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December 2, 2013

City of Los Angeles
Department of Recreation and Parks
221 N. Figueroa St.
Suite 1550,
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Community Budget Discussion

Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks, Staff and Commissioners,

The Recreation and Parks Department (RAP), is currently seeking public input on how parks can be improved to better serve the community through an online Community Input Survey. We are grateful for the opportunity to **remind RAP of their obligations under the 2010 Los Angeles City Bicycle Plan**, specifically, Chapter 4, Policies 3.3.5, 3.3.6, 3.3.7. However, we are somewhat perturbed that none of RAP's obligations as defined in the Bike Plan were in any way mentioned or even alluded to within the community survey. Any discussion of budgets and priorities should include the RAP's obligations as defined in the 2010 Bicycle Plan.

Since the 2010 Bicycle Plan was adopted, off-road cycling continues to grow at phenomenal rates. The So Cal High School Cycling League has grown from fewer than 200 registered student-athletes in 2010 to an expected 500+ for the 2014 spring season. The number of high school mountain bike teams has grown from fewer than 20 in 2010, to more than 45 for the coming season. It is especially troublesome that not one single high school cycling team is located in the City of Los Angeles, yet teams can be found in almost every community surrounding the City of Los Angeles.

These are children who are becoming life-long cyclists under the guidance and tutelage of trained and certified coaches. Many of them have already become bicycle commuters, and actively participate in volunteer trail maintenance. They represent a healthy future for our youth. Yet the City of Los Angeles continues to deny bicycle access to all trails on City-owned public lands, except for a single fire road in Mandeville Canyon Park as referred to in Chapter 4, Policy 3.3.5 (A) of the Bicycle Plan.

Similarly, mountain bike sales continue to outpace the sales of road bikes, as reported by the National Bicycle Dealers Association. The latest figures (2012), show that mountain bikes and hybrid/cross bikes (which can be used on both paved and dirt trails) account for 49% of sales, while road bikes account for 20%.

The 2010 Bike Plan identifies several objectives for which RAP is the lead agency. However, the online public survey currently being conducted by RAP does not include a single option where cycling is mentioned or listed as a possible priority for consideration. This is troubling, considering RAP's identified duties in the 2010 Bike Plan. When considering the future budget and community demand, we would have liked to see cycling options included in the survey. However, since the survey has already been publicly available for some time, it may not be possible to modify it to include these excluded cycling options.

We therefore take this opportunity to remind RAP where it has been identified as a lead agency in the Bike Plan, and urge that the appropriate resources be allocated to complete these obligations:

Chapter 4, Policy 3.3.5 states:

Continue the existing off-road bicycle trail and analyze and explore opportunities for additional off-road bicycle facilities and continue to abide by LAMC section 63.44 B16. Any proposal to consider the use of mountain bikes on City park trails must first be thoroughly reviewed and analyzed by the Board of Recreation & Parks and its staff.

Further, under Policy 3.3.5, Programs:

B. Mountain Bicycle Access Program. Pursue opportunities for mountain bicycle access that may exist on land within and adjacent to the City of Los Angeles, under the jurisdiction of other agencies such as the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, Los Angeles County, State of California, etc. Lead Department: RAP. Objective: Increase mountain bicycle access to surrounding areas.

While this provision B is helpful, its objective completely passes the buck on providing off-road cycling opportunities from the City to its surrounding neighborhoods and open spaces. Surrounding areas already have bicycle trails. This fails to help those within the City of Los Angeles who are unable to travel outside of the City (non-drivers, youth, the poor and underserved) to find local, accessible and legal options for off-road cycling.

Under Policy 3.3.5, Programs:

C. Off-Road Bicycle Database and Maps. Develop a database and create maps of all City and non-City owned trails within or directly adjacent to the City of Los Angeles where mountain bicycling is allowed. Lead Department: RAP, DCP, DOT Objective: Expand awareness of existing off-road facilities. Work with the State Department of Recreation and Parks and LA County Department of Parks and Recreation.

Again, while this is helpful, like provision B, its objective fails to help those within the City of Los Angeles who are unable to travel outside of the City to find local, accessible, and legal options for off-road cycling.

For these reasons, we consider the programs A, B, and C of Policy 3.3.5 a very low priority, as they appear to do nothing tangible to increase opportunities within the City of Los Angeles.

Policy 3.3.6 states:

Ensure that equestrian and hiking trails are separate from any future trail established for mountain bicycling.

The very existence of this policy seems to preclude the possibility of ANY shared-use trails within the City of Los Angeles. We were troubled by it as the drafts for the Bicycle Plan were being publicly reviewed, and we are troubled by it now. It essentially negates and ignores the concept of multiple-use or shared-use, for which there are numerous examples of successfully managed trail systems.

However, one obvious option that is not mentioned in the Bicycle Master Plan, but was listed on CORBA's petition and over 800 hundred letters submitted as comments to the draft Bike Plan, was the consideration of Bike Parks as a low-cost park amenity that could help provide off-road cycling opportunities while also maintaining separation from other trail user groups.

Bike Parks have seen an increase in popularity, with exponential growth in their deployment nationwide. Bike Parks can be as small as a pocket park, or as large as available space would allow. They have numerous benefits to the community, are a fraction of the cost of more developed amenities like basketball courts, football fields, swimming pools, etc., and can be built and maintained by volunteers. Their risk profile is similar to or less than that of Skate Parks. **We therefore urge RAP to investigate potential locations for such Bike Park amenities, especially in underserved and park-poor/trail-poor communities.**

Policy 3.3.6, Programs include:

A. Park Trail Inventory. Inventory all park trails. Identify a subset of trails with no existing equestrian use that may potentially be suitable for mountain biking based on trail width, grade and existing user counts. Lead Department: RAP, DCP Objective: Inventory, map and evaluate trails. Schedule: 2011-2015

B. Unimproved Road Database. Develop a comprehensive database of all unimproved roads and determined their suitability for use by mountain bicyclists. Lead Department: RAP, DCP, DOT, LAFD. Objective: Identify and map existing unimproved roads. Schedule: 2011-2015

We feel that these two programs are important steps in the provision of the Bicycle Master Plan. If the existing trails are studied and inventoried objectively and without the bias against mountain bikes that seems to exist within RAP and City Council, that there will be many trails that are deemed suitable for

multiple-use including bicycles. We urge RAP to complete these programs as directed by the 2010 Bike Plan.

Policy 3.3.7. states:

Evaluate and address multiple user groups' needs on the City's limited public park trails.

Further, Policy 3.3.7 Program A States:

A. Mountain Trail Conflict Resolution Analysis. Examine other jurisdictions to understand how they accommodate mountain bicycling and the extent to which conflicts in use, particularly with regards to concerns about safety, have been realized and addressed. Lead Department: RAP, DPW. Objective: Identify strategies for reducing conflicts between multiple users. Schedule: 2011-2015

This work has been done. The State of California has a multiple use policy, the goal of which is to provide trails that serve the needs of the largest possible base of trail users, including bicyclists. California State Parks has developed a methodology for objectively evaluating a trail whenever a change in use is requested. Almost all of the requests for a trail change in use have been requests to allow bicycles on a particular trail. Of all the trails that have been evaluated so far under this process, all have been deemed suitable for the addition of bicycles, with some minor modifications to bring them up to the State's current multi-use standards.

Within the State's Programmatic Environmental Impact Report, available at http://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/795/files/V2_CSP_RTChginUse_Apps_Draft_10-5-12.pdf, the State conducted extensive research on trail user conflict. This can be found in Appendix C of the draft "Road and Trail Change In Use Evaluation Process." Within that document, trail use conflict is identified as an important social issue. However, the determination was that "**actual incidents, including those involving accidents, are relatively rare.**" Further, it is stated that conflicts are "very subjective and determined by individuals" and may be as trivial as disliking the presence of another user on the trail. No modifications to this appendix were adopted in the final PEIR.

Policy 3.3.7, Program B States:

B. Data Collection. Conduct user counts and employ other methods to evaluate demand for off-road facilities by user groups. Lead Department: RAP, DOT, DPW. Objective: Indicate level of use for different groups. Schedule: 2011-2015

We were troubled by this program provision when it was introduced in the Bike Plan. The vast majority of off-road cyclists are law-abiding, and would not knowingly ride on trails that were closed to them. To conduct user counts on existing City trails, where bikes are not allowed, would never be able to adequately evaluate demand for off-road facilities. The "other methods," aside from user counts, are

not described. While these data are an important component in determining need, to do so at the one location in the City of Los Angeles where mountain bikes are allowed, Mandeville Canyon fire road, would not give a true representation of demand across the entire city. To do so at other locations within the City would skew the results as bicycles are already prohibited. We would therefore encourage RAP to conduct such studies on neighboring trail systems, such as those in the Verdugo Mountains (Cities of Burbank and Glendale), the foothills of the Angeles National Forest, or the multiple-use trails of the Santa Monica Mountains, Palos Verdes, or Conejo Open Space. In all cases we are confident that cyclists comprise a significant portion of trail users, far outnumbering equestrian trail users.

Finally, Policy 3.3.7., Program C States:

C. Spillover and Conflict Analysis. Conduct a spillover analysis to determine the extent to which mountain bicycle use spills over onto trails where bicycling is prohibited. Identify locations where spillover is occurring and document nature and frequency of conflicts. Lead Department: RAP, DPW. Objective: Document encounters between multiple trail users, with particular attention to non-permitted mountain bicycle activity.

While we acknowledge that there are cyclists who ride bicycles on City trails that are closed to them, especially in the Northern San Fernando Valley and Western Verdugo Mountains, we are not aware of any reports of conflict or incidents on these trails. Indeed many of the cyclists on these trails are children and teens on BMX bikes who may not know or understand the rules, or others who may be scofflaws choosing to blatantly disregard the rules. These riders are not necessarily representative of the larger mountain biking community. Regardless we urge RAP to conduct the analysis as directed in this policy.

Within all the policies and programs noted above, RAP is identified as the lead agency. In all cases the Schedule is identified as 2011-2015. This leaves two years within which RAP can meet and fulfil these policy objectives in compliance with the 2010 Bike Plan.

We would therefore strongly urge RAP to allocate the necessary resources to complete these policy objectives by 2015, as directed within the 2010 Los Angeles Bicycle Plan, and to report on their progress to the Los Angeles Bicycle Advisory Committee.

Further we would like to see RAP **explore the possibility of providing off-road cycling facilities in the form of Bike Skills Parks.**

“Bike Skills Parks,” or “Bike Parks” are community facilities where cyclists of all ages, skill levels and backgrounds can ride their bikes in a controlled, fun, challenging and safe environment. They are similar in concept to a skateboard park, but have a much lower construction cost, and much broader community reach. Bike Skills Parks include man-made features that allow cyclists to improve their skills and fitness. They typically include a mix of natural surface (dirt and/or rock) and constructed/engineered features (typically wooden), in addition to trails and other facilities. Community bike parks can range in size from a

quarter acre pump track to upwards of 20 – 30 acres for a regional facility.

Features commonly found in bike parks are pump tracks, progressive dirt jumps, balance skills features, rock/technical skills features, flow trails, and trails. There are numerous variations and creative possibilities within these broad feature categories.

Benefits of a Bike Skills Park:

- Local businesses, land managers and families will benefit from the presence of a safe and sanctioned place to ride bicycles.
- Bike Parks encourage participation in outdoor recreation, with all the attending benefits of promoting health, fitness, and an active lifestyle.
- According to the latest Outdoor Recreation Foundation study, cycling is one of the top three favorite outdoor activities of children, and has grown by 3% from 2009 to 2012.
- Riders of all ages and skill levels can ride a bike park in a safe, positive, and exciting environment.
- Trail education, etiquette, and respect can be taught within the controlled environment of a bike park. This educational opportunity can help reduce conflict on all local trails.
- The local economy can benefit from an increase in business in nearby shops and restaurants.
- Bike parks make off-road cycling accessible to every member of our community.
- Younger riders will have a place to safely ride after school and during the summer.
- It can build a sense of community and stewardship for bike riders and volunteers.
- Such an environment is ideal for introductory skills classes, organized rides and technical riding clinics.
- Bike Park facilities can be used for supervised after school programs, summer programs and special events.
- Bike parks can become a regional attraction.
- There are currently no bike park facilities within Los Angeles City or County.

There are numerous bicycle industry grants available to fund Bike Skills Park projects. We would be happy and willing to discuss these matters, and especially Bike Parks which do not appear in the 2010 Bike Plan, in person.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Klausner
CORBA Board Member

Steve Messer
CORBA Vice President

Mark Langton
CORBA President

cc: Eric Garcetti, Mayor, City of Los Angeles
Tom Gibson, Landscape Architect, Department of Rec and Parks
Theresa Walker, Staff, Department of Rec and Parks
Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition
Patrick Kell, IMBA Southwest Regional Director

About CORBA: The Concerned Off-Road Bicyclists Association (CORBA) is an all-volunteer 501(c)(3) nonprofit, and a chapter of the International Mountain Bicyclists Association (IMBA). Formed in 1987, CORBA works with land managers and the off-road cycling community at large to foster off-road cycling as a healthy, sustainable outdoor recreation in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties. CORBA is dedicated to preserving open space, maintaining public access to public lands, and creating more trail opportunities for all to enjoy. CORBA works with California State Parks, National Park Service, National Forest Service, Mountains Recreation Conservation Authority, Conejo Open Space Agency, as well as other local City and County government agencies. Our Volunteer Trail Crew, Youth Adventures, Free Skills Clinics, CORBA Kids Club and other programs promote off-road cycling recreation, and the responsible use and stewardship of our trails and open spaces.