



How bike-friendly cities got that way

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San Francisco

San Francisco has the highest quality of life in the United States, according to a survey by Mercer Human Resource Consulting. It also is consistently ranked by Bicycling Magazine as a top city for cycling.

And in San Francisco, cyclists have serious political pull.

The San Francisco Bicycle Coalition endorsed eight candidates for the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, and all were elected. The board, which is the transportation authority for the city and county, puts highest priority on pedestrian and cycling needs, followed by mass transit and trailed by cars.

With the number of commuters growing, all public transportation has been equipped to carry bicycles, and driving lanes are being converted into bike lanes.

SFBC's Co-Exist Campaign, co-sponsored by the Department of Parking and Traffic, aims to replace road rage with road etiquette. They have developed ads that feature photos of angered motorists and cyclists screaming polite messages of safety and awareness.

SFBC's Web site is updated daily and features resources ranging from safety tips to a woman's guide to bike fashion. In a city with hills that rival the steepest Pittsburgh has to offer, topography has hardly been a deterrent. Just the opposite.

"There are thousands of people who ride there. They commute to work, they run errands on their bikes, they go record shopping, to get coffee, to movies, to shows. People ride absolutely everywhere," said Scott Bricker, a one-time San Francisco resident, who sits on the board of Bike Pittsburgh, the city's nascent bike-advocacy group.

Copenhagen

The city with the sixth-highest quality of life in the world, according to Mercer, is also home to the world's most successful community bicycle program.

City Bikes (or "Bycyklen" in Danish), launched in 1995, placed 1,100 distinctive-looking bicycles throughout downtown Copenhagen for community use. One of the goals was to reduce congestion.

City officials aim to transform a medieval area of downtown, with winding cobblestone

streets and outdoor cafes, into a car-free district. Already one city neighborhood, the notorious commune Christiania, is completely car-free.

The bicycles used in the City Bikes program were designed with components that are incompatible with other bikes, preventing theft of parts. Since the launch of the program, bicycle theft in Copenhagen has decreased.

The City Bikes program has become part of Copenhagen's downtown culture. A researcher followed one community bike for 12 hours and found that it was not in use for only eight minutes.

One of three adults bicycle to work in Copenhagen, where cycle planning and cycling are on a par with motor traffic and pedestrian traffic.

The Copenhagen cycle track network of some 200 miles was built over the course of almost a century.

Chicago

No other city in the United States is working as hard to become a cycling-friendly city as Chicago.

In 1990, it was voted second-best city for cyclists by *Bicycling Magazine*, but for avid cyclist Mayor Richard Daley, it's not good enough. "My goal is to make the city of Chicago the most bike-friendly city in the United States."

Last year, the city installed its 8,000th bike rack, more than exist in any other U.S. city. Chicago aims to ensure that anywhere a cyclist goes, she would have a place to safely store a bicycle. By the end of the year, the city will add 25 miles to its 100 miles of bike lanes (Pittsburgh has fewer than 5 miles).

"You can go almost anywhere you want and stay primarily in a bike lane," said Matt Ryan, who spent three years living in Chicago before moving to Pittsburgh. Ryan was a bike messenger in Chicago for a year.

What are Chicago's reasons for focusing on cycling? "It's an effort to reduce congestion, improve quality of life, improve health and fitness levels of people living here and actually reduce cost in building new highways," said Ben Gomberg, the city's bicycle coordinator.

Chicagoland Bicycle Federation, the area's leading advocacy organization, works with the city identifying sites that need bike racks. It also pioneered a "Shop by Bike" program to educate merchants on the value of attracting and accommodating bike-riding customers.

They provide a brochure with detailed instructions on making a business bike-friendly. The goals are to support smaller neighborhood businesses and to encourage Chicagoans to incorporate exercise into their daily routines.

Some Pittsburghers said that they could use similar initiatives here. "I only go shopping on my bike," said Christian Reed. "If it's not OK to bring my bike inside, I won't shop there."

In the past 12 years, Chicago's bike-to-work day has grown into bike week and eventually into Bike Summer with more than 120 events that take place in the summer months.

Portland, Ore.

Voted No. 1 Best Overall city for cycling by Bicycling Magazine, Portland has close to 230 miles of bikeways, with 400 more on the way. Recently, it invested \$34 million to build a bikeway on the new Eastside Esplanade, the longest floating walkway in the United States.

Portland's Create-a-Commuter program is the first project in the United States that provides low-income adults with commuter bicycles as well as a session on commuter safety. The bikes come outfitted with lights, a lock, a helmet, a pump, tool kits, maps and rainwear.

Portland has set six criteria for a bicycle-friendly community, five of which are targeted at curbing automobile use and traffic. The criteria include good facilities for bicycling, an urban design oriented to people and not automobiles, traffic restrictions in residential neighborhoods, stricter enforcement of traffic regulations, better traffic education for motorists and nonmotorists, and restrictions on automobile use.

"There is less congestion [and] traffic, and there are no vast parking lots," said Jen Fox of the Community Design Center of Pittsburgh, who lived in Portland for a year and a half before moving back to Pittsburgh. "Portland is a role model."

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