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Bicycle Urbanism, Blog 2

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Bicycle Urbanism

Part of the Great VCU Bike Race Book Course



A Bike Friendly City

🕒 October 1, 2015 📁 Student Post 👤 dpitt

A Bike Friendly City

There are several ways a city can be bike friendly. Statistics show that traveling by bike just makes sense; bikes emit zero carbon emissions, it is physically healthy, it is economically healthy—Alta Group’s report for Portland, OR showed economic activity related to biking was \$90 million. The most recent news for Richmond was the World Championships in Richmond, VA. During that week, people saw professional riders all over town, and the general response was excitement and encouragement. Some people were able to test out the bike share program coming soon to Richmond. Remarks I heard from Richmond residents after the event was that they had never seen so many bikes in one place, and maybe they are not so bad after all.

From my experience riding around in different cities, well-planned bicycle infrastructure and bike facilities do not necessarily make cities bike-friendly. Biking culture and acceptance is what makes an area feel safe for bicycling to me. In fact, sometimes bike lanes give a false sense of security; I am constantly wondering when a car will veer into the bike lane or when I will run into a parked car in the lane. At least that is the case in Richmond, and it will continue to be the issue until people have fully embraced bicycling as an effective means of transportation.

For me, what makes a city bike friendly is all about the experience while riding. When I rode my bike in Boulder, Colorado and in the surrounding mountains, I was not familiar with any of the roads but felt completely safe. It was not because of protected bike lanes or excellent road conditions but because there were so many cyclists doing just what I was doing, and drivers were accepting and respectful to cyclists sharing the road. I feel a similar way in some parts of Richmond. I live in Church Hill and ride my bike around Church Hill and commute to work downtown and to school at VCU. I feel encouraged to visit areas that support bicycling; Lakeside became Richmond’s first Bike Friendly Business District, and DC has designated Business Improvement Districts to enhance the quality of life. Also, bike programs and events geared toward empowering women such as women’s specific bike clinics and last year’s Women’s Bike Summit also encourage me to keep pedaling even when riding conditions are frustrating. It is also exciting to feel included in bike events that are changing the course of the city forever—the Mayor’s ribbon cutting for the Manchester Bridge bike lanes brought a

decent crowd of cyclists, bike advocates, and press.

A city is bike friendly when riding a bike to get to all my destinations is enjoyable. When there are other pedestrians and bicyclists on the road and they seem to also be enjoying themselves, that contributes to the overall experience. Bike lanes, bike parking, and other infrastructure may increase ridership among people who already have bikes and would be willing to get around town sans automobile, but it may not necessarily reach a larger audience who is too scared of being hit or worried about carrying too many items per trip. I believe this disconnect is an opportunity for planners, traffic engineers, bike advocates, local governments, and the general public to collaborate and eventually embrace commuting by bike or by walking as major modes of transportation and part of the urban lifestyle. Bikes are powerful tools, and people need to know they can transform lives for the better. Especially so soon after Worlds, Richmond can use that excitement generated from those 9 days and keep the momentum going, making Richmond the most cycling-friendly it has ever been.

Submitted by Rachel

4 thoughts on “A Bike Friendly City”



Mariam
Sankoh

October 5, 2015 at 10:36 pm

I have never actually biked for non-recreational purposes in places other than Richmond VA, so I find it refreshing when you talk about it not just being infrastructure but mindset. And, although Richmond VA was awarded the bike race I do not think we have quite reached the point of developing the mindset. Maybe doing more free programs great towards minority groups and children will help move us more towards a biking culture as it helped you do.



James
Yancey

October 9, 2015 at 2:54 pm

Having others around you cycling creates a great atmosphere, I agree. You're spot on when it comes to the cycling mentality and what makes us feel safe when cycling. It's not always about great infrastructure, but about sharing this recreational activity with others that get the same enjoyment from it. You summarize perfectly when you state that bikes are tools and that they can transform lives.



October 9, 2015 at 3:16 pm

I have to say that, I love how the bike race brought bikers and non bikers to Richmond. Living in Northern Virginia, which is similar to Richmond roads it makes

Jimmy
Nguyen

it easier for me to bike around since i already know how the city works. I would say for non bikers and people who are starting out to bike it may be harder for them to adjust to the roads though.



Justin
Grenzebach

October 10, 2015 at 10:45 pm

I think it is really interesting that a lot of us are mentioning the cultural side / social norms of cycling. I also think that the bike share display was a great feature of the race because as people spectated, they also noticed the bike share displays and many inquired and thus were exposed to the idea of having one in richmond. Additionally the ones that were at the race had electrical assisted pedaling which is great not only because it would be the first electrical bike share I've ever heard of but also because its an excellent way to warm non-bikers up to cycling as it would reduce sweat which is definitely a factor(example: people may choose to drive over cycling if they have a meeting/presentation where sweat is not desirable)