

'Complete streets' plan envisioned for Sewickley Valley

By LARISSA DUDKIEWICZ, [Tribe LIVE](#)

January 27, 2016 SEWICKLEY, PA — Glen Osborne resident John Orndorff envisions a time when cars, pedestrians and bicycles can safely share Sewickley Valley roads.

Whether local municipalities decide to adopt a complete streets plan remains to be seen. Through the plan, Orndorff and the Beaver County-based Ohio River Trail Council want to build a coalition of nine communities along the Ohio River to guide municipalities in implementing an expanded vision of road use. So-called complete streets plans are being adopted in communities nationwide, offering shared use of roads to vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians, Orndorff said.

Having a multi-municipal effort means having consistency in signs, lane markings and other features, he said.

“If a cyclist traveling down the road through Sewickley enters Edgeworth and there's ... new signs and lane markings that aren't consistent with those in Sewickley, that doesn't work very well,” Orndorff said.

Orndorff said he has visited area municipalities, presenting an engineering study released this month by the Ohio River Trail Council for a bike trail that would connect from Coraopolis to Monaca and cross the Sewickley Bridge from Moon into Sewickley.

He wants to see leaders of Glen Osborne, Sewickley, Edgeworth, Leetsdale, Ambridge, Moon, Coraopolis, Harmony and Baden work together on the project.

In most cases, Pennsylvania's streets are designed primarily for vehicles and using streets for alternative forms of transportation — pedestrians, runners, bicyclists — can impede motor vehicle traffic, he said.

“What I see needed here is an expanded vision of what transportation should be in our communities,” Orndorff said. “Without an expanded vision, the whole concept of an Ohio River Trail becomes meaningless.”

More than 720 regional and local agencies in 30 states have adopted complete streets policies.

Last April, Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto issued a complete streets executive order requiring transportation planners, engineers and other employees to think about all users of the public rights of way as they work on projects.

Eric Boerer, advocacy director for Bike Pittsburgh, said the city's approach to complete streets has resulted in a design for years to come.

“It's more of a philosophy or a tool,” he said. “It's definitely a national movement.”

Boerer described complete streets plans as a way to reclaim public spaces for all users. For at least the last 50 years, streets have been oriented to move cars as fast as possible, he said.

“Complete streets sort of flips that script a little bit and recognizes that there are a lot of people who are not driving around,” Boerer said. “Or even if they are driving, they're still walking.

That doesn't mean every street needs to be for every user — it's a matter of thinking the design through, he said.

Lower Allegheny River Valley communities including Aspinwall, Sharpsburg, Fox Chapel and Blawnox also are working to develop a similar design for roads in those municipalities, he said.

In December, Pittsburgh hosted a public meeting outlining the next steps for a complete streets plan, which city planners are working to incorporate into an ordinance.

“If a new developer comes in and puts a street in, they can't make it for just one use,” Boerer said. “They have to think through all of the options like walking, biking and transit as they are putting their development in.”

Edgeworth Councilman David Aloe raised concerns about encouraging more bicyclists on Beaver Road, citing state law requiring vehicles to remain several feet away from bicyclists.

“Pennsylvania wasn't built for bike traffic,” he said. “The roads were built for cars.”

Orndorff said he knows it might be hard for some people to imagine multiple uses for roads.

“It is hard when we've grown up with this motor vehicle focus to have an expanded vision,” Orndorff said. “It is difficult. But it's time for us to rethink that.”

Orndorff made a similar presentation to Sewickley officials and plans to take it to the other communities. In Sewickley, borough leaders have raised concerns about bike lanes crossing busy Route 65 and eliminating needed parking on Beaver Street in the commercial district.

Beyond saying borough staff and council will review Orndorff's plan, Sewickley Council President Susan Aleshire did not comment on what she thought of a complete streets proposal for Sewickley Valley.

Sewickley Manager Kevin Flannery said he expects to have a recommendation to borough council in two months.

“I know that we will also want to find out how all the neighboring municipalities feel about it since it really covers more than one municipality,” he said.

Orndorff said he hopes to get at least five or six municipalities to sign onto a multi-municipal agreement and is asking each to give \$500 toward an introductory workshop. Member communities also would be responsible for covering the cost of a solicitor, engineer or public safety provider and to develop a “Complete Streets” policy resolution.

Orndorff said he doesn't expect any municipality to contribute anything unless at least three sign on.

“I'm willing to wait years to get this idea across because without that idea ... we're sort of not going to go anywhere,” Orndorff said.

Source:

http://www.membership.ohiorivertrail.org/administrator/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&layout=edit&id=287