of Washington.

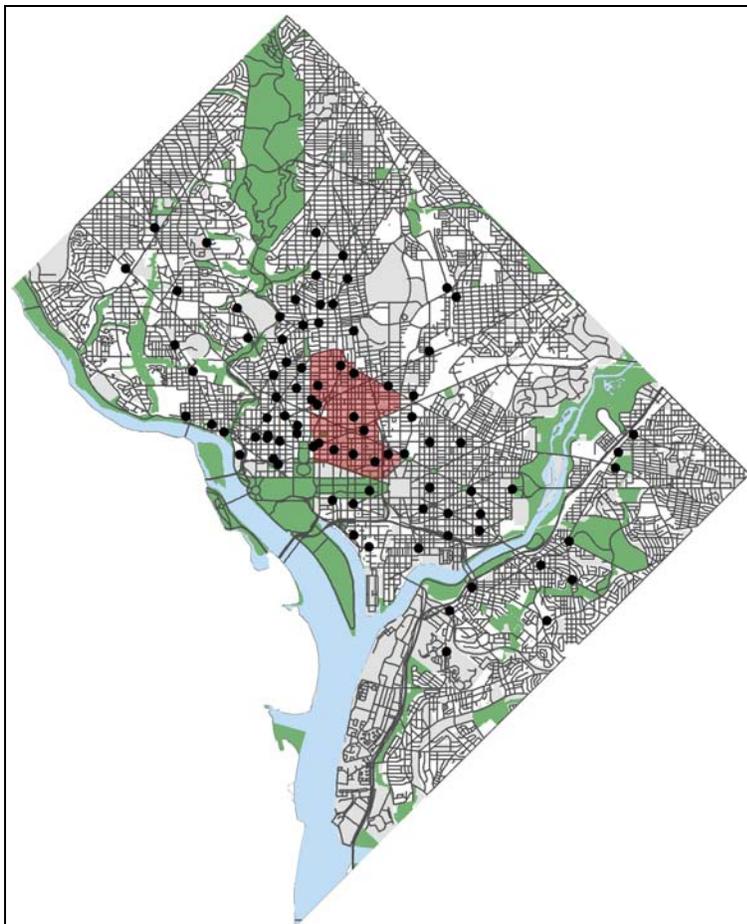
Background

In August 2008, DDOT launched SmartBike DC as a pilot bike sharing program with 10 sites and 100 bikes. Since then, DDOT has received grant funding from the Federal Highway Administration to expand the bike sharing program using a new system known as BIXI. The BIXI system is currently used in Paris, France and Montreal, Canada, and is specifically

designed for use in urban environments. Its design is intended to seamlessly integrate into the urban landscape without seeming out of context with its surroundings or compromising functional needs.

“Capital Bikeshare” is a cooperative effort between District of Columbia government and Arlington County, Virginia, intended to form a District of Columbia/Arlington County smart bicycle rental system. When completed, the system will have a total of 100 bike stations and 1,000 bicycles located in the District of Columbia, with an additional 14 stations and 100 bicycles in Crystal City, Virginia. A total of 85 sites have been submitted for NCPC review, and are analyzed below. These 85 sites are located at various sites throughout the city, of which 14 of them are located within the Central Area of Washington, D.C.

Proposal



Locations of proposed Capital BikeShare stations with Central Area shown in red

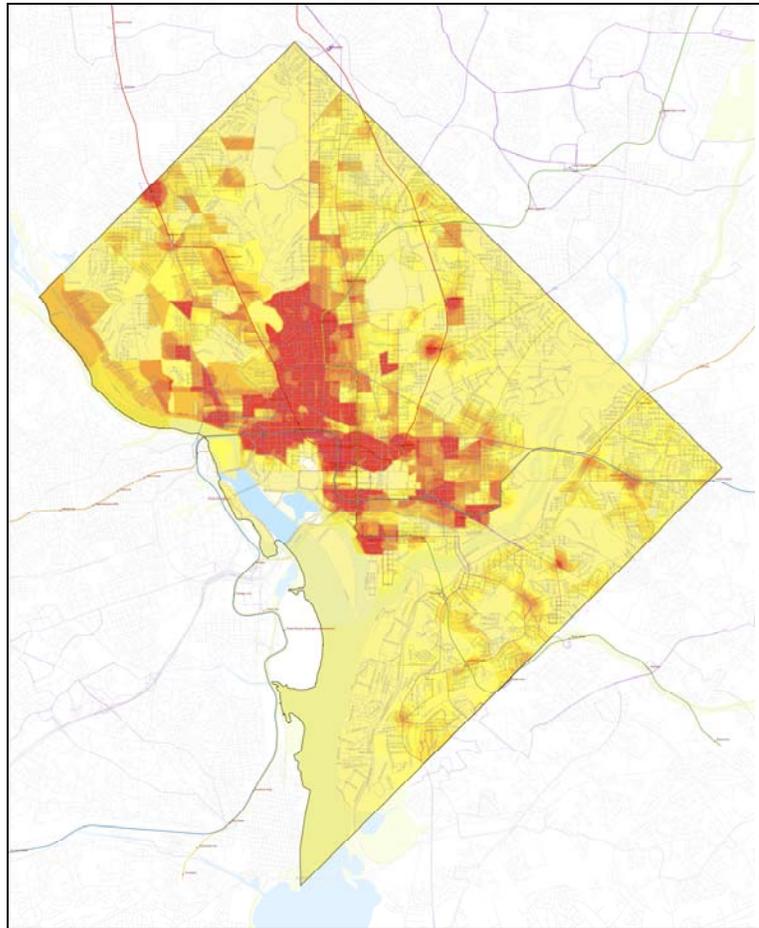
The District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT) proposes to locate 85 BIXI bike share stations at various locations throughout the District of Columbia. The bike stations will be located within street rights-of-way, with all but seven of the stations being located along a sidewalk. The other seven stations are proposed to be located on-street within an existing parking lane. These particular bike stations will be 40 – 50 feet in length and will occupy existing on-street parking spaces. Of the 85 stations submitted for NCPC review, 14 of them are located within the Central Area of Washington, D.C.

The proposed bike stations will utilize solar-power and wireless technology to provide Capital Bikeshare members access to the bikes using their membership card. Each bike station will also possess a map that depicts all of the bike station locations within the bike

sharing program. The new bike stations will either replace an existing SmartBike DC bike rack, or be installed at a new location identified by DDOT through a location suitability analysis and SmartBike DC member survey. The location suitability analysis considered employment and population density, bike-to-work rate, proximity to a major shopping center, and access to transit. Using these criteria, DDOT was able to create a map that shows the best locations for a

bike station. In addition, DDOT further refined the results of the location suitability analysis by applying certain site specific criteria including property ownership, solar availability, and applicable public space requirements pertaining to manholes, vents, and vaults; sidewalk cafes; construction; and clear space for pedestrian travel.

The bike stations are proposed to be located along sidewalks or along an existing parking lane within on-street parking spaces. All of the proposed sites are located within street rights-of-way that are owned by the United States Government under the administrative jurisdiction of the District of Columbia. Bike stations proposed to be located in an existing parking lane will eliminate at least two parking spaces and will be installed with “flexposts,” or narrow plastic pylons, to protect cyclists from moving vehicular traffic. DDOT has indicated that it considers the flexposts critical for cyclist safety while drivers become accustomed to the presence of these bike share stations.



DDOT map showing areas most suitable for SmartBike locations



Flexposts installed around an existing SmartBike DC station at 12th Street, NW and G Street, NW

The particular model of bike share station that DDOT has chosen to utilize is both portable and modular. The typical station module measures approximately 6-foot wide and 10-foot long. Individual modules can be combined to provide greater numbers of bikes per station ranging from a minimum of 8 bikes to a maximum of 100 bikes. Modules can also be configured in different ways to allow loading and unloading of bikes from one side, both sides, or in a “V” configuration. As proposed, the typical DDOT bike share station will range between 30 – 60 feet in

length with a single-file configuration. The stations will not be bolted to the ground and installation does not require any below-grade work or excavation. Each station includes a terminal powered by a photovoltaic panel attached to a 10-foot pole.

A large-format map inside a glass-enclosed free-standing kiosk will also accompany each bike share station. The two-sided kiosks will measure approximately 4 feet by 7 feet and will display the “Capital Bikeshare” name and logo. The maps are an important element to the success of the Capital Bikeshare system in providing a viable transportation alternative. The maps will inform would-be riders as to the whereabouts of other bike share stations throughout the system, and can be easily updated when additional stations are added or when stations are moved to different locations. DDOT has indicated to staff that it currently plans to replace the maps on an annual basis.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

Bike sharing in Washington, DC is a program that NCPC staff fully supports, and commends DDOT for its efforts to expand the Capital Bikeshare program from 100 bikes to 1,000 bikes in order to increase the potential of bike sharing as an alternative mode of transportation for residents, workers, and visitors, including federal employees living in the District of Columbia, thus supporting the goals of the federal and District elements of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital. While fully supportive of DDOT’s proposal, staff finds that use of flexposts to provide cyclist safety at those bike stations located within an existing parking lane requires further study and consultation.

Flexposts Around On-street Bike Stations



Flexposts installed around an existing SmartBike DC station at 12th Street, NW and G Street, NW (Source: Google Streetview)

The bike stations that are proposed to occupy and replace existing on-street parking will need protective barriers to separate cyclists from oncoming vehicular traffic. DDOT intends to install flexposts, or narrow plastic pylons, between the bike station and the travel lane, similar to what is found at the existing SmartBike station at 12th Street, NW and G Street, NW. DDOT has expressed to staff that it considers the use of flexposts around bike share stations located in the parking lane to be critical for cyclist safety while drivers become

accustomed to the presence of these particular bike share stations. While staff recognizes the need to take immediate precautions to protect cyclists while the Capital Bikeshare system gets established, staff also sees potential that through further consultation an alternative to flexposts could be developed that would minimize or eliminate aesthetic and visual impacts, and potentially contribute to the overall notoriety of the bike share program. **Staff notes that DDOT has committed to re-evaluate the safety and effectiveness of flexposts one year after installation and report back to the Commission, including consideration of the visual impacts on L'Enfant street rights-of-way.**

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan promote smart growth and sustainable development as one of NCPC's overarching planning principles. The plan highlights the importance of transportation mobility overall, of reducing congestion and air pollution, and of employing multi-modal transportation strategies, such as bike sharing, as critical to promoting a sustainable region and federal workplace. The proposed Capital BikeShare system is consistent with these planning principles and successfully carries out several of the policies contained in the Transportation and Federal Environment Elements of the Comprehensive Plan. For example, policies within the Transportation Element encourage the use of ridesharing, biking, walking, and other non-single-occupant vehicle modes of transportation as a means for commuting back and forth to work. Other policies promote increased bicycle commuting among federal employees by working closely with local jurisdiction bike coordinators, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, Commuter Connections, and bicycle proponents such as the Washington Area Bicyclist Association.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

NCPC and the United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) each have an independent responsibility to satisfy the requirements of NEPA. FHWA's responsibility derives from its role in funding the Capital Bikeshare project, which under Section 1508.18(a) of the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing NEPA would constitute a "major federal action" that potentially could affect the human environment. NCPC's NEPA responsibility stems from its approval authority over the 14 Capital Bikeshare sites located within the Central Area of Washington, D.C.

The FHWA has determined that the proposal meets its criteria for categorical exclusions, found at 23 CFR 771.117 (c)(3), Construction of bicycle and pedestrian lanes, paths, and facilities, and that preparation of an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement is not required. Staff has also determined that the project qualifies as a categorical exclusion pursuant to Section 8(C)(8) of NCPC's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

Pursuant to the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's regulations, NCPC and FHWA, in consultation with the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO), have concurred that the project will have "no adverse effect" on historic properties provided that further site-by-site coordination of the proposed bike share stations occur with NCPC, DC SHPO, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, the National Park Service, and with Advisory Neighborhood Commissions and other neighborhood organizations, as necessary.

CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal at its August 11, 2010 meeting and forwarded it to the Commission with the statement that the proposal has been coordinated with all participating agencies. The participating agencies were the District of Columbia Office of Planning, the General Services Administration, the District Department of Transportation, and the National Capital Planning Commission. Though the National Park Service (NPS) did not attend the Coordinating Committee meeting, it did convey to staff that it supports the project in concept but is not ready to coordinate for final approval. According to the NPS, the information that has been submitted by DDOT thus far is not detailed enough to fully assess impacts to views due to the insertion of the stations, re-striping of pavement, and installation of traffic barricades/flexposts, etc.

U.S. Commission of Fine Arts

At its July 15, 2010 meeting the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) reviewed the Capital Bikeshare proposal at the conceptual level. CFA expressed "no objection" to the general concept for the additional 100 Capital Bikeshare stations provided that "for final design review, site plans for each installation are submitted for review by the Commission (and by the Old Georgetown Board when located in the Old Georgetown Historic District)." CFA also noted that special consideration should be given to locations in or near the Pennsylvania Avenue Historic District, West Potomac Park, the National Mall, Old Georgetown, and the Shipstead-Luce Act area.