UM hopes to make campus more bike-friendly

Officials present study, plan to council

by David Hill | Staff Writer

There could be more bikes and fewer cars on the University of Maryland, College Park, campus in coming years if school transportation officials have their way.

During the College Park work session Tuesday, representatives from the university and Hyattsville-based Toole Design Group outlined their plan to boost on-campus bike ridership.

The preliminary plan, the result of an eight-month study, calls for a three-year campaign of advertising and renovations to encourage bike riders.

A university survey found that 5 percent of respondents rode their bikes on campus. J. David Allen, director of the university's Department of Transportation Services, said he'd like to get that number up to 9 percent.

The campaign would address the many obstacles — too few curb ramps and marked bike lanes, narrow trails and a lack of parking — that hinder on-campus riders.

"There are these little things that will discourage people from biking," Allen said. "We want to eliminate as many of these things as possible."

The university hopes to have the same success it had with its public transportation campaign, which in five years increased annual shuttle ridership from 1 million to 2.5 million.

"We think we've done a pretty decent job of getting that change in philosophy going," Allen said. "We're just kind of getting started in the bike world."

While the $1.12 million plan calls for a three-year timeframe to implement new bike paths and parking facilities, Allen said it could likely be stretched over as many as six years. "There really isn't any way the university is going to put in $1 million over three years," he said.

The campaign will begin this summer with low-cost measures such as adding bike racks and signs asking motorists to "Share the Road" with bike riders.

The College Park City Council and Mayor Stephen Brayman were pleased. Councilwoman Stephanie Stullich (Dist. 3), an avid bike rider, called the plan "very comprehensive and forward-thinking."

The council suggested the university also look for ways to make biking more pleasant in
the surrounding city.

"I think you're not casting your net wide enough," said Councilman Robert Catlin (Dist. 2).

Allen said that although he only has authority over on-campus projects, he'd be open to collaboration between the university, government and local businesses.

"We're very excited to work on this project," said Dan Goodman, senior planner for Toole Design Group. "With a lot of the programs we're recommending, there's a lot of opportunity for partnership."