

Neighborhood Perceptions and Biking in the Port Towns of Prince George's County, Maryland

by

Andrew Friel, Paige Goldscher, Cristian Ortiz, Jennifer Solan,
Jacob Sorensen

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Associate Professor Ebonie Cooper-Jean, School of Public Policy,
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Abstract

The relationship between biking and gentrification in the Port Towns has yet to be fully understood. While working with the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, students from the University of Maryland sought to identify barriers to biking access in the Port Towns of Prince George's County, Maryland, and how Port Towns residents perceive development, gentrification, and biking.

The following localities comprise the Port Towns: Bladensburg, Colmar Manor, Cottage City, and Edmonston. Biking positively impacts health and is an environmentally sustainable form of transportation. Unfortunately, historically Black communities like the Port Towns face displacement due to gentrification and underinvestment in community resources.

The researchers conducted a focus group with Port Towns residents, and interviews with elected officials and bike group members to understand the challenges and opportunities regarding biking in the Port Towns. They found that a lack of protected and connected bike infrastructure, affordability of bike equipment, and the poor quality of existing bike infrastructure prevents residents from biking in the Port Towns. The researchers found no association between gentrification and bike infrastructure in the Port Towns, but there are concerns about displacement due to housing costs.

The researchers conclude that requiring mixed-use development, expanding Capital Bikeshare, implementing a bike safety course in Prince George's County Schools, and requiring green travel plans for major employers can improve biking accessibility in the Port Towns.

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Introduction

The relationship between bike infrastructure and gentrification in Prince George's County, specifically the Port Towns, has yet to be fully understood in the context of historically Black neighborhoods. Therefore, it is unknown how residents of the Port Towns view the relationship between biking and gentrification. Understanding these perceptions will allow the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) to implement inclusive programs and recommend policy solutions to engage more women and people of color with biking. Additionally, the M-NCPPC can use this information to limit the potential impacts of gentrification on communities.

The main objective of this project is to identify barriers to biking and determine if gentrification is a barrier for current and prospective bicyclists in the Port Towns. Moving forward, the researchers hope to gain a deeper understanding of how these communities view biking by conducting interviews and creating focus groups with the residents. Generally, the Port Towns have small, diverse populations and rich histories. Because of this, it is crucial to preserve these communities.

M-NCPPC was created in 1927 by the Maryland General Assembly and has worked for more than 90 years to enhance the quality of life for all the residents it serves in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties, as well as the communities where these residents reside, work, and raise their families (M-NCPPC, 2022). From this collaboration, the M-NCPPC hopes to explore research regarding how bikeways are associated with gentrification. The M-NCPPC does not wish to curb bikeways or bike lanes in any community because these facilities benefit all residents and visitors, even non-bicyclists, regardless of ethnicity or economic status. Instead, the

M-NCPPC wants to learn how to add additional bikeways to communities and avoid the potential negative, associated consequences.

For this project, “bikeway” is a generic term that covers travel facilities that accommodate bicycling. Bikeways can include bike lanes, bike routes, and shared-use paths, also known as bike paths. For example, Prince George’s County currently has 85 miles of shared-use paths within its trail system and various, often unconnected, systems of bikeable road shoulders and on-road marked bike lanes on its major roads (M-NCPPC, 2022).

For this project, “gentrification” is defined as bike infrastructure that doesn’t have community input, infrastructure that disrupts alternative modes of transportation, and infrastructure that causes displacement. As counties and localities try to expand on alternative transportation methods for residents, leaders must stay mindful of residents of color and address their concerns about gentrification and bike lanes. To illustrate, a Portland, Oregon study found that the city only installed bike lanes in historically Black neighborhoods once younger white families moved in, resulting in bike lanes associated with gentrification (Lubitow et al., 2019). Port Towns residents might also have mixed perceptions of bike infrastructure based on the disruption that infrastructure causes in their daily lives.

Despite these perceptions, bike infrastructure supports an easy, low-cost transportation method with health and sustainability benefits that all people should be able to access equally. The focus groups will identify if bike lane installation has similar associations to gentrification in the Port Towns as it did in Portland.

There are many barriers to equitable access to biking as a sustainable form of transportation in Prince George’s County. The lack of adequate bike infrastructure makes biking more dangerous for current bikers and less attractive to prospective bikers. Prince George’s

County has many bike lanes and shared-user paths, but connections between these systems are missing, which makes biking less desirable for residents. Within the Port Towns, the practicality of biking depends on location. Often, residents must drive to areas like the Bladensburg Waterfront Park to bike because it's dangerous to bike to the waterfront from their homes. Residents who seek to bike on the miles of county trails risk their safety to use unprotected shoulders or marked bike lanes on major roads to access these trail systems. As a result, riders must either shuttle their bike to an alternative site for a ride or avoid riding altogether.

The missing culture of biking among all county residents can be connected to this lack of infrastructure, as missing infrastructure creates a stigma of being unsafe and could act as a barrier to entry for potential new riders. Additionally, biking culture has been exclusionary and centered on white men, which results in women and people of color feeling unwelcome in many bike spaces (Setterfield, 2016). Personal safety is also a significant barrier to biking, as biking can make women and people of color feel more vulnerable to harassment. In Portland, interviews revealed that women and people of color were discouraged from routine bicycling due to fear of racial profiling and gender-based violence (Lubitow et al., 2019). Finally, the lack of community engagement, specifically with people of color, increases barriers to implementing adequate bike infrastructure. These barriers may shift depending on the outcomes of the focus groups.

However, bikeways also positively impact communities. Evidence shows that inclusive policies in biking infrastructure can help create a better overall biking culture. According to the non-profit People for Bikes, the best forms of inclusive biking infrastructure policy often ensure that traffic is not interrupted without systems to adjust for bikes, as well as ensuring that the infrastructure created can help people better access jobs and services rather than making it harder for them to access those things (Inclusive Biking, 2022). For example, research regarding the

promotion of the Complete Streets program in Sacramento, California, shows how community outreach, partnered with sufficient infrastructure, increased biking and walking participation (Geraghty et al., 2009). In addition, the health benefits of biking are abundant. If residents could substitute biking with driving, they would be able to reach the 150 weekly active minutes recommended by many public health agencies (Malmo-Laycock, 2017).

While the M-NCPPC wants to learn about biking as a form of transportation in the Port Towns, it is also important to highlight the environmental and health benefits. Biking for transportation, leisure, or exercise has been proven to reduce an individual's chance of diabetes, heart disease, weight gain, and mental health concerns (Malmo-Laycock, 2017). The positive benefits of biking also extend to the environment. Biking doesn't produce harmful emissions, so it helps decrease air pollution (Malmo-Laycock, 2017).

It is vital to ensure that all communities reap the rewards of biking.

Methodologies

Port Towns Demographics and History

This research highlights the Port Towns in Prince George's County: Bladensburg, Colmar Manor, Cottage City, and Edmonston. These towns work together toward community revitalization, which is pertinent when discussing biking and gentrification. Community revitalization and growth are divisive topics in Prince George's County, particularly in transit-induced gentrification (Roberts, 2020).

The demographics of the Port Towns are unique. Each town has a small, diverse population. Bladensburg's population is approximately 9,650. Of this, 68% of residents are Black, 26.8% are Hispanic or Latino, and 8.6% are White. Each household has 2.57 persons and a median household income of \$50,390 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

The populations in Colmar Manor, Cottage City, and Edmonston are significantly smaller than Bladensburg. Colmar Manor has an approximate population of 1,588 residents. The town's demographic makeup is 58.2% Hispanic or Latino, 25.8% Black, and 10% White. Each household has about 4.23 individuals with a median household income of \$73,839 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). The population of Cottage City is approximately 1,335. Of this population, 43.9% of residents are Hispanic or Latino, 34.9% are Black, and 16.7% are White. Households have an average of 3.86 individuals with a median household income of \$57,404 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Lastly, the Town of Edmonston has an approximate population of 1,399 people. Hispanic or Latino residents comprise 61% of the population, Black residents make up 23%, and White residents make up 10%. Approximately 3.6 people live in each household and have a median household income of \$71,667 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

The Port Towns have a unique history. The Port Towns were unified through a distinctive set of circumstances: historical ties, economic development, and new zoning laws (M-NCPPC, 2009). As Prince George's County focuses on future economic development, the Port Towns will play a significant role. With this in mind, a master plan developed by the M-NCPPC positioned the four towns to become green, healthy, and pedestrian-friendly communities. The M-NCPPC wants to make the Port Towns into destinations that can celebrate and build on the area's cultural diversity, strategic location, industrial base, and historical, recreational, and environmental assets.

In moving Prince George's County forward, the Port Towns region would serve as an industrial/wellness district. (M-NCPPC, 2009). Some of the more recent development across the Port Towns includes the expansion of Metro via the Purple Line construction and a redesigned Bladensburg Library. The intensive Purple Line construction will encourage new development and possibly transit-induced gentrification (Roberts, Isom, Stone, Branchman & Garcia, 2020). Because of this, direct revitalization efforts in the Port Towns are slim. However, the County is redesigning the Bladensburg Library. The new building will incorporate elements that highlight the rich history of Bladensburg and will serve as a cornerstone for the community (Prince George's Community Memorial Library System, n.d.).

Across Prince George's County, economic development and community revitalization are crucial topics and gaining much support from leaders. However, development across the County is highly selective, with some regions receiving more investment than others. Because of this, the County has experienced population shifts, as people who can afford to relocate elsewhere in the Washington region.

A 26-item survey examines how residents view development. The survey pulled a framework of perspectives from Prince Georgians and revealed how they view their identity and their attitudes regarding the investment their communities have received. The aim was to understand why people wanted to move or stay in the county and to identify disparities found in housing, income, or transportation. The results indicated that most Prince Georgians wanted to stay, and especially Black residents wanted to invest more in the community to support Prince George's County as a thriving majority-minority community (Shinault, 2018).

Current Biking Infrastructure in the Port Towns

It was essential to this research to determine the practicality of biking in the Port Towns. If the current infrastructure and bikeways are deficient, it changes potential barriers to biking. One of the most easily bikeable locations in the Port Towns is the Bladensburg Waterfront Park. The Waterfront Park was recently revitalized, and residents praised the updates and additions. The Bladensburg Waterfront Park is a significant biking destination in the Port Towns. However, it's not easily accessible. The infrastructure connecting to the Bladensburg Waterfront Park needs to be improved (Ivey, 2022).

In an informational interview with Prince George's County Councilmember Jolene Ivey, a Port Town representative, she spoke about biking from her and her constituents' perspectives. Safety is a significant concern; many residents would feel more comfortable biking on roadways if there were physical barriers between cars and bikers. In addition, the connections between trail and bikeway systems are lacking, with many local bikers driving to a park to begin biking (Ivey, 2022). So, while the Bladensburg Waterfront Park is a beautiful destination and a valuable asset

for the Port Towns, biking infrastructure is severely lacking throughout the Port Towns and surrounding areas.

Bikeways, Gentrification, and Community Outreach

In major cities, bikeways and gentrification are commonly associated. Builders and contractors will move into historical communities of color and design extensive biking systems and new housing for incoming residents (Gibson, 2015). These practices are very harmful to the communities and their long-standing residents.

In Portland, Oregon, interviews with women and minorities aimed to understand their perceptions of biking and the city's biking infrastructure. These interviews revealed that the respondents connected biking infrastructure development with gentrification and echoed safety and access concerns (Lubitow et al., 2022). In Washington, D.C., gentrification is of enormous concern and is typically associated with bike lanes. When Washington, D.C. Mayor, Adrian Fenty, began his first term in office, he wanted to quickly develop bike lanes and implement other changes to the city's infrastructure. His goal was to create more bike lanes and encourage imaginative growth. However, D.C.'s large Black population saw these changes as ways to gentrify the city and encourage affluent white families to move to the city (Gibson, 2015). Moreover, these changes did occur as D.C.'s population becoming wealthier, whiter, and younger (Gibson, 2015). Gentrification significantly changed the history and demographics of Washington, D.C.

One of the most significant ways to prevent gentrification and increase community support for bike lanes and development projects is to emphasize community outreach. When conducting community outreach, it's crucial to physically go to the community (Inclusive

Biking, 2022). Further, most surveys typically ask respondents to select answers or give brief responses. For example, a study from the *Journal of Transport & Health* interviewed a large pool of women, wanting to examine how they perceive biking and asking respondents to describe the potential reasons for avoiding the activity (Fowler, Berrigan & Pollack, 2017). The interview approach allowed the researchers to gain valuable information about the perceived barriers to biking that might have otherwise been lost (Fowler, Berrigan & Pollack, 2017).

Justification for Focus Group

The secondary sources emphasize the importance of community outreach. To best understand the community's needs, face-to-face connections with the Port Towns residents were necessary. While many of the proposed questions could be asked in a survey, it's crucial to thoroughly understand the emotions behind beliefs and not limit residents to word counts. A Portland study on Gender-Based Bicycling Inequalities demonstrated how focus groups and individual interviews could provide specific anecdotes that reflect broader policy themes (Lubitow, 2019). It guided the development of our focus group questions.

To learn about perceptions of bikeways in the Port Towns, a focus group was created to determine the relationships between bikeways and gentrification. The focus group comprised individuals from the Port Towns. We also interviewed a member of a biking organization in Prince George's County. The focus group and interviewee responded to the same topics and questions—designed to see if they would make a connection between bikeways and gentrification. To collect additional information, we also conducted interviews with local leaders.

Preliminary Research

After interviews and research into relevant literature and the Port Towns and their history, the focus moved into primary research of neighborhood perceptions about biking and transportation. Many findings from the literature emphasized the importance of community outreach. Therefore, the goal was to connect face-to-face with Port Towns residents. While many of the proposed questions could have been asked using a survey, the goal was to ensure word limits didn't bind residents when answering these essential questions. By speaking to the residents, a better understanding of the emotions behind their beliefs could come to light.

Two focus groups were created to determine attitudes about the relationships between bikeways and gentrification in the Port Towns. The first focus group comprised members of biking organizations across the County. The second focus group comprised individuals from the Port Towns. Both groups responded to the same guiding topics and questions. The goal was to see if either group would make a connection between bikeways and gentrification. In addition, interviews were conducted with local leaders.

Findings

An informational interview with Prince George's County Councilmember Jolene Ivey, who represents the Port Towns, revealed that for her constituents safety is a significant concern; many residents would feel more comfortable biking on roadways if there were physical barriers between cars and bikers. In addition, the connections between trail and bikeway systems are lacking, with many local bikers driving to a park to begin biking.

Interview: Bikers' Perceptions Bikeways

David Owens, President of Fort Washington Forward (FWForward), a 501(c)(3) focusing on the development of Fort Washington, was interviewed to determine how experienced bikers feel about biking, gentrification, and development. The first questions were intended to develop a better understanding of FWForward, specifically how the group is focusing on biking. One of the group's missions is to focus on sustainability and connectivity in their community. Owens explained that the group is looking to use cycling to connect their community with the growing development in the region.

The next questions focused on understanding the growing development in their area. Owens shared that there has been a noticeable shift in the local demographics. Historically, the area has been made up of mostly older African Americans. However, recent development has introduced a younger and more diverse racial demographic to the community. Owens views the changes as a positive, noting that many people moving into the area are coming from Washington, D.C., bringing more money with them. He believes the development of nearby National Harbor has kickstarted this new generation in the community. Long-time community

members worried about how far the National Harbor development would spread. However, the younger demographic hoped this development would encourage more businesses and grow the area.

When asked about the demographic of people leaving the area, Owens noted that it was mostly people pushed out by rising housing prices. And there was still concern among the community choosing to stay. According to Owens, they are tired of having to go elsewhere for needed goods and services and the lack of accessible amenities, which Owens believes is a development issue. He explained that people are tired of feeling they can't get anywhere without a car.

While FWForward wants to see new development, they want to ensure that it is both sustainable and connected to their community. Owens shared his desire for the community is for everyone to be able to bike to and from these new developments. He would like to see Fort Washington shift from a widely-spaced city to a close-knit town by using bike infrastructure to connect the community with development.

The next set of questions focused on Owens' own biking experience. He bikes frequently but still relies on his car for as his primary mode of transportation due to his line of work. He wishes there were a more viable transportation option but doesn't see his bike as an option. Owens' biking is mainly focused on exercise and enjoying the outdoors. He regularly bikes around his neighborhood but will drive his bike to take longer trail rides, citing safety concerns on the main roads between his home and any trail access. Owens shared that while he is pushing for the development of more bikeways, he is also concerned about the existing infrastructure. He described bike lanes that are unprotected and dangerous. Additionally, area trails are overgrown and under-labeled, leading to confusion on the trail and an unwelcoming environment.

Focus Group: Residents' Perceptions of Port Towns Bikeways

This focus group began with questions aimed at identifying the residents' perceptions of their community, specifically around development. For example, when asked, "How has your neighborhood and the surrounding area changed since you have lived there?" long-term residents of Colmar Manor immediately identified increased car traffic. Although the roads haven't changed in 30 years, the number of cars and their speed has increased. Residents reported feeling less safe as pedestrians or bikers because of increased traffic. In the past, when there was less traffic, residents said they felt comfortable sending their children on bikes to Bladensburg, the grocery store, or anywhere in town.

Residents also agreed that infrastructure that changed during the COVID-19 pandemic had not been restored. For example, a resident explained that bike lanes on Bladensburg Road were removed during a period of construction, but not re-installed.

The next question was, "Have you noticed any new development or construction in your neighborhood? How do you feel about these developments?" Residents of Colmar Manor responded with concerns about the town losing population due to people being priced out of the community. They particularly mentioned a potential gas station development. Colmar Manor has a finite amount land, and one of its only empty lots is proposed for a gas station. Residents raised numerous concerns about the gas station, including environmental impacts, the lack of healthy food options, and that it would not be a positive asset to community residents.

To understand the sense of community demographics we asked, "Have the demographics of your neighbors changed since you have lived there?" Colmar Manor residents answered that their neighborhood has always been racially diverse with majority-minority residents. Even as residents have moved away, the neighborhood's diversity has continued to attract diverse

residents, and current residents take pride in their community demographics. However, they are concerned that homeownership has become more complicated, and those who can afford to purchase homes need higher incomes than previously.

The conversation flowed into the next question, “Do people you know moved away?” The residents answered that those who moved primarily had to for financial reasons. One resident offered an anecdote about their neighbors who had to move because the cost of maintaining their homes became too much; many of the houses in Colmar Manor are over 50 years old. Residents in the focus group then began to discuss gentrification. They felt that although gentrification hadn’t yet displaced many residents, they saw early signs of it. Surrounding communities such as Brentwood and Mt. Rainier were identified as gentrified, and residents are concerned about an increasing cost of living in Colmar Manor that might displace longtime residents. Furthermore, residents occasionally noted displeasure with the local grocery and shopping options.

During the focus group, residents noted, without being asked, several aspects of their neighborhood that they appreciated. They enthusiastically identified the community’s people and how they look out for each other. The residents also took pride in their community’s diversity and the Port Towns’ history. This sense of community was among the most substantial reasons for liking their neighborhood and appeared to be the reason residents haven’t left despite the issues they described. One resident said, “My block looks like the UN [United Nations].”

Residents also noted that while the term “Port Towns” may be confusing, it is essential to telling their community’s history. While some community members want to shift away from being called the “Port Towns,” the majority believe keeping the name will share the area’s history with the next generation.

We also asked the group about their transportation and biking experiences. Residents were asked their typical daily transportation mode for commuting and other trips. The residents all use cars as their primary form of transportation, but they recalled a time when transit, such as Metrorail and Metrobus, was a better option; if they drove, it was to park at Metro stations to use transit. However, other residents pointed out that Metro has recently become more expensive; driving to work, even with high gas prices, can be more economical. Residents also noted that in the past, Uber rides were a better commuting choice before the added D.C. tax on rideshare services. While bikes were not mentioned as a primary form of transport, one resident noted that they prefer to use their electric scooter, explicitly stating that they find this mode of transportation quite entertaining.

When residents were asked if they would prefer biking as a primary transportation mode, they responded with concerns about road quality as a barrier to bikes or other small personal vehicles such as scooters. Residents noted that many area roads lack sidewalks or that existing sidewalks are unsafe. Many also lack shade, which would make travel more tolerable in the summer heat. Those with physical limitations noted that the uneven paving on local sidewalks makes it difficult for them to travel on foot without discomfort. Residents agreed they feel lucky to arrive safely if they use small personal vehicles such as bikes and scooters.

Residents were asked about current and past family history with biking in the Port Towns. Most residents noted that they currently own or have owned bikes in the past but aren't as equipped as "serious" cyclist groups. They also questioned how serious cyclists could arrive in town since accessing the area without a car can be difficult, considering the traffic conditions. Residents recalled a time in the Port Towns when biking was safe for children and adults and those with young children are more concerned about safety issues than in the past. Older

residents with adult children noted that there was a time when “kids could be kids” and felt that people hanging around area stores might make things feel less safe. Residents mentioned there was a time when bikers could leave bicycles at local racks without fear of theft. Residents noted while crime has undoubtedly improved, that times have changed, particularly regarding children’s safety. They were once allowed to run more freely through town. Respondents also mentioned changing laws and regulations for safety equipment such as helmets, high visibility lights, and jackets.

Residents were asked about the usefulness of bike share programs such as Capital Bikeshare for families/individuals who can’t otherwise purchase bicycles. Residents unanimously agreed that the service wouldn’t be as helpful as it might seem. They noted that beyond the rental cost, users leave the bikes in areas that can damage the local environment. One resident shared that Capital Bikeshare is more suited for commuters willing to pay the price and those who work and live in areas served by Capital Bikeshare.

Residents also noted that bikes and equipment are increasingly expensive to own and maintain, and for families with kids, the costs may outweigh the potential benefits. One resident referenced the Mt. Rainier bike co-op as a resource to help mitigate biking costs but felt more needed to be done to improve biking access.

The resident focus group finished with an open-ended question asking about other barriers to biking in the area beyond road and sidewalk safety. For example, one resident noted that a dedicated bike lane would eliminate a car lane from already congested Bladensburg Road. Residents also pointed out that drivers who cut through the Port Towns drive fast, leading to the installation of speed bumps. Finally, residents expressed disappointment in the lack of quality housing development, healthy food options, and other positive development along Route 1 in

areas such as College Park and Hyattsville. After the focus group, residents shared why participating was important and discussed that the community needs to be engaged in planning decisions.

Supplemental Interviews

Bladensburg Council Member Marilyn Blount

Marilyn Blount has witnessed many changes in her community, including increased development with more to come. Bladensburg has benefitted mainly from Prince George's County's push for beautification. She highlighted how constituents generally viewed the development favorably. With construction of a new library, constituents are excited to have more public space. Blount wants new development to recognize the history of Bladensburg to help more residents appreciate it.

In terms of construction and development, Purple Line construction has significantly impacted Bladensburg, generally causing a mess in the community. Once construction is completed, that condition and attitude might change. Constituent input was necessary for Purple Line construction, and it received lots of support. However, Blount explained community input surveys aren't always accurate.

As mentioned, the community has changed. For example, the population is becoming more Korean. Blount couldn't say whether these changing demographics correlated with the growing lack of affordable housing. Rents are increasing and salaries are stagnant. She particularly highlighted the difference between affordable housing and low-income housing. In Bladensburg, there is an enormous need for fixed-income housing and Section 8 housing for seniors. Throughout the community, residents are suffering from increased rents. In Bladensburg,

gentrification isn't the biggest concern in the cost of living and biking. Community members want a particular type of person living near them. Along with lower rents, residents want new residents who treat their apartments with respect.

Council Member Blount lived in Washington, D.C., for most of her life and dealt with gentrification. She compared this with Bladensburg, where there is no significant White community, and the historical population is mainly Black. Because of this, gentrification in Bladensburg is Hispanic and Korean people moving into the area and Black people moving out. However, Blount noted that it's hard to tell how constituents feel about these changes because fewer people are voting. Above all, affordable housing is the biggest concern in Bladensburg.

As for transportation, Blount said many residents rely on buses and without car, transportation is challenging. Bladensburg was designed mainly for car and bus transportation, not biking. The bus system in the Port Towns is decent, supported by the Colmar Manor senior bus that operates in a ten-mile radius. Bladensburg's large senior population are more focused on bus transportation than biking. In her experience, there are few bikers or biking areas. She'd like the biking trails to make accessibility easier for students, so they don't have to walk as far to school.

When the conversation shifted to the barriers to biking in Bladensburg, Blount noted that the topography isn't conducive to biking. Hills make biking for transportation or leisure more difficult for inexperienced riders. Most residents would have to drive to the Bladensburg Waterfront Park if they wanted to bike. As to safety, she is concerned about violence in the community that pushes people away from biking and other outdoor activities.

Hyattsville Resident

A brief interview with a Hyattsville resident who frequents the Bladensburg Waterfront Park supplements the research and ensures information from multiple groups. As a senior, this resident emphasized the need for the County and the M-NCPPC to focus on providing resources and programs for seniors. When asked about transportation, she noted that some of her friends do not have vehicles, a challenge to navigating the Port Towns. To make travel easier for seniors, she suggested a shuttle bus or trolley from the Bladensburg Waterfront Park to the senior center, Colmar Manor Community Center, and Town Hall. She was asked specifically about the recently revitalized Bladensburg Waterfront Park. She was pleased with changes to the waterfront but thought the M-NCPPC could sponsor more events to publicize the area.

She also spoke explicitly about biking and her experience with biking throughout Prince George's County. When she was younger, she used to bike all the time, typically for leisure and exercise. However, the more she biked, she realized her dislike for biking culture. She felt pressured to join biking groups and, because of this, felt like her biking couldn't be casual. Instead, she thought she needed to participate in the competitive and cliquy parts of biking. Additionally, with these biking groups came more barriers to biking—expensive biking gear and matching team shirts—as well as safety gear to protect herself from vehicles.

Upper Marlboro Resident

In an interview at the Bladensburg Waterfront, a biker using the trail shared that he was an avid cyclist, biking approximately 100 miles weekly. This was his first time visiting and using the Bladensburg Waterfront and using the Anacostia River trail system. As a retiree, he bikes for exercise and fun. When asked about the area's biking culture, he found D.C. to be increasingly

bike-friendly but mostly biked in larger groups in Charles County, Maryland. When asked about how he travels to go biking, the resident explained that he uses his car to take his bike to a starting point, highlighting safety concerns for bike travel in his area and the areas surrounding the trail systems.

In further discussion, he continued describing barriers to biking in the region, highlighting two key factors that stop people from biking: geography and wealth. As to geography, he pointed out that the region is hilly, and the weather needs to be temperate for biking to be a primary form of transportation. He stated, “out of 365 days, maybe only 100 of them are actually safe and comfortable to bike in.” He’d lived all over the country, including places where residents can use bikes as primary transportation, but this region was not one of them.

As to wealth, he noted on how expensive biking really is, pointing out his bike cost \$3,000, with more for all the necessary equipment for safe and comfortable riding. He found that any gentrification issues stemming from cycling were based solely on socioeconomic factors, not race-based factors.

Discussion

After meeting and interviewing residents and bikers, a stark delineation became clear. There is a significant difference between those who bike in large groups (residents and non-residents) for exercise and socializing and those who bike as a hobby or form of transportation. In Prince George's County, biking in large groups recreationally is more common. Due to topographical, safety, and connectivity concerns, it's less common for residents to bike for transportation.

An overarching theme from the resident focus group and bikers' interviews was that the lack of safe bike infrastructure is a primary barrier to biking in the Port Towns. Colmar Manor residents said uneven sidewalks, bike lanes that end abruptly, speeding cars, and a lack of connectivity prevented them from biking for recreation or transportation. Bike group members shared that they typically drive to a location where they feel safe biking, indicating that even avid bikers do not feel safe on the roads. For anyone wishing to bike, driving to a desirable location adds cost and time, preventing more informal biking.

Another theme in the research came from conversations about gentrification. Typically, gentrification occurs when wealthy white people move into communities and displace low-income people of color. The standard definition of gentrification places a significant emphasis on racial inequity. However, in the Port Towns, gentrification concerns aren't race-based. Instead, residents make the connection between gentrification and income. The challenge of potential gentrification comes from higher-income people of color moving into the Port Towns, which historically were lower income.

The Port Towns' racial and ethnic diversity remains strong and incredibly valuable to residents. During the resident focus group, one respondent said their street looks like the United

Nations. This statement speaks to the importance Port Towns residents place on diversity to the prosperity of their community. Residents' pride in their diversity indicates that future development and community events should celebrate, recognize, and preserve community diversity. Further, the Port Towns also have a rich history that should be shared. Any efforts to increase biking in the community should prioritize inclusion and market to the diverse populations of the Port Towns.

The focus groups and interviews aimed to answer whether biking was associated with gentrification in the Port Towns. Based on the responses of both residents who don't bike and avid bikers, it's apparent that biking is not negatively associated with gentrification. In the Port Towns, housing prices are skyrocketing. Residents don't know the cause, but it was not biking. More likely, the increased cost of living and rents in the Port Towns is due to many factors.

Residents also view biking infrastructure improvements as community assets. Unlike communities in Washington D.C. and Portland, Port Towns residents don't feel that bike infrastructure was only installed with the displacement of long-time residents. Rather than viewing bike infrastructure as imposing on the community or as a sign of gentrification, it has been part of the community's history as transportation and recreation. Increasing biking opportunities would be a return to a valuable aspect of living in the Port Towns; a return to biking that has been reduced by car traffic in recent decades. The lack of association between biking and gentrification in the Port Towns suggests that biking and bike infrastructure should be marketed and implemented in the Port Towns with a focus on overcoming other barriers to biking.

The affordability of biking, for both individuals and recreational bike groups, was a recurring theme in the research. Port Town residents identified that the cost of bikes has

dramatically increased in the past thirty years and that current biking culture emphasizes high-end equipment. Interviews with avid bikers also stressed the cost of biking. To be in a bike group and bike regularly, bikers are spending up to thousands of dollars for their bikes, group membership fees, and protective gear. These cost barriers make biking less desirable to lower-income groups who may enjoy biking on a nice day but can't justify the cost of maintaining a bike. To further improve affordability, the costs of bike maintenance for casual bikers needs to be addressed.

A gap in bike share services also contributes to a lack of affordability. Capital Bikeshare, which has a \$5 annual membership for residents, doesn't provide service in the Port Towns. For commuters who travel longer distances to work, a bikeshare program reduces costs by providing access to electric bikes without requiring ownership.

Recommendations

Require Mixed-Use Development

All new development in the Port Towns and greater Prince George's County should be mixed-use projects that encourage sustainable transportation and inclusive development. Since the M-NCPPC also works in zoning and planning, this is a feasible policy change. The new County-wide Map Amendment and Zoning Rewrite already incentivizes mixed-use development. As a result, much of the new development in Prince George's County will be mixed-use, however, these developments are small and still relatively uncommon across the County.

One example of significant mixed-use development is Columbia, Maryland. Columbia incorporates many different neighborhoods in one community. The neighborhoods were built to be self-contained, with easily accessible shopping, community centers, schools, recreation facilities, and a comprehensive, connected bike path system. Neighborhoods also have easy access to local bus routes that connect to MARC stations and the northernmost points of the WMATA Metrorail system. Mixed-use development already exists in Prince George's County but are not common.

At a policy level, the M-NCPPC has the authority to require mixed-use developments and the Commission should study the feasibility of more mixed-use communities in the County. Part of the examination should include existing bicycle infrastructure and plans for new communities connected by shared-use paths and on-street bike lanes. Once this research is complete, the Commission should urge the Prince George's County government to enact regulations for new development that require planning and providing aspects of the mixed-use community model.

Mixed-use communities can help meet the needs in Prince George's County, including shared-use paths and bike lanes and increased accessibility to transit bus and rail systems.

Advocate for Expanded Capital Bikeshare

Expanding the Capital Bikeshare program would provide residents with increased transportation and recreation options. The Capital Bikeshare offers electric and non-electric shared bikes for users who pay fees based on use time. It is an excellent option for commuters and other short-term bicycle users. Bikes can be picked up and dropped off at various docking/charging stations. While it serves the capital region, Capital Bikeshare doesn't extend to the Port Towns. The closest stations are in Hyattsville, Riverdale Park, and College Park. The governments in the Port Towns, along with the M-NCPPC and the Prince George's County Council, should seek a new deal with Capital Bikeshare that includes the development of new docking/charging stations across the region, connecting these communities to the larger system.

Any bikeshare extension should include electric bikes that can meet residents' concern about the area's hilly topography—a barrier for experienced and inexperienced bikers. Capital Bikeshare's electric bikes both reduce travel time and the strain on the rider in these conditions.

Along with a Capital Bikeshare expansion, the M-NCPPC should offer educational materials and campaigns to promote the "Capital Bikeshare for All" transportation program. By creating awareness of eligibility for the \$5 annual membership, Port Towns' residents may realize that bicycling is attainable when the proper infrastructure is in place. The \$5 annual membership program is vital to making the expansion of Capital Bikeshare feasible, since many residents shared concerns about the high costs of biking.

Implement Bike Safety Courses at Schools

The County should partner with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in a bike safety course to be implemented in high schools across Prince George's County. There is a significant knowledge gap regarding biking, and education can empower people with the necessary tools to bike safely. The new curriculum would include safe biking and driving habits and could potentially change the narrative around car culture in Prince George's County. Further, Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) is focused on educational policy reform and recently extensively transformed curriculum and goals for the next five years. Two goals include providing students with relevant education and increasing support for mental health. Both goals can be accomplished by implementing a bike safety course.

Researchers have found that safety is an enormous concern for bikers and pedestrians. It is a reason many people don't bike and miss out on mental and physical health benefits. The safety concerns are valid for Port Towns residents. With the current biking infrastructure lacking, prospective bikers need to know how to share roads safely. Bike safety courses would increase students' relevant and real-world learning and support mental health education through exercise. A change in curriculum works with PGCPS's progressive approach to education reform.

The new curriculum would include the following focuses based on NHTSA resources:

- proper helmet use
- rules of the road, such as biking with traffic and using turn signals
- safe driving tips.

Educating students about safe biking and driving habits can be a first step to increasing the number of County residents who are interested in biking. Since safety was the biggest concern for both Port Towns residents and experienced bikers, educating the next generation of

bikers would help make all bikers feel safer and more knowledgeable. Additionally, teaching this course while students are learning to drive would increase their knowledge about safe driving.

Require Employer Green Travel Plans

The County should require Green Travel Plans for its major employers (any business with a staff of 50 or more).

Before requiring Green Travel Plans, the County and the M-NCPPC must be able and willing to upgrade the biking infrastructure significantly. Biking infrastructure upgrades would include improved signage and infrastructure and hiring maintenance staff to keep the current infrastructure usable year-round, regardless of weather conditions. Site visits and focus group findings show that improved signage and infrastructure, particularly on Bladensburg Road, would help bikers quickly identify paths and would be a safety feature. For example, a green-colored bike lane surface communicates to road users the area that's set aside or dedicated to bicycling. The markings on many on-street bikeways blend in with the rest of the paint that drivers typically see on area roads; New, more visible paint indicates to drivers that they can't use that road area for driving.

Pursue Safe Streets for All Grant

To support these improvements, the M-NCPPC can seek grant funding from the Federal Highway Administration's Safe Streets for All grant. As of 2022, this grant has approximately \$1 billion for disbursement. It requires applying jurisdictions (which can include metropolitan planning boards such as the M-NCPPC) to submit plans to build/develop comprehensive action

plans around transportation, design or development associated with such action plans, and work to carry out the action plans.

As an example, the grant describes an action plan to reduce pedestrian fatalities in a jurisdiction. A plan focused on improving the bike safety in Prince George's County would qualify when applications reopen in 2023. This grant would provide funds needed to build mixed-use communities and expand biking infrastructure.

Conclusion

Research shows that the overarching problem with biking in the Port Towns is the lack of connectivity, a problem that also applies across Prince George's County. However, in the Port Towns, we heard the lack of connectivity as an issue multiple times during our research. The Port Towns' connectivity problems stem from an overall lack of biking infrastructure and the poor condition of the existing infrastructure. Across Bladensburg, Colmar Manor, Cottage City, and Edmonston, there is a significant lack of biking infrastructure. Residents explained that when they wanted to bike or recreation, they needed to load their gear into a car, then drive to a safe shared-use path. Unless residents choose to bike with traffic on unsafe roads, their best option is to drive somewhere, then bike. Likewise, biking as transportation is ruled out due to the lack of appropriate infrastructure. Significant expansions are necessary to increase biking connectivity in the Port Towns.

Another problem stems from the current biking unconnected infrastructure. Residents repeatedly mentioned safety and practical concerns about biking in the Port Towns. The hilly topography makes it hard for inexperienced bikers to bike for transportation and adds difficulty for bikers trying to keep up with traffic. While it's unsafe to bike on sidewalks, bikers don't even have this option because constant construction in the Port Towns closes sidewalk. Bike lanes in the Port Towns are minimal. In most cases, bikers share the road with cars, and given the area's heavy traffic, not even experienced bikers are willing to do this. To increase biking connectivity in the Port Towns, significant work must be done to upgrade current infrastructure to make it safer for residents.

The recommendations make biking as a form of transportation a more viable option for the Port Towns residents. Requiring mixed-use developments, expanding Capital Bikeshare,

implementing a bike safety course at the County public schools, requiring major employers to institute green travel plans, and pursuing a Safe Streets for All grant would dramatically transform the biking landscape in the Port Towns and Prince George's County. Biking can and should be an accessible form of transportation. The Port Towns residents deserve better biking infrastructure.

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Appendix A

Resident Focus Group Questions

- A. What is your name, where do you live? How long have you lived there?
- B. How has your neighborhood and the surrounding area changed since you have lived there?
- C. Have you noticed any new development or construction in your neighborhood? How do you feel about these developments?
- D. Have the demographics of your neighbors changed since you have lived there?
- E. Do people you know moved away?
 - a. What led to them moving?
- F. What is your favorite thing about your neighborhood?
- G. What is your primary mode of transportation? Do you prefer your primary mode, or do you wish there was an alternative?
- H. Do you own a bike?
 - a. If so, how often do you use it?
- I. Where do you bike?
- J. Is there anything that prevents you from biking more often?
- K. Are you aware of the bike facilities in the area? Have you ever ridden or walked on the paths?

Appendix B

Focus Group Flyers

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS FOR
FOCUS GROUP ON

NEIGHBORHOOD PERCEPTIONS

COLMAR MANOR COMMUNITY CENTER
3701 LAWRENCE STREET
COLMAR MANOR, MARYLAND 20722
NOVEMBER 6TH AT 3:30 PM

Snacks and drinks will be provided!



Pre-register with
the QR code!



ESTAMOS RECLUTANDO VOLUNTARIOS PARA
UN GRUPO DE ENFOQUE SOBRE

OPINIONES DE LA COMUNIDAD

COLMAR MANOR COMMUNITY CENTER
3701 LAWRENCE STREET
COLMAR MANOR, MARYLAND 20722
NOVIEMBRE 6, 2022 ALAS 3:30 PM

Habra snacks y bebidas!



Registrese Aquí

