



Share the Road

Bike lanes are not the only solution for a town like Morgantown. ➔

No matter how many bicycles we see on the rail-trails, there are never more than a few brave riders on the streets. It feels like Morgantown's bike culture is fully formed and ready to bust out—if only people felt safe.

"I'd like to see it unnecessary to use your car for most daily life—say, most trips of three miles or less," says cyclist Marc Glass. "But we've made it very difficult to go more than a very short distance from our houses without using a car." A longtime, avid rider who commutes about a mile every day from his home in Westover to his job in downtown Morgantown, Marc says the ride can be dangerous. "When you ride to the right and there's no designated bike lane, a lot of times cars will stay in your lane with you. They'll get closer to you than they would any fixed object or any car—it's not uncommon for them to drive so close you could reach out and touch their car. It's very threatening," Marc says. "The way I get

around that is to move into the lane," he says—a personal choice he says every rider has to make. "Drivers can still pass, but they have to make the decision, 'Am I willing to take the risk of going into the oncoming lane?' like they would with any other vehicle."

It seems impossible to make Morgantown's streets safe for cyclists: There simply isn't room for dedicated bike lanes. But Chip Wamsley, owner of Wamsley Cycles and a member of the Morgantown Bicycle Board, doesn't see that as a problem. "Dedicated bike lanes are in some ways more dangerous than riding in the lane, anyway," Chip says. He cites, for example, the problems cyclists have when cars turn right directly in front of them—"probably the largest cause of bicycle injuries in the country."

A different solution for cyclists that's being used in other places that have narrow streets like Morgantown's is "sharrows"—a word that combines "share" and "arrow," and a more formal implementation of Marc's choice to ride in the traffic

lane. "Sharrows are a marking like upside down 'V's and a bicycle icon painted in center of the traffic lane, accompanied by a sign that says 'Bicycles use the full lane,'" Chip explains. "By law, bicycles have the same rights as cars. But this is a reminder to cyclists that this is a road we think is good for cycling, and a reminder for motorists that bikes can be in the road." The Bicycle Board has been in conversation with the state Department of Transportation about sharrows for several years, Chip says, and recently applied for a federal grant to help pay the cost of establishing sharrows in town.

The Bicycle Board also likes asymmetrical solutions, where they make the most sense. "Bicycles can't go up hills as quickly as cars, but they can descend as quickly as or more quickly than cars," Chip says. "So, for example, we've proposed a climbing lane going up the big hill on Mon Boulevard, up to Evansdale Drive and Patteson Drive. It would be marked and cleaned and dedicated as a bike path, and would keep bicycles out

of the way of faster traffic. On the downhill side, we would have signs saying bikes can use the full lane, and use sharrows."

Another way to make it easier for cyclists to get around town would be more bike-safe connections between neighborhoods, destinations like shopping centers, and the rail-trails. "There are a lot of places where traffic is really, really bad and there's just no way to fit bikes," Chip says. "We've looked at some ideas for getting people to the rail-trail safely—and once they get there, they can use it for their commute to work or school. Having more connectors onto and off the rail-trails would be huge."

A Bicycle Plan adopted this spring by the Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) as part of its 2013-2040 Long Range Transportation Plan includes all of these ideas. "Bicycles are an integral part of the area's future transportation network," says MPO Executive Director Bill Austin. "We incorporated recommendations from a plan the Morgantown Bicycle Board created and we identified the major routes and the types of improvements that need to be made. And we looked to do it in a cost-effective manner—there are a lot of fine-tuning details you can do to the existing road network that would make it a lot more cycling-friendly." The top five priorities on the list include climbing lanes, sharrows, and improved shoulders, and could be done for under \$100,000, Bill says. "We'll be meeting with the local Department of Transportation district to get those implemented as quickly as we can."

written by PAM KASEY
photographed by ELIZABETH ROTH

TOP FIVE PRIORITY PROJECTS in the Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization's Bicycle Plan:

Mon Blvd. from Boyers Ave. to Patteson Drive—bicycle climbing lane

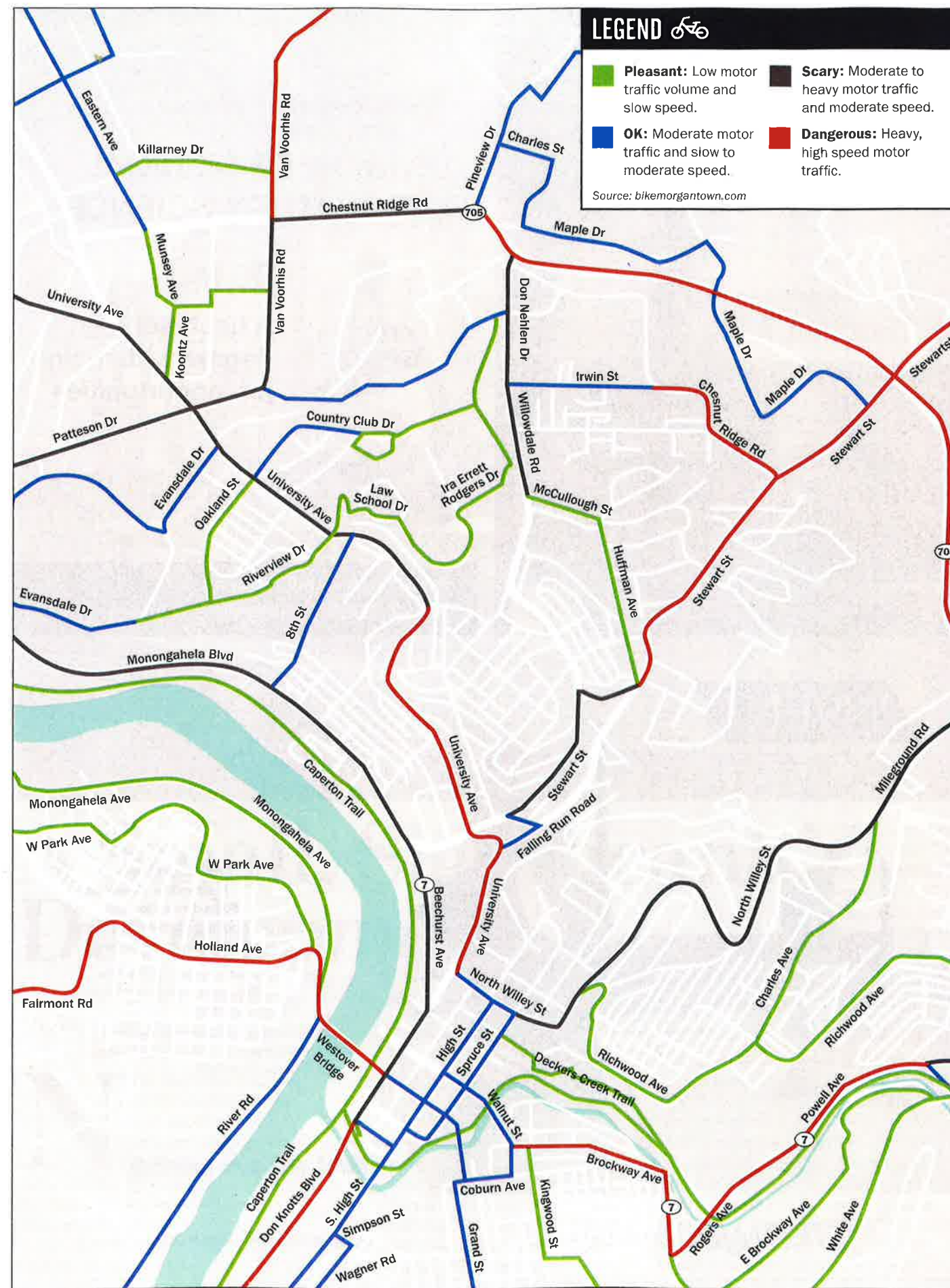
Mon Blvd. from 8th St. to Patteson Drive—bicycle climbing lane

Rail-trail connection to White Park and Greenbag Road—access improvement, paved shoulders

University Ave. from Riverview Drive to Campus Drive—marked shared lane

Van Voorhis Road from WV 705 to West Run Road—marked shared lane

Source: plantogether.com

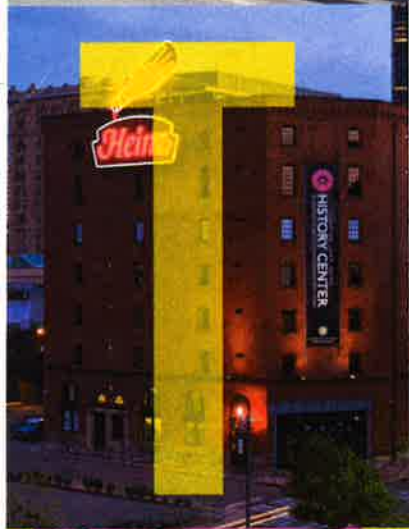


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