

Race and Equity Pocket Questions

Title and purpose of this initiative: The purpose of this agenda item is to authorize a contract for installation of bicycle detection systems at four intersections, three in downtown (Weaver/Greensboro, Main/Greensboro, Main/Roberson) and one at West Poplar and NC 54

Department: Planning and Public Works

What are the racial and equity impacts? Bike loop detection involves the use of a light-weight conductive loop embedded in the pavement to advance the light cycle at a traffic signal, thereby allowing a person on a bicycle to advance through an intersection more quickly. BIPOC populations may face barriers to accessing reliable transportation and could use bicycles as a primary form of transportation. It is much safer for people on bicycles to travel with the green light than to proceed through an intersection against the light. The locations for the bike loop detectors include heavily trafficked areas in the downtown and at a key crossing point along NC 54 in the vicinity of the Chateau Apartments, West End Flats Apartments and Carolina Springs Senior Apartments.

Who is or will experience community burden? Businesses in close proximity to the signals may experience noise and inconveniences during construction. There may be temporary closures at some of the intersections for a few hours at a time, and staff will have to alert transit services. Traffic control will also be needed during the modification to the traffic signal cabinets. Bike loop detectors do not affect vehicular use; however, the use of bicycle detectors may cause minor delays for people driving cars, as the light signal advances for cyclists. This burden would affect all residents.

Who is or will experience community benefit? Signals will significantly improve the safety at the downtown locations and at the NC 54 crossing at West Poplar Street. Over the years, the Carrboro Police Department has monitored people on bicycles entering intersections against the light cycle as part of the Town's participation in the Watch for Me NC program. People on bicycles are considered vehicles and are legally required to follow traffic signals. The use of bicycle detection reduces the delay for a signal to change for cyclists, creating a more complete multimodal network.

What are the root causes of inequity? Working individuals and families may find it difficult to attend public meetings when transportation projects are discussed. Structural racism in government decisions, particularly those relating to transportation, as well as residents' personal experiences with government, can further contribute to a reticence by historically marginalized people to speak in a public setting. Some community members, especially those who are historically marginalized may not be aware of the project and other projects the town is undertaking.

What might be the unintended consequences of this action or strategy? The installation of bike loop detection does not eliminate the possibility of a safety hazard at the crossing point. People on bicycles will need to remain alert and need to wait for the signal to change before entering an intersection. Pedestrians will also need to pay attention, as the presence of a bicycle may adjust the timing of the light cycle. It is possible that some people on bikes, may become overly confident that all drivers and pedestrians will stop and enter into the intersection before it is safe. Cyclists will need position their bikes on the loops within the vehicular travel lane to activate the detectors, and this may feel uncomfortable for some riders.

How is your department planning to mitigate any burdens, inequities, and unintended consequences? The Town could arrange for a ribbon cutting event with a demonstration of how to use the new signals. Written materials in English and Spanish with images of the bicycle detector loops and procedure for activating the traffic signals could be posted on apartment bulletin boards and shared via management. As funding becomes available, the Town will seek other opportunities to collaborate with NCDOT and the Town of Chapel Hill to install additional bicycle loop detectors as part of other road improvement projects.