

BICYCLE FRIENDLY



“We are truly thrilled by this honor, and I can not overstate how critically important the designation has been to us,” wrote Mayor Richard Howorth of Oxford, Miss. “The rigorous application process provided a structure that required our Pathway Commission and the Board of Aldermen to intensify our planning efforts — greatly enhancing our knowledge of countless aspects of making our city a better, safer place for bicycling and strengthening our ability to execute those plans. I must add that having been turned down for designation in a previous application only made us work harder!”

Letters like this are how we know the League’s Bicycle Friendly America program is not only working, it’s thriving. These

are also good reminders that our hope in building a country that is great for cycling is not only a Washington, D.C. dream, but something shared and worked for on Main Street. We have a front row seat in seeing bicycling transform America. These programs are designed to recognize the great achievements already being made and to provide assistance for states, cities and businesses to improve.

A small town in Mississippi has made huge strides specifically because of the Bicycle Friendly Community program. States near the bottom of our 50-state ranking have begun enacting legislation to improve conditions for bicyclists. Businesses are competing to be ranked higher than their competitors — and the Bicycle Friendly Business program is not even a year old.

The barriers to bicycling in U.S. communities are plain to see. Even much-vaunted Portland pales by comparison to your average Dutch or Danish community when it comes to cyclist education, infrastructure, parking and promotion. We are starting from a different place and what’s exciting is seeing change unfold before our eyes, sometimes in unexpected places. We see dots popping up all over the map representing new Bicycle Friendly Communities (welcome Billings, Mont.!). We see a state ranked last in the country, West Virginia, holding their first statewide bicycle symposium in April. We see unexpected businesses in unexpected places applying for the Bicycle Friendly Business award. We see an amusement park in Santa Cruz, a brewery in Fort Collins and a regional planning commission in Roanoke vying



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AMERICA

By Bill Nesper



for status as a Bicycle Friendly Business. What we see, from a national perspective, when we look at the map, are communities blooming, businesses leading, and states improving.

The program started at the League in 1995, and the past 15 years have seen it evolve into the tool it is today — evaluating and improving bicycle friendly states, communities and businesses.

EVOLUTION

For any applicant, in any of the three programs, the process takes a time commitment. But, it wasn't always this way. Back in 1995, the requirements to be designated as a BFC were pretty simple: answer four questions in the affirmative and send a check for a sign, and you were

in the program! We didn't feel that set the bar quite high enough.

In 2002, the League convened an advisory group in Washington, D.C. to overhaul the program. Leaders in bicycle advocacy, city planners, and industry experts gathered to look at the program and see how it could improve. The program in its current form was born at this meeting. By the end of 2002, a new application was launched, with in-depth requirements covering the newly coined Five Es — Engineering, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement and Evaluation — and the first communities in the new program were designated in 2003.

Now the program requires an in-depth assessment of what's really going on in the community related to bicycling.

The League added 21 **new** communities to the list this year and promoted five to higher levels. See page 4 for information on how to make your community a Bicycle Friendly Community.

The program enables communities to truly benchmark their progress against similar sized or comparable places. A renewal process has been built into the program to ensure no community is able to coast or rest on its laurels. And the four levels of award have provided a clear incentive to keep doing more.

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SNAPSHOT

The Programs, How to Apply, and Who to Talk to

The applications are designed to be part of the learning process — asking in-depth questions that bring people from various parts of the community, business or state together to build a comprehensive picture of where the applicant is and where they should go. Filling out the application, receiving the feedback and talking to League staff members are all important parts of the process, separate from the actual award.

Thanks to the generosity of the League's sponsors, all Bicycle Friendly America applications, questions and feedback are provided with no charge. It is free to participate in this program.

Bicycle Friendly Business

Program Lead: Alison Dewey alison@bikeleague.org, 202-621-5443
2009 Deadlines: January 16 and July 19

The Bicycle Friendly Business application is designed to be filled out by a human resource person or a staff member who knows about the company's work on behalf of bicyclists.

Bicycle Friendly Community

Program Lead: Bill Nesper bill@bikeleague.org, 202-621-5444
2009 Deadlines: March 13 and August 7

Someone affiliated directly with the community, whether working for it directly or as an advocate working in conjunction with a city staff member, fills out the Bicycle Friendly Community application online.

Bicycle Friendly State

Program Lead: Jeff Peel jeff@bikeleague.org, 202-621-5445
State Ranking Deadline: March 13
Award Designation Deadline: March 13

State bicycle coordinators from all 50 states filled out a 70-item questionnaire in 2008. The 2009 version will allow us to track progress and re-rank with new information. The optional award application and designation is for states that want to apply for further recognition and in-depth feedback on their bicycling efforts.

"When Spartanburg, S.C. earned its designation in 2007, no one wanted to see the momentum die." -Jean Crow, *Partners for Active Living in Spartanburg*



TURNING FEEDBACK INTO A ROADMAP

The changes were apparent immediately. The new program's in-depth feedback to applicants has transformed communities. Every city, awarded or not, receives feedback from the League's panel of reviewers, which includes local cyclists and nationally recognized experts. This feedback acknowledges the good things that are present in the community and presents a roadmap of proposed policies, programs, and projects to move the community forward.

Carmel, Ind., just north of Indianapolis, has about 70,000 residents — very few of whom ride to work. They first applied for BFC designation in 2003, largely on the strength of a multi-use path that runs through the community. In their feedback, the League told them that wasn't enough. Specifically, they needed to get people to the trail, improve access and crossings, start teaching bike safety in schools and start some promotional events to get people riding. Since then, they've striped

bike lanes, started a community bike ride with 2,000 riders, passed a bike parking ordinance, trained city staff and emergency personnel to be bike safety instructors, and approved more than \$6 million of bonds for trails. They were awarded a bronze-level designation in 2006.

BENCHMARKING SUCCESS

The new application also encouraged designated communities to keep improving. Its revised form, with more than 50 in-depth questions, forces each community to take a comprehensive look at its programs and policies as they relate to bicycling. This benchmark serves as a snapshot of where they were when they applied and as a comparison for where they are when they renew. "When Spartanburg, S.C. earned its designation in 2007, no one wanted to see the momentum die," said Jean Crow, associate director of Partners for Active Living in Spartanburg. "The city agreed to support another multi-year effort to reach a higher level designation by 2011. That commitment, along



The Bicycle Friendly Community process helps a community assess where they are and how they are doing; and through our renewal process, the program shows them how far they have come (or not).

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with the specific feedback provided by the League, has already led to the development of a new county and citywide Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan and a localized mode-share study for the entire county.”

RENEWED COMMITMENT

The Bicycle Friendly Community process helps a community assess where they are and how they are doing; and through our renewal process, the program shows them how far they have come (or not). Renewals are required every four years for every community in the program, and the process works both ways. In 2005, Denver renewed but had not been able to fulfill many of the requirements outlined in their own community bike plan. While they are still a bicycle friendly community, the League downgraded their status from silver to bronze. This inspired Mayor John Hickenlooper to redouble the city’s efforts to improve, and they hope that their next renewal will bring them back to silver.

On the other hand, Tucson and the East Pima Region in Arizona used their

original status as a silver level community to launch an intensive effort to become platinum. With an areawide taskforce and the support of almost every local politician, the results have been astounding. While they fell short of platinum in their 2008 renewal, they were upgraded to gold based on their remarkable achievements and impressive results. The reviewers were specifically impressed with community’s investment in infrastructure, including two custom bike/pedestrian bridges completed in the last two years.

GOING PLATINUM

One of the most interesting results of the evolved program is the national jostling to become the first of a certain award level, like the first large-scale city to become Platinum, or the first Midwestern town to earn gold. Two of these contests were resolved in 2008, with Portland earning the first platinum designation for a large-scale city and Madison, Wis. winning the first Midwestern gold. It is inspiring for League staffers and bicyclists

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-Peter Lagerwey, Seattle Dept. of Transportation

nationwide to see this kind of passion to improve cities for bicyclists. It is just the kind of result we couldn’t have imagined when the program was launched, and we hope to continue and grow in the coming years.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

The revised 2003 application vastly improved the process, but we’ve made great strides since then. We launched the Bicycle Friendly Yearbook (which you are holding in your hand) in 2006 — the book did more than we dared hope, showing readers and members how broad this movement is: from towns of 5,000 people to the largest city in America, everyone can build a better place for bicyclists.

Because the application focuses on five different categories, communities that are making strong, measurable efforts in one area can be recognized. A bronze is a

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It is inspiring for League staffers and bicyclists nationwide to see this kind of passion to improve cities for bicyclists.





Some Help from Our Friends...

The Bicycle Friendly America program has been generously supported throughout its many years by: Bikes Belong, Trek's One World Two Wheels Program, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and many volunteer hours by too many people to mention. We appreciate their vital and continued support.



much better community for cycling than one that is turned down for an award, but still has a long way to go before becoming platinum. The varying levels help us reward communities based on what they've accomplished.

Even the big communities, the ones that have been working on cycling issues for 30 years, have found the process rewarding and inspiring. "The application is an education in itself," said Peter Lagerwey, senior transportation planner for the Seattle, Wash. Department of Transportation. "Looking at the criteria in the application helped us refine our annual work plan, including setting measurable goals with an accelerated timeline. It put a spotlight on areas that needed improvement and helped us to re-prioritize some of our efforts. Lastly, filling out the application required that we work closely with other agencies and the bicycling community. It was a team effort that brought us together and helped us all realize the cumulative effect

of all the good things we were doing to promote safe cycling."

We rely on our national advisory group to make sure that we are collecting the most pertinent information. In the past two years, we've found some holes in the application and worked hard to fill them in. Specifically, a community's work to improve recreational cycling by providing velodromes, mountain biking facilities and BMX parks were not included in our questions. Amending this was part of why Park City, Utah scored highly, with their great connectivity between transportation and recreational cycling.

GROWING, CHANGING, IMPROVING

We are working, changing and improving every day as we build a Bicycle Friendly America. Through generous grants from Trek's One World Two Wheels program and the Bikes Belong Foundation, we now have three full-time staff members offering direct assistance to businesses, communities and states. We offer Bicycle Friendly Community Workshops and local Bicycle Summits — 38 in 21 states so far. Our feedback to applicants continues to improve and assist mayors, business owners, and state governments who recognize the importance and intelligence of building for bicyclists.

This program, this country, is on the right track. This yearbook is proof. Read on to learn about the current BFSs, BFCs and BFBs. Please join us in building a Bicycle Friendly America. ●



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