

Safe Bicycle and Pedestrian Transport Committee Meeting Minutes
April 3, 2026 – 7:30 a.m.
Village Hall

The Safe Bicycle and Pedestrian Transport Committee met on April 3, 2026, at Village Hall. Chairman Chris Bell called the meeting to order and confirmed attendance, which included Council Members Mary Rensel and Ruth Cavanagh, Phyllis Marino, John Buda, and Police Chief Rizzo.

The meeting began with a review of the prior meeting minutes. A minor correction was noted regarding the spelling of Steve Latkovic's name. With that amendment, a motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Bell then noted that, due to recent changes in village processes, new committee members would benefit from an overview of Sunshine Laws. He indicated that the fiscal officer would provide guidance on communication rules and requirements to ensure compliance going forward.

Discussion of Potential Levy

The committee reviewed information regarding a potential property tax levy to fund pedestrian and bicycle improvements. The estimated cost was presented as approximately \$28 annually per \$100,000 of property value, or 0.81 mills, over a five-year period. Members discussed how this compares to existing levies and noted that newer levies are based on current property values, whereas older levies may not reflect updated valuations unless replaced.

There was concern about how an additional levy might compete with other potential funding needs, such as police, road, or future fire levies. Committee members expressed hesitation about advancing a ballot issue without first gauging public support and ensuring clear communication of the proposal.

Historical Study and Prior Planning Efforts

The committee discussed a previously completed 2010 Alternative Transportation Study (CF RATS), which explored trail connections between South Russell and surrounding communities. This study included detailed mapping of right-of-way widths, potential trail routes, and estimated maintenance costs ranging from \$15,000 to \$25,000 annually (in 2010 dollars).

Members noted that the study also identified challenges, including property access issues—particularly with private property owners such as the Whitetail Homeowners Association—and varying right-of-way widths along Bell Road. Despite these challenges, the study was described as comprehensive and potentially useful for current planning efforts.

Trail vs. Roadway Options

A significant portion of the discussion focused on evaluating different approaches to improving pedestrian and bicycle safety along Bell Road. Three primary options emerged:

1. **Re-striping (Road Diet):** Narrowing existing vehicle lanes through striping adjustments to create space for non-vehicle use.
2. **Road Widening:** Expanding the paved roadway to accommodate a designated non-automotive lane.
3. **Separate Multi-Use Trail:** Constructing a dedicated path off the roadway for pedestrians and cyclists.

Committee members discussed the advantages and limitations of each option. A separate trail was generally viewed as the safest alternative but also the most expensive and complex. Road widening raised concerns about cost, physical constraints (such as bridges and narrow sections), and potential impacts on adjacent properties. Re-striping was considered the simplest and most immediate option but may not significantly increase usage or perceived safety.

Chief Rizzo emphasized that any improvement would enhance safety relative to current conditions. However, he also highlighted the importance of clearly defining the intended primary users—pedestrians, cyclists, or both—as this would influence design decisions and safety considerations.

Public Engagement and Communication Strategy

The committee agreed that public engagement would be critical before pursuing a levy or finalizing plans. While a quick survey using the village's communication system was suggested, members concluded that it would be premature without first presenting a clear and well-developed plan.

Instead, the committee discussed developing a communication strategy that could include:

- Visual concepts or sketches of proposed options
- Public meetings or informal information sessions
- Website materials explaining the vision and constraints
- Opportunities for residents to ask questions and provide feedback

The goal would be to ensure residents understand both the need for improvements and the available options before being asked to support funding.

Engineering and Feasibility Questions

Several technical questions were identified as necessary next steps, including:

- Whether Bell Road can be further widened within existing right-of-way
- Minimum allowable roadway widths and potential lane reductions
- Costs associated with widening, re-striping, or constructing a separate trail
- Feasibility of shifting roadway alignment to create additional space

- Constraints imposed by ODOT or grant funding requirements

The committee agreed to consult with the village engineer and potentially other experts to obtain answers and cost estimates.

Funding Considerations

In addition to the proposed levy, the committee discussed alternative funding sources, including federal, state, and local grants identified in the earlier study. The Geauga Parks Foundation was highlighted as a potential partner, given its history of supporting trail projects, although such funding would require lead time and likely some local financial commitment.

There was also discussion about whether reliance on grant funding (e.g., NOACA/ODOT) might impose constraints that limit flexibility or increase costs, prompting consideration of whether locally funded solutions could sometimes be more efficient.

Additional Updates

Chief Rizzo provided an update on traffic calming efforts, noting that an additional speed feedback sign (“speed box”) had been ordered for installation near the park. He also described plans for a public-facing online portal that would allow residents to view traffic data, including vehicle counts and average speeds, at various locations throughout the village.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The committee concluded that additional analysis and planning are required before moving forward with a levy or public outreach. Immediate next steps include:

- Consulting with engineers regarding feasibility and costs
- Reviewing prior study materials and sharing them with relevant stakeholders
- Developing clearer conceptual options and visuals
- Creating a comprehensive communication plan

With no further business, a motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting at approximately 8:18 a.m. The motion passed unanimously.