As the newly elected chair of Morgantown’s Municipal Bicycle Board, I want to commend the DA staff for your March 9th editorial “Becoming bicycle-friendly in W.Va.” The widespread desire for increased cycling infrastructure in our area coupled with Morgantown’s unique environment present unique challenges for our community. The $1.1 million grant for Charleston will go a long way to promoting cycling and should be celebrated accordingly.

I would like to call attention to our Bicycle Board, a municipal advisory board dating to the late 1990’s. With voting representatives from every city ward and greater Morgantown – as well as ex-officio members in every transportation related department within the municipal government – we are uniquely positioned to advocate for and implement facilities which promote cycling in our city.

Indeed, representatives from our board are regularly invited to speak at both state and national conferences on their experiences in promoting cycling. For example, our direct consultation with state policymakers led to the 2015 repeal of the requirement for cyclists to “ride as far to the right as practicable” on roadways throughout W.Va. We firmly believe cyclists fare best when treated as a part of, and not separate from, other traffic. This new affirmation of cyclists as equal to motorists is particularly beneficial for cyclists in Morgantown. As was mentioned in your editorial, the narrow built environment in our town typically prevents the installation of dedicated facilities such as bike lanes on the majority of city roads.

In 2012, after a multi-year effort with stakeholders throughout the area, Morgantown was listed as West Virginia’s first (and currently only) bicycle-friendly community as defined by the League of American Bicyclists. The League is the national governing body of such designations and was founded in 1880. The application process takes many months and is independently vetted by local reviewers on a number of criteria – the bulk of which hinge on proving that a city dedicates resources to improving cycling not only as a recreational activity but also logical, safe, and accessible mode of transportation.

Working to defend this title within our unique topographical confines, our board helps Morgantown apply for and receive a number of grants aimed at improving accommodations for cyclists in the area. This spring and early summer will witness the installation of covered bicycle racks at many bus stops as well as a network of on-street lane markings and signage specifically designed to better communicate the updated cycling laws. We currently seek funding for a nearly 3 mile long multi-use path and bike lanes to serve the growing number of residents east of WV705 through the federal Transportation Alternatives Program.

The enthusiasm in our local planning and engineering departments as well as our champions on city council lead me to find Morgantown one of the most bicycle-friendly places I’ve ever lived. Our history demonstrates a creativity with limited resources and a dedication to improving the environment for all transportation users. We should be proud of our designation as a bicycle friendly community.

We value and solicit any input regarding needs and desires for Morgantown’s cycling community and would like to invite you to our monthly, public meetings. They are held every first Thursday from 6:30-8:30pm in the Public Safety Building on Spruce Street. Our next is on April 7th – we hope to see you there!

Sincerely,

John “Drew” Gatlin

Chair, Morgantown Municipal Bicycle Board

Student, WVU – Civil and Environmental Engineering