

December 18, 2009

Jordann Turner
200 N. Spring St. Rm. 721
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: LA Bicycle Plan (2009 Draft)

Dear Mr. Turner,

CORBA, the Concerned Off-Road Bicycle Association has been representing Mountain Bikers in Southern California since 1987. CORBA has worked with numerous land managers on trail development, access for off-road cyclists, and has several ongoing partnerships for volunteer trail maintenance and trail development. CORBA runs a youth program, free beginner off-road cycling workshops, and other educational and outreach programs.

Let us first acknowledge the efforts being made by the city to re-vamp it's outdated 1996 bicycle plan. It is a vast undertaking that is well overdue.

Even though nothing from the 1996 plan was ever implemented, at the time it was a step forward, acknowledging the needs for a growing population of off-road cyclists. In 2009 a flawed process failed to reach consensus on how to proceed with implementing those recommendations. Unfortunately the current 2009 draft plan is a step backwards for off-road cycling at a time when mountain biking continues to see phenomenal growth, has been accepted as an Olympic sport and now boasts a National Scholastic Mountain Bike League for high school teams.

At a time when sedentary lifestyles are causing a decline in overall public health, all forms of exercise should be encouraged. Off-road bicycling—including mountain biking, cyclocross and BMX—is a legitimate, health-promoting, sustainable activity that should be encouraged and welcomed in the City of Los Angeles.

The following are our recommendations concerning the current draft plan:

1) Retain the recommendations from the 1996 draft plan. The mountain biking population has grown since 1996 and there is more demand than ever for off-road cycling opportunities in Los Angeles. The 1996 plan identified this need and proposed new opportunities be found for

mountain bike riders on City of Los Angeles properties. As Chapter 3 notes, resources are limited. The goal to systematically develop mountain bike opportunities should be a part of the plan. The recommendation for new trails needs to stay in the current draft plan.

2) Chapter 3, the Off-Road Cycling components of the bicycle plan. There has been much attention drawn to Chapter 3 by a vocal anti-mountain bike lobby, calling for its removal from the draft Bicycle Plan. To be a true bicycle-friendly city, Los Angeles must embrace all forms of cycling. It is well understood in transportation planning that transportation and recreation are not distinct, separate categories for cyclists or drivers. Today's BMX-riding teen could be tomorrow's bicycle commuter; a teen who has a place to ride a bike has a place to exercise. Studies by the Outdoor Recreation Association reveal that making exercise fun is the biggest motivating factor we can offer our children. The unstructured play element of off-road cycling entices kids to explore our natural areas. The bike handling skills learned off-road lead to more competent and confident cyclists. As a "Master Bicycle Plan" this document must encompass all aspects of cycling. Furthermore, some cyclists will use park trails in combination with road routes to get to their destinations. There are bicycle commuters who use off road trails on their way to work or home. Families may ride to and through neighborhood parks. Mountain cycling is transportation.

3) Lift the city-wide ban on off-road bicycles on trails in City parks. Section 86.04 of the Municipal Code prohibits bicycles on any trails. Section 63.44.16 prohibits bicycles, except on "paths roads or drives designed and provided for such purposes." Further, MC Section 12.04.05 (Open Space Zone) specifically allows for bicycle trails within open space zones. These seemingly contradictory codes are subject to interpretation. They are currently interpreted as a city-wide ban on bicycles in parks. Having a city-wide ban on bicycles on park trails fails to take into consideration the differing demographics and needs of nearby residents of each individual park or open space. It sends an exclusionary message, disenfranchising the large and growing population of off-road cyclists. This ban effectively reduces opportunities for safe, healthy exercise, especially for non-driving children and adults. It even criminalizes a small child with training wheels learning to ride a bicycle in a park. A better policy for Los Angeles is "bicycles are allowed on trails which are designated open to bicycles."

4) Allow bicycles in parks that do not have a management plan that specifically excludes off-road cycling. O'Melveny Park, Aliso Canyon, Limekiln Canyon, Moonshine Canyon, Mission Trail, Serrania Park, Wilacre Park, and other areas are being used on a daily basis by local bicyclists, adults and youth, who are unaware they are not welcome, and who do not seem to have any issues with other trail users. We should be encouraging people to be out riding bikes and getting exercise. Some of the aforementioned parks do not have management plans, or may have management plans that do not specifically exclude bicycle use. Trails in parks that meet one of these two criteria should be opened to bicycles immediately.

5) Give Section 3.3.1.5 specific directives. Section 3.3.1.5 of the current draft plan outlines an ambitious plan to inventory trails, study usage patterns, research other land management agencies experiences, etc, with the goal of developing a mountain biking plan. While we support the idea, this section needs to have specific target dates for the completion of each step, and designated City departments to handle each aspect of the process. It needs to direct the City to

utilize existing research from other land managers and NGO's to speed up the process. Given the City's past track record, without specific directives it is doubtful that this section would lead to any improvement in access for off-road cycling over the life of the plan. The City's inability to complete the 3.3.1.5 plan should not impede the other recommendations made in this letter.

6) Develop a trail inventory and trail system map for the City of Los Angeles open spaces.

This is a provision of the current draft under section 3.3.1.5, and is a necessary tool for the city to begin the process of managing its trails and parks for all users, including mountain bikers. Most trails in City of LA Parks are actually dirt service roads. They are wide and most have good sightlines. There is ample room and opportunity for shared multi-use trails in many of the City's Parks, and an accurate inventory of existing trails will be needed to identify those opportunities.

7) Remove or correct false and misleading statements made in appendix H. Many false and misleading statements were made during mediation hearings by a vocal anti-mountain biking lobby. There are unsubstantiated claims about mountain bikers and mountain bike advocacy groups in this appendix and in the public comments. At the very least, the comments in Appendix H should be contextualized to indicate they were made by individuals within the mediation process, and are not official policy or factual. They reflect a difference of opinions, and have not been verified by the planning team.

For example: The assertion that the "City did buy Mandeville Canyon as a pilot program. [for mountain biking]" is false and misleading. The facts are that the Mandeville Canyon homeowners association pressured the city to buy the property to prevent further development. See the attached letter from the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy for further details.

8) Identify opportunities for designated bike parks. Bike Parks are becoming more and more popular in municipalities across the country and around the world as cities try to encourage the younger generations to exercise. In areas where trail options do not exist, designated Bike Parks provide off-road cycling opportunities that do not have any conflict with other trail user groups. Examples can be found in Seattle, New York, Boulder and Fresno, and have proven extremely popular and successful. Urban bike parks that can range in size from 2 to 10 or more acres operate in a similar fashion and with similar liability concerns as Skateboard parks, of which the City already has several. They can be constructed on marginal land, and be an inexpensive way to revitalize otherwise undesirable property. Bike Parks provide ideal locations for kids to hone their bike-handling skills and get exercise. Dirt parks, accommodating both BMX and Mountain Bikes, can be constructed easily and inexpensively in cooperation with local advocacy groups, clubs, and volunteer efforts. The Master Bike Plan should include language acknowledging the role that Bike Parks can play as a means to accommodate riders of all ages who do not or cannot travel to trails outside the City limits, and further, should recommend Bike Parks be considered by the Parks and Recreation Department.

9) View Green Spaces as potential alternate travel corridors. In other jurisdictions where open space with multi-use trails exist, these can become alternate travel and commuting routes. Here in Los Angeles a commuter from the north Valley may choose to ride one of the canyon parks on his way south, for example. Currently off-road routes through the Santa Monica

Mountains can and are being used for commutes between the Valley and the West Side. Again, there should no distinction between transport and recreation.

10) Reduce motorized travel. Most mountain bikers who live in the City of Los Angeles must load up their bicycle and drive to a multi-use trail outside the city limits. This adds to traffic and congestion. The number of vehicular trips to trailheads would be reduced if there were more local opportunities available. Additionally, safe and bicycle-friendly routes need to be established to trailheads to encourage car-less trips. This is in accordance with the overall goals of the bike plan.

The City is under pressure from groups who would like to maintain the status quo with regards to off-road cycling. Their staunch opposition has derailed attempts to move the process forward. We urge the City to remain focused on the project at hand: developing a Master Bike Plan that embraces cycling in all its forms and establishes a vision for safe, sustainable mountain bike travel and recreation in City parks.

We look forward to partnering with the City to develop that vision and bring it to fruition.

Sincerely,

Board of Directors
CORBA

Attached: Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy letter regarding Mandeville Canyon

CC: **Michelle Mowery** *L.A. D.O.T. Senior Bicycle Coordinator*
Matt Benjamin *ALTA Planning & Design*
Bill Rosendahl *11th District; Transportation Committee Chair*
Ed Reyes *1st District; Planning and Land Use Management Committee Chair*
Tom LaBonge *4th District; Arts Parks Health & Aging Committee Chair*
Jon Kirk Mukri *Recreation and Parks Department General Manager*
Barry A. Sanders *Recreation and Parks Commission President*
Luis A. Sanchez *Recreation and Parks Commission Vice President*
Johnathan Williams *Recreation and Parks Commission Member*
Judith Valles *Recreation and Parks Commission Member*
W. Jerome Stanley *Recreation and Parks Commission Member*
Jen Klausner *Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition Chair*
Alex Baum *Los Angeles Bicycle Advisory Committee Chair Emeritus*