

IT'S TIME FOR A NATIONAL BIKE PLAN

A strategy to slash bicyclist fatalities and increase mode share

BY ANDY CLARKE

America needs a new National Bike Plan. Bicycling is on the rise across the country and the opportunity to realize the remarkable potential of the bike to solve numerous complex problems is within our grasp.

Cities are seeing annual double-digit percentage increases in cycling. Mayors and business leaders understand that a bike-friendly community is essential to attract talented and creative people and they are backing new infrastructure, education programs, bike-sharing systems, and all manner of rides and events to entice people back on to their bikes. Meanwhile the need for increased levels of bicycling has never been greater as we face the dramatic public health crisis of obesity and costly environmental consequences of climate change.

American cities are expecting to add up to 100 million inhabitants over the next 30-40 years — and simply cannot do so with the same reliance on single-occupant car travel as today. Imagine the parking issues!

We've been here before, of course. The 1973-74 oil crisis ushered in a new era of bicycling and in 1978 President Carter adopted a "Bicycle Transportation for Energy Conservation" plan, which envisaged a dramatic increase in bicycle travel to save energy — but the plan went nowhere.

Then, in 1994, the National Bicycling and Walking Study was released with the goal of doubling non-motorized trips and cutting crashes involving the most vulnerable road users by 10 percent. This time, the safety goals have been met and usage has definitely increased — but we still haven't hit those targets. We're not even close.

Perhaps the third time is the charm. Af-

ter all, we know what to do to get more people riding and we know how to make bicycling safer. Now we just have to make it happen. A new National Bike Plan is needed to cut fatal bike crashes by half and increase bike travel to 5 percent of all trips by 2025.

TOP 10 REASONS WE NEED A NATIONAL BIKE PLAN

1» The blueprint for creating a Bicycle Friendly Community includes having a current bike plan that is being funded, implemented and evaluated — the same need is there for the nation.

2» Peer nations — our economic competitors — have a plan for bicycling. France, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Germany, have all adopted bike strategies in

NATIONAL BICYCLING AND WALKING STUDY

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One simple sentence in the 1991 Transportation Appropriations bill authorized the U.S. Department of Transportation to complete a report on bicycle safety and use in the United States. The task was assigned to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and, over the course of the next two years, the agency documented the state of bicycling and walking in the early 1990s through 24 case study reports.

The final report, which was delivered to Congress at the start of National Bike Month in 1994, set two overarching goals: doubling the percentage of trips made by foot and bike, while simultaneously reducing fatalities and injuries by 10 percent. These goals — the first ever national mode share targets — appeared in virtually every state and local bicycle plan written throughout the remainder of the 1990s. While they were conspicuously missing a completion date, they became a clear and consistent target that made sense of the need for the new "transportation enhancements" program and planning requirements created by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA).



recent years. Japan just appointed a bike czar to coordinate the work of several national government departments working on cycling.

3 » We had one 20 years ago, and it really worked! (see sidebar)

4 » Establishing national targets and performance measures helps every state and community identify its own goals – and see how it connects to a larger national effort.

5 » A clear role is identified for federal, state, regional and local government — and there’s a critical role for each to play.

6 » A national bike plan can effectively document the benefits of getting more people riding across multiple sectors — health, transportation, energy, environment, education, recreation, economic

development, tourism — and plug bicycling into pre-existing goals and objectives in each of those sectors.

7 » When you add up all the benefits of bicycling, across all sectors, disciplines and levels of government, the argument for getting more people riding becomes utterly compelling.

8 » The plan can unify the bicycling movement around our shared goals and objectives, celebrating and focusing the unique contribution of local advocates, the bike industry, the racing and mountain bike community, and national groups like the League.

9 » The next transportation bill — and potentially a new national transportation strategy — **MUST** incorporate bicycling. A National Bike Plan is essential to make the case and define the outcomes.

10 » We can’t wait any longer to achieve the vision of the 1994 National Bicycling and Walking Study: “A nation of travelers with new opportunities to walk or ride a bike as part of their everyday life.”

The League is committed to seeing the adoption of a new National Bike Plan in 2014 – the stakes are too high to strive for anything less – and our work starts at the National Bike Summit in March. However, we recognize that to have any chance of success, the plan cannot be the League’s alone and it must focus on the bike as a means to an end, not an end in itself. This will test our new strategic planning focus, mission and vision to the maximum.

We are ready for the challenge. Will you join us? **ANDY CLARKE IS THE PRESIDENT OF THE LEAGUE OF AMERICAN BICYCLISTS**

The study also identified a 60-point federal action plan that became a 10-year work plan for the Federal Highway Administration, guiding their multi-million dollar research agenda and creating training tools for state and local transportation agencies. Five- and 10-year progress reports show the NBWS had a profound impact on the work of the transportation agency and laid the foundation for the progress we see today. State and local action plans “recommended” in the final report also generated consistent planning and policy implementation across the country.

Did the plan work? In 1990, 7.9 percent of all trips in the United States were made by foot or bike. By 2009, that number had risen to 11.9 percent – not yet double, but a significant increase nonetheless. The 1991 traffic crash data showed that 841 cyclists and 6,595 pedestrians lost their lives compared to 677 and 4,432 respectively in 2011; considerably better than the target of a 10 percent reduction.

