

Why Communities & States Need Bicycle and Pedestrian Staff

Bicycle and pedestrian program managers are common in U.S. cities and, along with other transportation planners and bicycling advocates, are a critical part of creating a bicycle-friendly community. Staff help communities plan for and respond to the needs of cyclists and pedestrians. An analysis of 40 of the largest U.S. cities shows that cities with bicycle and pedestrian staff have higher levels of bicycling than the cities without staff. Cities with larger staff – both in count and per capita – have higher levels of bicycling than cities with smaller staffs.

About bicycle and pedestrian program managers

Bicycling program managers institutionalize the consideration of bicycling accommodations throughout transportation departments and other relevant areas of government. State bicycle program managers direct planning efforts, develop and implement projects, ensure design guidelines are followed, and improve bicycling-related policies. Local managers run programs and implement projects in the community's bicycle and pedestrian plans. They also evaluate existing plans and initiate new ones.¹ This analysis shows that bicycling staff are extremely common in cities and counties, even though they are generally not required.

Since the passage of Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) in 1991, states have been required to have a bicycle and pedestrian coordinator or program manager on staff.² The Federal Highway Administration recommends – but does not require – that the position be fulltime. Eighty percent of the cost of a state's bicycle and pedestrian coordinator can come from federal funds, such as the Surface Transportation Program (STP) or [Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement \(CMAQ\) Program](#), the remaining comes from the state.³

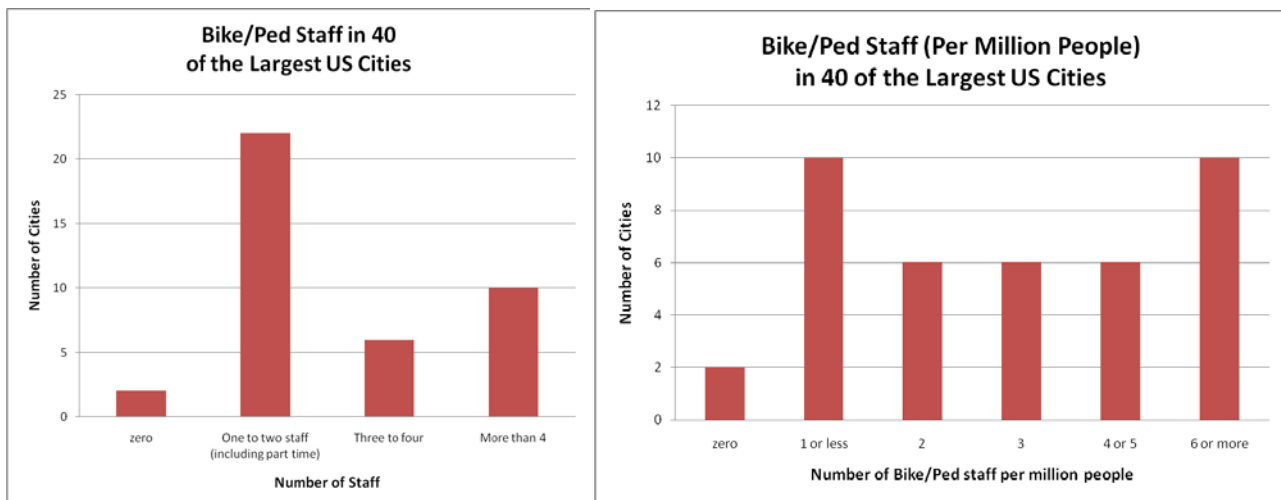
State bicycle and pedestrian coordinators have helped prioritize active transportation in most states. For example, in Wisconsin, which has a bicycle and pedestrian coordinator and a pedestrian and bicycle safety program manager, the coordinator provided guidance and DOT support for a groundbreaking state economic impact study, works closely with the statewide bicycle advocacy group, and plays an active role in the governor-appointed bicycle advisory committee.

However, advocates should monitor how their state DOT uses the bicycle and pedestrian position. State DOT's are sometimes slow to fill vacancies as they arise. Other times, bicycle and pedestrian issues get relegated to part-time or marginalized coordinators and do not get integrated into important planning decisions.

Most cities have bicycle and pedestrian staff

The Alliance for Bicycling & Walking⁴ surveyed the 50 largest U.S. cities to find how many bicycle and pedestrian staff they employed.⁵ Of the forty cities that responded, only two do not have any staff dedicated to bicycle and pedestrian issues. More than half of the responding cities have one or two staff spending at least part of their time on them. A quarter of the cities have more than four staff working on bike and pedestrian issues. [See larger versions of all figures in appendix, starting on page six.]

Figures 1 and 2



All but two of the forty cities in the sample have bicycle and pedestrian staff. Ten have more than four

The cities with the largest bike staff are not always the largest cities. Minneapolis, MN is the 46th largest city, one of the smallest in the sample. With nineteen employees, Minneapolis has the largest bike staff in the country. It also has the second highest rate of bicycle commuting in the sample with 4.3 percent.

Large staffs are very common when the data are analyzed on a per capita basis. Nearly three quarters (28) of the sample cities have more than one bicycle and pedestrian staffer *per million residents*. A quarter of the cities (10) employ six or more staff per million. That is equal to the number of cities that have one part-time or full-time bicycle and pedestrian staffer per million people.

In addition to large cities, many smaller communities have bicycle and pedestrian program managers. Davis, CA, a city of 62,000, has a city bicycle and pedestrian coordinator -- who works with their Bicycle Advisory Commission (BAC) -- and the University of California at Davis, has a campus bicycle coordinator.

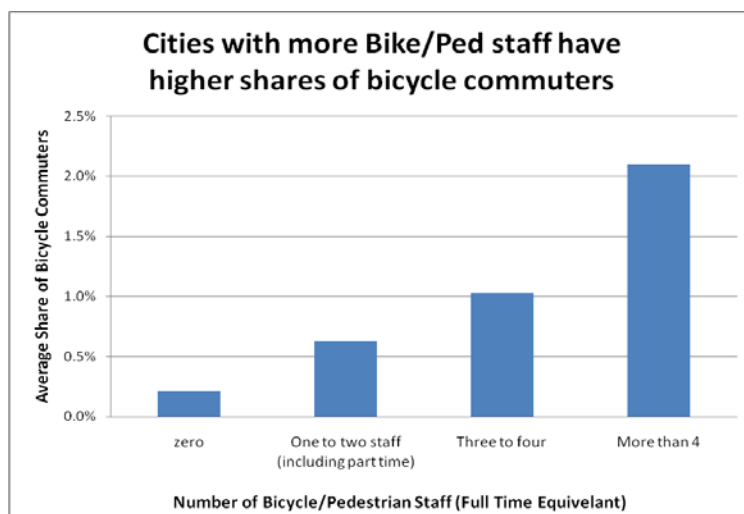
Together they help make Davis the country's Bicycling Capital. Communities like Fort Collins, CO (population 136,000), Missoula, MT (pop 107,000), and Columbia, MO (population 96,000) all have at least one full-time bicycle and pedestrian staff person.

Bicycle and pedestrian managers are also common in counties and MPOs. For example, Arlington County, VA, (population 210,000) has two full time bicycle and pedestrian planners and an eight-person transportation engineering staff who all spend at least part of their time on bicycle and pedestrian issues – a good model of integrating bicycling into all transportation planning. In Florida, the Miami-Dade County MPO and Volusia County MPO have bicycle coordinators, to name two examples.

Communities with larger bicycle and pedestrian staffs have higher levels of cycling

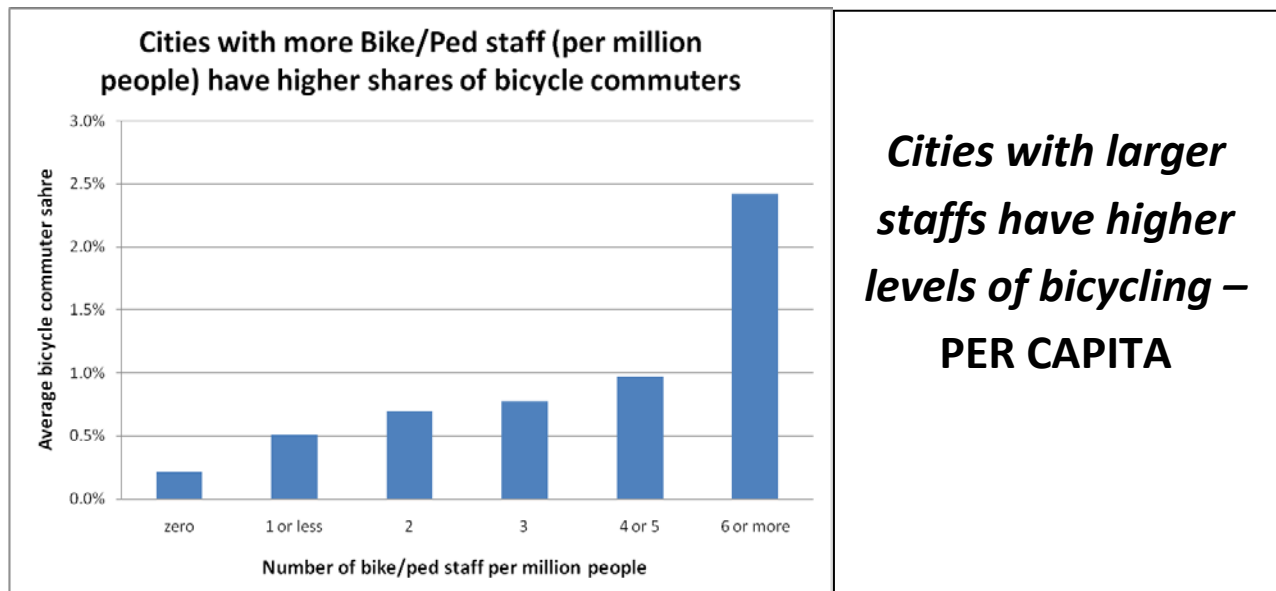
What impact do bicycle and pedestrian staff have on bicycling levels? The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey measures the percentage of workers who use the bicycle as their *primary* mode of transportation to work.⁶ Comparing staffing levels to the commuter data shows that larger bicycle and pedestrian staffs are correlated with higher bike commuter levels. The cities without bike staff had the lowest average bike commuter share. As the size of a city's staff increases the average bike commuter share also increases. Cities with more than four staff averaged a ten times greater share of bicycle commuters than cities without staff – 2.1 percent compared to 0.2 percent. The cities with more than four staff had more than three times the average bike commuter share of cities with four or fewer – and double that of cities with three to four staff. This shows that cities that make a serious commitment to bicycle planning see a greater return on investment than cities with fewer staff. (See figure two.) The same trend exists when using the number of staff per million residents. The ten cities with six or more staff per million people had an average bike commuter share of 2.4 percent, more than four times the average for cities with one or fewer staff members. (See figure 3.)

Figure 3



Cities with more than four bike staff have ten times the bike commuter share of cities without staff

Figure 4

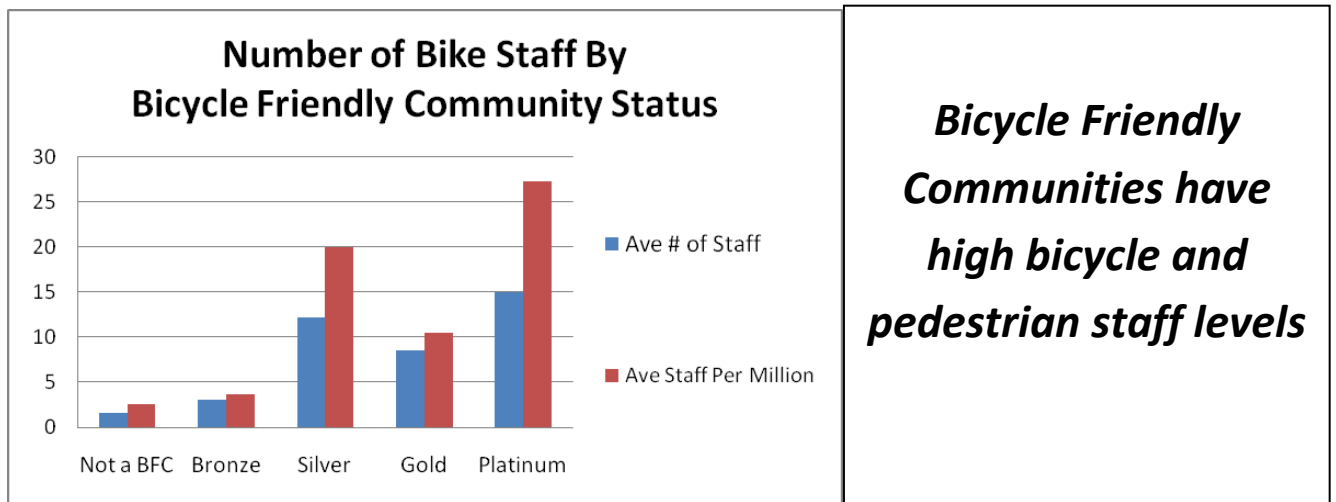


Bike staff levels correlate with overall bicycle-friendliness

The League of American Bicyclists' Bicycle Friendly Community (BFC) Program recognizes communities that have made dedicated efforts to improve bicycling conditions. Applicants describe their investments in five categories of bicycle-friendliness: engineering, education, encouragement, enforcement, and evaluation and planning. Staffing levels are only a few questions in the comprehensive BFC application, but there is strong correlation with BFC recognition. Cities with large bicycle staffs are more likely to have accomplished more for bicycling in their communities than other cities. The most bicycle-friendly city in the sample, Portland, OR, has a larger staff than all but Minneapolis and the highest bike commuter share with 6 percent.

Eighty-eight communities in the U.S. have achieved bronze Bicycle Friendly status. Only 36 have received silver, gold, or platinum recognition. The elevated status of the top three categories is reflected in staff sizes. Non-BFCs average one and a half staff, bronze BFCs average three staff, and the top three categories combined average 11 staff. Larger staffs get communities to the next level.

Figure 5



Conclusion

Without planning for bicycling, a city's transportation network is incomplete. Employing bicycle and pedestrian staff shows that a community is committed to a comprehensive transportation system; they are critical to integrating bicycling into the municipality's plans and projects. Their impact is measurable. Bike commuting levels and Bicycle Friendly Community recognition patterns show that larger staff investments lead to better bicycling outcomes. Having at least one staff-member focusing on bicycle and pedestrian issues is an important first step toward bicycle-friendliness. The route to higher levels of bike-friendliness, though, is best planned through the combined efforts of the city, bicycle advisory committees, advocacy organizations and advocates. Advocates should work with their cities and towns to hire bicycle and pedestrian managers.

¹FHWA, *Case Study #22: The role of State Bicycle/Pedestrian Coordinators*, and the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center, www.walkinginfo.org

² FHWA memorandum <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/designcoord.htm>

³ http://www.bikeleague.org/resources/reports/congestion_mitigation_air_quality.php

⁴ Source for staff levels: Alliance for Bicycling & Walking, *Bicycling and Walking in the United States 2010: Benchmarking Report*, based on a 2008 survey of the 50 largest US cities. www.peoplepoweredmovement.org. The 10 cities among the largest 50 not included are Los Angeles, Jacksonville, Memphis, El Paso, Nashville, Albuquerque, Sacramento, Cleveland, Omaha, and Arlington, TX.

⁵ All staff numbers are expressed as full-time-equivalent (FTE). That is, a city with two half-time staff would be listed here as having one FTE.

⁶ Source for bicycle commuting levels: 2008 American Community Survey, analysis by the League of American Bicyclists, http://www.bikeleague.org/resources/reports/acs_commuter_trends.php

Appendix

Figure 1

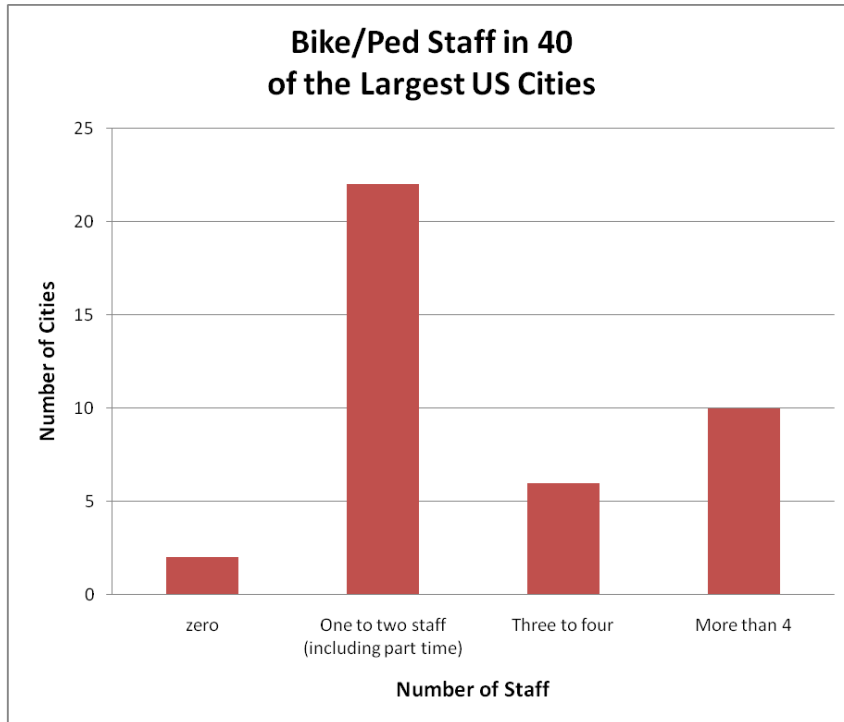


Figure 2

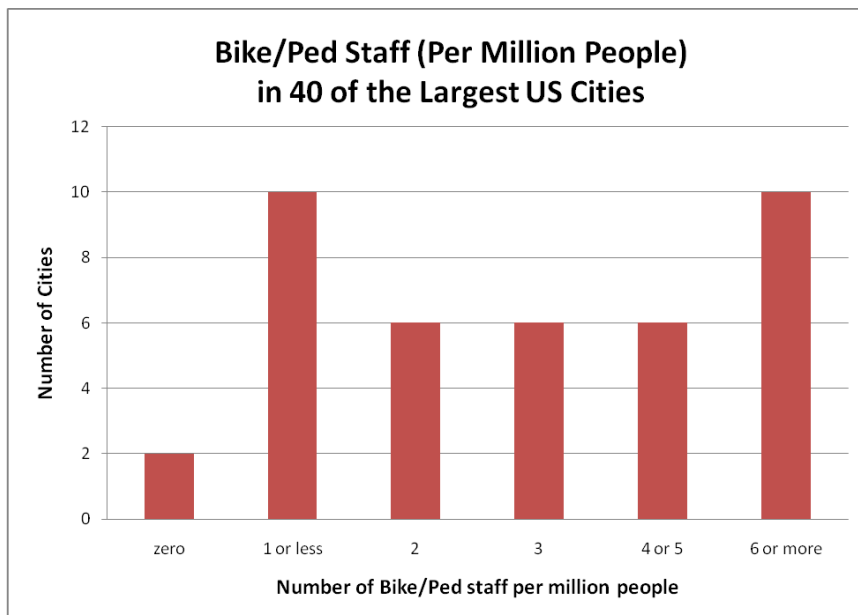


Figure 3

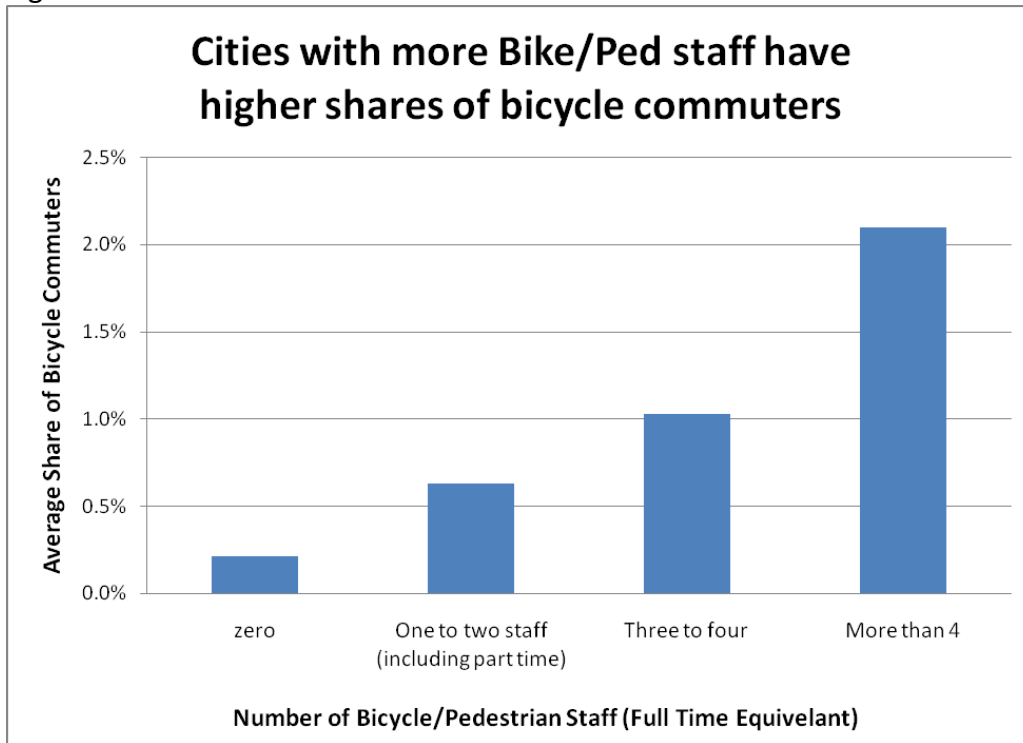


Figure 4

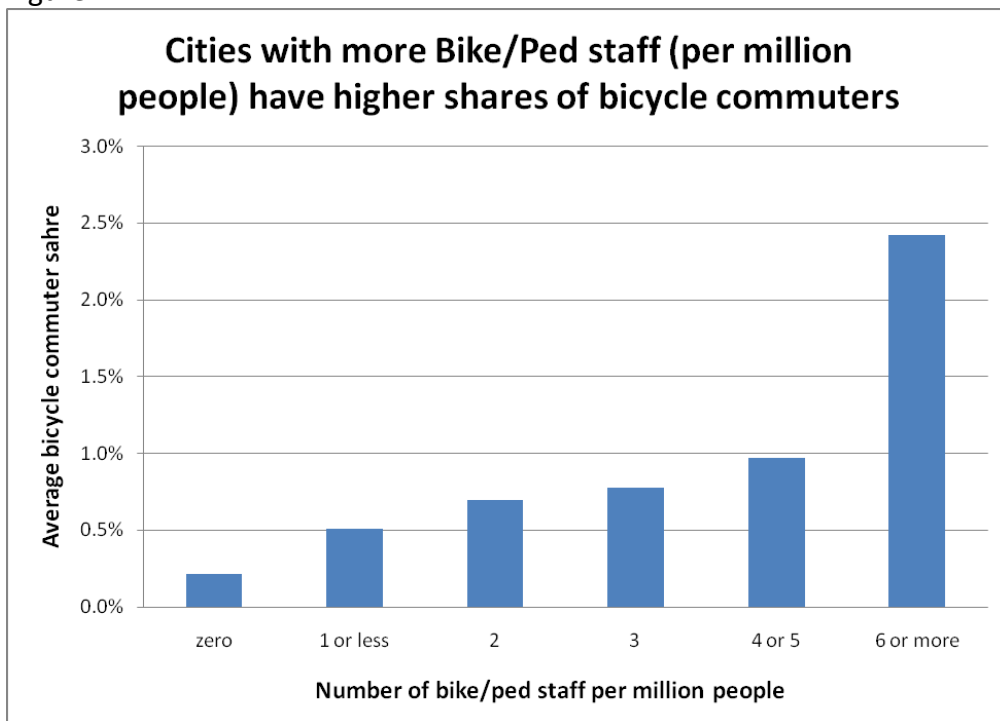


Figure 5

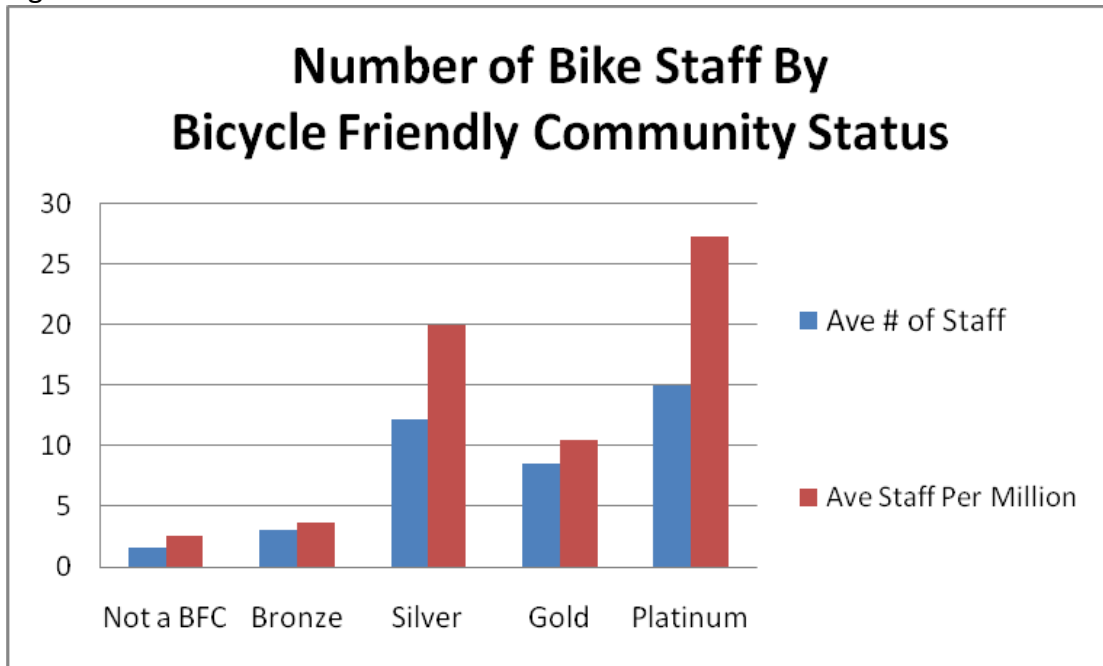


Figure 6

