

GalleP

Comment on the Transportation Coordinating Committee's (TCC) Greater Bozeman Area Transportation Plan Update

The following are points we need to make:

- We'd like to call your attention to the City of Bozeman's Vision and Mission, which we couldn't help notice and admire on the wall at the city offices. For those of you who don't know it, the Vision is: **A diverse, attractive,** and sustainable community which **preserves our heritage** and respects the environment. The Mission is: **To preserve and enhance Bozeman's unique quality of life through innovative and responsible planning** and community development. We're asking that the TCC, or enough members of the TCC, be willing to stand up and practice these admirable ideals. If they are just words on a wall, that the TCC chooses to ignore, and not plan for a continued equestrian presence by making horse-travel safe, the TCC and its members will be choosing to be in direct contradiction of both the vision and mission of the city they are trying to serve. In fact, by not allowing equestrian access, you are seeking to **undermine** Bozeman's heritage, its diversity, its attractiveness and its unique quality of life, not to mention that it is in contradiction to responsible planning. The TCC will erase the experience of our history from the very ground on which we walk. A land use pattern is not an easy thing to undo and once put in motion its effects will last for generations.
- Equine enthusiasts hope the TCC lives up to its own goals and "respects and ensures the area's natural and historic context, and minimizes adverse impacts the environment and existing neighborhoods." Since the planning boundary for the Update includes areas currently and historically used by equine riders and drivers, they must be taken into consideration.
- For city/county governments NOT to plan for equestrian access to trails in equestrian neighborhoods is in direct contradiction to all the goals of the Plan: functionality, safety, variety, respect of historic context and existing neighborhoods, and its particular emphasis on non-motorized uses.
- Like most of the West, the Gallatin Valley was settled, cleared and farmed largely with the help of the horse. Indeed, the horse was so highly regarded in the partnership, that the county seal bears to this day, most significantly, the horse and cart. And like most of the West, the Gallatin Valley has seen enormous growth, especially in the last decade. Equestrian residents here in the Gallatin Valley think planners should consider not only the cultural heritage we represent but also that the equine industry represents a large part of this **growth** and is an important part of the Gallatin Valley economy. Note, for example, the recent investment in new large-animal veterinary clinics and the increased number of equestrian organizations with increasing memberships. According to the USDA the number of horses and ponies in the Gallatin Valley increased by 46% between 1997 and 2002. In Montana the increase is 32%. Nationally, the equine industry contributes more to the U.S. GDP annually (112 billion) than the motion picture industry, according to the American Horse Council. Well over seven million U.S. citizens participate in horse related activities, which is one in every 35 Americans.

- An enormous positive economic gain could be realized by restoring Bozeman to an equestrian-friendly community. Tens of millions of Americans participate as spectators at various equestrian events. For example, the steeplechase hunt cup that goes through Baltimore draws close to 8,000 spectators to its event every year.
- This plan can enhance, preserve or diminish the character and history of the valley. Not including equestrians diminishes the whole community by ignoring historical and on-going uses.
- The TCC could be helping to ensure the long-term vitality and character of the Greater Bozeman area by recognizing equestrian uses. The TCC could be mitigating growth impacts by providing safe rights of way for equestrian use. Doing so would help ensure that Bozeman remains one of the “last best places.” The TCC has the opportunity to do something distinguished and help prevent having an “Anytown, USA.”
- Equestrians who use their horses under saddle or harness and other residents have used the unpaved roads for over 100 years as their system of routes for safe non-motorized travel. As these roads become paved with no shoulder and no alternative, and traffic volumes and speeds increase, planners must be aware that these roads become dangerous places because of the close proximity of motorized and non-motorized users. Planning rights-of-way that accommodate equestrians and other non-motorized users safely would “minimize adverse impacts” of road “improvements.”
- Equestrians on the roads are frustrated at how uneducated motorists are about safely sharing the road. They are also frightened of how unsafe it is becoming to travel on the road as roads are paved with no shoulder, and vehicle volumes and speeds rise. Simple signage, public policy and allowed use of bike lanes could go a long way to mitigating these hazardous situations.
- Equestrians would like to see the plan for the greater Bozeman Area include a variety of travel options allowing safe travel, and have the plan support safe passage within and between our neighborhoods.
- We’re not asking for much: some minor text additions and a map labeled “routes allowing equestrian access.” We’re not asking public agencies to build anything for us or incur additional expenses.
- This plan should be consistent with the PROST plan, which will soon recognize equestrian users of specific routes in the greater Bozeman area, and will include them on an equestrian route map.
- The city/county needs a forward-looking plan that can serve the needs of all residents and all types of non-motorized users.
- The TCC has asserted that equestrian use is recreational and not transportation, therefore has no place in the transportation plan...How can you know what percent of pedestrians and bikers will be using the plan’s designated lanes or trails for either function. Is going to get a cup of coffee or visit a friend recreation or transportation? – How about when you ride your horse to your lesson or to an event at a nearby stables? If you load them in a horse trailer and use petrochemicals instead to get there, is that recreation or transportation? Do we make these distinctions with bike users and pedestrians?
- There are many trips that equestrians would take if they could do so safely by horseback or harness rather than by car, which is one of the plan’s “complete-streets” goals: reducing “vehicle miles traveled”.

- The national “complete streets” policy movement makes no distinction between recreation and transportation, because they know that roads and trails will be used for both purposes, which is a gain for the communities they serve, not a problem or a means for excluding uses.
- Equestrians are current transportation system users in the more rural areas within the Transportation Plan Update boundary. Planners’ refusal to acknowledge this will mean the end of an era and a way of life for these residents. Many property owners close to Bozeman have small acreages and have spent years cultivating them. We don’t want to move. We feel these are an integral part of the character of the area – it’s one of the characteristics of our landscape that people value.
- We want community planners to recognize our contribution to the cultural history of the valley and not force us to leave. We want mitigation of the impacts of growth, simply by allowing us access to trails the TCC already has planned.
- Equestrian users are only seeking designation as legitimate “NON-MOTORIZED” USERS of the transportation system.
- The Equestrian community is not asking for city/county governments to build special facilities such as separate trails with fences and wood chips and we are not asking for special consideration. We recognize the difficult tasks you have and we have modified our requests accordingly. We want the TCC to consider our presence with an eye to safety, and to reinforce the Transportation Plan’s own goal of encouraging non-motorized use.
- The TCC already has, with Alta Design, all the resources and expertise it needs to incorporate what equestrians are looking for.
- This summer during the County Fair we hosted a ride into town that went through Sundance Springs and the Gallagator trail to the library, and across Main Street to the Fairgrounds. We enjoyed the fair and rode home again. We had to jump through a lot of hoops to make this ride happen. We had to get special permission to use the trails, almost had to get a parade permit and a police escort to do this ride. And what was the outcome of using the most congested trail in town? Plenty of bike/pedestrian encounters, but with no safety issues whatsoever, and the verbal comments from OTHER traditional users were all enthusiastic, such as: “wow, horses,” “it’s so great to see you guys,” “we hardly get to see any horses anymore,” “keep it up!”