

Chapter 9: Regional Bikeway System

Bikeway Policies

The Metropolitan Council acknowledges and supports bicycling as an important form of transportation in the Twin Cities metropolitan region. Bicycle facilities also provide a very popular and essential component of the recreational infrastructure of the region. Increased bicycle commuting will not in itself solve the region's transportation problems, but it is a part of a package of solutions and one piece in the overall transportation picture.

The bicycle is especially important as a mode to access other means of travel, such as transit. Because of short average trip lengths, nationally about two miles for bikes, most of the facilities for these modes in the region have traditionally been planned for and constructed at the local and county level. More recently there has been a push for developing an effective bicycle transportation network infrastructure at the regional level. Mn/DOT, the Metropolitan Council, and county and city public works departments have begun collaboration on an effort to identify a regional bicycling facilities network and recommendations for projects that complete or enhance that network.

Since 1991 the region has made an effort to direct a significant level of federal transportation funds to special facilities for bicycles, not only as freestanding projects but also as part of larger roadway constructions. Current funding criteria under the Met Council's and Transportation Advisory Board's regional solicitation process recognize that "travel on foot and by bicycle...are critical to transit friendly land uses which are more compact and mixed in their development patterns. The pedestrian and bicyclist both support and are supported by this development pattern." Bicycle facilities are funded as stand-alone Surface Transportation Program bikeway projects and Transportation Enhancement projects, and as components of highway construction or reconstruction projects or transit capital projects. Across all funding categories, prioritizing criteria give those projects that support other modes of transportation – such as bicycling – a greater chance of selection for funding than projects that do not provide integration of modes. These federal funds have allowed construction of many new bicycle facilities.

Bikeway Facilities

To this date, the region's on-road bicycle facilities have not been inventoried in a comprehensive and consistent manner. One of the difficulties in such an effort is to get agreement on a classification scheme for on-road facilities. However, as stated previously, the Metropolitan Council is participating in an effort to map and inventory both on-road and off-road bicycle facilities using common criteria across the region. It is expected that the product of this effort will be a base bicycle transportation system map that incorporates both types of facilities and can be used to identify bicycle system needs within future planning efforts at both the regional and local level. Figure 1 shows the extent of the off-road trail system in the region based on data collected by the Metropolitan Council in 1998 from city and county governments. Trails information is only available for those cities that responded to a survey, so there may be segments missing from the bikeway system as represented.

Many of the trails identified in Figure 1 have been designed and built primarily for recreational purposes, although some of these trails, depending on their location, also serve purposeful trips. The Council plans biking facilities for recreational use through its regional recreation open space

policy plan. The Metropolitan Council's regional parks capital improvement program gives funding priority to trail projects that leverage federal TEA-21 grants.

Bikeway Utilization

While no system-wide utilization surveys or counts have been conducted to date in the region, some metropolitan area communities and counties – Minneapolis, for example – conduct counts on components of their trail systems. Conducting counts, especially on on-road facilities, is a difficult and costly task. Regional and national travel behavior studies can be analyzed to provide a surrogate measure for bikeway usage.

In the *1999 Statewide Transportation Tracking Study* conducted by the Minnesota Center for Survey Research for Mn/DOT, about 4 percent of working Minnesotans reported commuting by bicycle at least a few days a year.

Recent census data suggest that the metropolitan area's investment in bikeway facilities has helped produce one of the nation's leading bicycle commuting populations. Based on the 2000 Census Supplemental Survey, Minneapolis is the top-ranked city in the country for bicycle commuting with a 2.63% mode share, or an average of 5,366 people riding to work each day on a bicycle. In comparison, warm-weather cities Sacramento, California and Portland, Oregon rank number two and three nationally with 2.59% and 2.25% bicycle mode shares, respectively.

In 2001 the Metropolitan Council is conducting a Travel Behavior Inventory study (TBI) examining trip modes not included in the 1990 TBI, including bicycle trips. The data will provide regionally specific statistics for trip-purpose modal splits that are not available nationally for bicycle trips. Short bicycle trips and transit-access trips are typically under-represented in personal travel surveys, so this information will be especially useful for monitoring and forecasting growth in bicycle trips. Some 54% of Americans live less than five miles from their jobs, and 50% of all car trips are five miles or less, so bicycling is a viable alternative to the automobile for many trips.

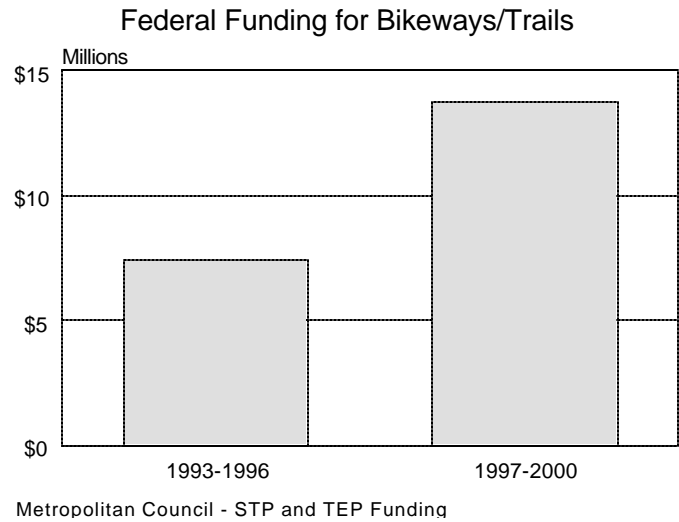
The Metropolitan Council also conducts a survey of use of the trails in the regional park system and found that in 1999, there were 3.3 million biking visits. The percentage of visits for commuting purposes versus recreation, however, is unknown.

Planning for Bikeways

Cities and counties in the seven county metropolitan region recognize the need for facilities for bicyclists. In 2000, out of 117 adopted county and city comprehensive plans, there were 53 that included a bicycle policy section and, of those, 35 included a map of bikeways. Most of the communities whose plans lack a bikeways component are located outside the urban area, where bikeway facilities are less common.

Federal Funding for Bikeways

Federal funding for trails and on-road bikeway facilities has been increasing. Changing federal regulations and an increasing emphasis on trails has resulted in an increase in funding of approximately 40% over the previous funding cycle.



The Twin Cities area has become increasingly involved in including bikeway components into the transportation system. As of 2001, 45 percent of the adopted local comprehensive plans included a bicycle policy section. The use of federal Transportation funds for bikeway facilities increased by 40 percent in the 1997- 2000 time period compared to the previous three-year cycle.

Figure 9-1 Off-Road Trail System

