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Bicycle Urbanism

Part of the Great VCU Bike Race Book Course

A Better Community: Urban Cooperation & Acceptance

🕐 October 2, 2015   📁 Student Post   👤 dpitt

Prior to exploring the opinions of the UCI Championship attendees, my perspective of a bicycle-friendly city was one where there were lots of designated, barricaded bike lanes on every street. Of course this can definitely be a characteristic of a bicycle-friendly city, though I learned there is a lot more to a city in which welcomes bicyclists than just infrastructure.

Bike culture can have a large effect on how residents or visitors feel while biking in a city. You may feel comfortable on bike lanes alone, but when surrounded by others who are using the same transit as you, you feel more of a sense of community. From observation, biker to biker cooperation and respect is more common than between drivers, and often more common between biker and driver. This topic was a theme among the surveys conducted at the bike race; a mutual understanding of safety amongst drivers and bikers help both commuters feel more comfortable on the road. Bike culture not only refers to those on bikes, but also the attitudes towards bikers, especially from those in automobiles.

In terms of advocacy for more bike infrastructure, access, and programs, bike culture can enhance the chances of the execution of these initiatives. For example, Bike/Walk RVA is a large advocacy group, and with the support from Richmond bikers they are able to push for more legislation in favor of bike routes and programs. This was also the case with a couple from a rural New York town, who mentioned their biking culture as a primary factor in making the town bicycle-friendly. More bikers and those who are passionate about biking most likely want to share with those new to the activity in the form of programs and events.

One positive attribute of Richmond's bicycle-friendliness that came up during the surveys, was that drivers understand that bikers will also be on the roads. The attendee mentioned her negative experience with drivers from out of town, who may not be used to the fact or accept the fact that drivers and bikers often share city streets.

Although biking culture can serve as a great contribution to a city's bike-friendliness, sometimes that culture will not push for further biking infrastructure because they are used to the current conditions. For example, many advance bikers I spoke with mentioned they felt comfortable on any size roads with or without bike lanes. Their reasoning included their higher level of experience, but also they had already accepted the current conditions, and adapted. This often makes it difficult for new bikers to enter into that same bike culture, and perhaps even deter them from continuing to bike in urban areas.

In my opinion, biking culture is a huge component of creating a bicycle-friendly city/town/neighborhood. It takes passion and support to encourage new bikers to take the roads, as well as push for policy for bikers' rights on the roads.

Submitted by Carlisle

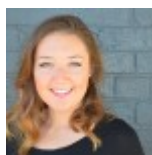## 4 thoughts on "A Better Community: Urban Cooperation & Acceptance"

October 2, 2015 at 11:10 pm

First of all, nice picture, it definitely looks like you're in the middle of the raceway.

Brittany Prosise

One of the things you said that stood out to me the most was how you feel a sense of community when you're riding a bike and the people around you are as well. It's weird how that happens, you feel a little safer. I feel like when I'm riding alone and there are cars behind me, there's pressure on me to ride faster and move out of the way. It also seems like people are more patient with yielding to people on bikes when you're in the Fan than when you're downtown.

October 7, 2015 at 11:35 am

I agree that it is more common for cyclists to have positive interactions and less common for cyclists with motorists. But how do we reach the audience of drivers who seem impenetrable? How do we get them to understand how we feel when they lay on their horn or barely miss us when they pass? Drivers will never understand bicyclists until they get on a bike. I believe this is a multigenerational problem we face today and will continue to face for awhile down the road.

Rachel Jordan

October 8, 2015 at 3:33 pm

Carlisle
Wilkinson

Rachel–I think that's a great question. Perhaps more bike infrastructure emphasizes the right that bicyclists have to be on the road. Bike lanes, sharrows, signs, etc. encourage bikers to be on the roads, which might also help change the attitude that roads are car driven (no pun intended). Also, I think road design can change this attitude; protected bike lanes, green paths for bikers, and lower speed limits. Just like any perspective, our environment highly influences how any particular aspect is framed.

October 10, 2015 at 10:19 pm

Justin
Grenzebach

Hey I too, think that cyclist-culture plays a big role in how smooth bike transit is. I also think it is really interesting how you pointed out that average everyday riders in Richmond are comfortable/content with the current infrastructure, which isn't exactly helpful in the push to advance cycling as transit. I think that zooming in and analyzing the opinions of those individuals who bike much more often than the average commuter would be beneficial during the planning process of new infrastructure.