

Feedback

Bicycle Friendly Community Application

Newton, MA

Spring 2012





The League of American Bicyclists has recognized **Newton, MA** with an **Honorable Mention**, because Newton exhibits a commitment to cycling that is still in its beginning stages. The reviewers felt that there is still “room to grow”, but that notable steps are being made in the right direction:

- *Engineering:* Parking facility standards conform to the currently recognized safety standards. The majority of destinations have bike racks or storage units. The majority of public buses are equipped with bike racks. The community uses road diets to make roads safer for all road users. Sixty percent of arterial streets have bike lanes or paved shoulders. Most natural surface trails and singletrack are open to bicyclists. Cyclists are accommodated at busy intersections through timed signals and loop detector markings.
- *Education:* Most elementary and half of all high schools have Safe Routes to School programs. The community is educating motorists and bicyclists on sharing the road safely through share the road signs. Commuter classes are offered regularly in the community. Newton requires safe driving training for city staff.
- *Encouragement:* Newton promotes National Bike Month through a city proclamation, a community ride and a mayor-led ride.
- *Enforcement:* The community has an identified law-enforcement point person to interact with cyclists. Officers have received specific training on the relationship between bicycling and law enforcement. There are specific penalties for failing to yield to a cyclist when turning and/or it is illegal to park or drive in a bike lane (intersections excepted). There is a ban on texting while driving.
- *Evaluation & Planning:* Bicycle mode share is above average for U.S. communities. Newton has a bicycle master plan.

Particular **highlights** were Summer cyclovias and the "Newton Serves" event.

Reviewers were pleased to see the current efforts, potential and commitment to make Newton a great place for bicyclists which can be seen in the growing number of cyclists. The BFC review team expects great things in the future given the good local team and the coming improvements to the network and programs.

Below, reviewers provided recommendations to further promote bicycling in Newton in the short and long term. Further increasing bicycle use can [improve the environment](#) by reducing the impact on residents of pollution and noise, limiting greenhouse gases, and improving the quality of public spaces; [Reduce congestion](#) by shifting short trips (the majority of trips in cities) out of cars. This will also make cities more accessible for public transport, walking, essential car travel, emergency services, and deliveries; **Save lives** by creating safer conditions for bicyclists and as a direct consequence improve the safety of all other road users. [Research shows](#) that increasing the number of bicyclists on the street improves bicycle safety; **Increase opportunities** for residents of all ages to participate socially and economically in the community, regardless of income or ability. Greater choice of travel modes also increases independence, especially among [seniors](#) and [children](#); [Boost the economy](#) by creating a community that is an attractive destination for new residents, tourists and businesses; **Enhance recreational opportunities**, especially for children, and further contribute



to the quality of life in the community; [Save city funds](#) by increasing the efficient use of public space, reducing the need for costly new road infrastructure, preventing crashes, improving the health of the community, and increasing the use of public transport; **Enhance public safety and security** by increasing the number of “eyes on the street” and providing more options for movement in the event of emergencies, natural disasters, and major public events; [Improve the health and well being](#) of the population by promoting routine physical activity.

The key measures Newton should take to improve cycling in the community are:

- Adopt a [Complete Streets](#) or Bicycle Accommodation policy and offer implementation guidance. By adopting a Complete Streets policy, communities direct their transportation planners and engineers to routinely design and operate the entire right of way to enable safe access for all users, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation. This means that every transportation project will make the street network better and safer for drivers, transit users, pedestrians, and bicyclists – making your community a better place to live.
- Set up training for city staff and area consultants on bicycle facility design and planning. Consider a membership to the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals www.apbp.org for city Bicycle and Pedestrian Staff. Training opportunities and the listserv provided by this organization are excellent resources.
- Continue to expand the bike network and increase network connectivity through the use of bike lanes, bike tracks, shared lane arrows, signed routes and bicycle cut-throughs. On-street improvements coupled with the expansion of the off-street system will continue to increase use and improve safety. These improvements will also increase the effectiveness of encouragement efforts by providing a broader range of facility choices for users of various abilities and comfort levels.
- It is vital to make motorists and cyclists aware of their rights and responsibilities on the road. Continue to expand public education campaigns to promote the share the road message and the rights and responsibilities of all users, e.g. through public service announcements, share the road street signs or a dedicated bike page on community website. Consider taking advantage of your local bicycle advocates for content and strategy development and manpower. See a motorist education video at <http://www.bikelib.org/safety-education/motorists/driver-education/>. Also, see the excellent Look Campaign from New York City: http://www.nyc.gov/html/look/html/about/about_us_text.shtml.
- Offer bicycling skills classes and Traffic Skills 101 classes on a *frequent* basis or encourage a local bicycle advocacy group, club or shop to do so. You could invite a League Cycling Instructor (LCI) to conduct the classes. Ideally the instruction would incorporate a classroom portion as well as on-road training. For examples of educational materials visit: <http://www.bikeleague.org/programs/education/>.



Reviewers provided the following menu of recommendations to further promote bicycling:

Engineering

Low hanging fruit and fast results:

- Ensure that new and improved bicycle facilities conform to current best practices and guidelines – such as the [NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide](#), [AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities](#) and your DOT's own guidelines. Consider innovative bicycle infrastructure such as bicycle tracks, contra-flow bike lanes or colorful bike lanes.
- Ensure that all public buses are equipped with bike racks.
- Install way-finding signage at strategic locations around the community. Here are some best practices from the Washington, DC area Council of Governments: <http://www.mwcog.org/uploads/committee-documents/t1dZW1k20070516090831.pdf>
- Improve the coordination and communication between city departments and state paving and rehabilitation projects and facilities maintenance. Consider offering oversight to state DOT staff and contractors working within municipal boundaries. Ensure that facility design follows current best practice and that they are properly installed.
- Consider measuring the bicycle level of service (LOS) on community roads and at intersections, to be able to identify the most appropriate routes for inclusion in the community bicycle network, determine “weak links” in the network, prioritize sites needing improvement, and evaluate alternate treatments for improving bike-friendliness of a roadway or intersection: [http://www.bikelib.org/bike-planning/bicycle-level-of-service/\(roads\)](http://www.bikelib.org/bike-planning/bicycle-level-of-service/(roads)) and <http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/library/details.cfm?id=4425> (intersections).
- Accommodate bicycles at intersections and multi-use path crossings to improve efficiency and safety of all road and path users. Consider adding bike boxes to make bicyclists more visible to motorists. Consider incorporating raised multi-use path crossings or other high-visibility treatments on medium and high traffic roads. Ensure that both path and road users are clearly informed about who has the right-of-way at every crossing.

Long Term Goals:

- Since arterial and collector roads are the backbone of every transportation network, it is essential to increase the number of wide shoulders or [bike lanes](#) along these roads to allow bicyclists of all skill levels to reach their destinations quickly and safely.



- Increase the amount of [secure bicycle parking](#) at popular destinations such as transit stops, schools, recreation and entertainment facilities, retail and office clusters and churches throughout the community. Regulations that require bike parking, e.g. as part of new developments, can secure private funding for bike parking. More and more communities also ensure that multi-family residential developments provide secure and covered bike parking. See bicycle parking ordinances of [Madison, Wisconsin](#) and [Santa Cruz, California](#). If alternative funding is necessary -- The Chicago DOT used a federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) grant to provide indoor bike parking in Loop offices and parking garages. For more information on this project see <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/congestion-mitigation-and-air-quality>
- Allow access to suitable public lands for mountain bicyclists. Ensure to connect any off-road trails and facilities to the overall bicycle network. Look for ways to bridge the divide between the bike community and equestrian community by creating dedicated trails for each user group and multiuse trails where feasible.
- Develop a system of bicycle boulevards that creates an attractive, convenient, and comfortable cycling environment welcoming to cyclists of all ages and skill levels. See more on how to do it at <http://www.ibpi.usp.pdx.edu/guidebook.php>

Education

Low hanging fruit and fast results:

- Ensure that bicycle-safety education is a routine part of public education and that schools and the surrounding neighborhoods are particularly safe and convenient for biking. Ensure that youth are allowed to ride their bikes to school. Work with your Bicycle Advisory Committee and local bicycle advocates to develop and implement [Safe Routes to School programs](#) that emphasizes bicycling for middle schools. Strongly encourage all schools to participate in the existing programs as well.
- Improve the reach of the community's bicycle safety campaigns. Use valuable information from the League's Ride Better Tips in your outreach education and encouragement efforts. See the Ride Better Tips pages at <http://www.bikeleague.org/resources/better/index.php> , PSA's <http://www.bikeleague.org/programs/bikemonth/psas.php> and the downloadable Bicycle Safety Tips for Adults video at <http://www.bikeleague.org/programs/education/shortversion.wmv>. Again, consider taking advantage of your local bicycle advocates for content and strategy development and manpower.
- Add bicycling and motorist education messages to local routine activities such as drivers licensing and testing, or include inserts in utility bills.



- Start a bicyclist and motorist ticket diversion program. Road users given citation are offered an opportunity to waive fees for violations by attending a bicycling education course. This should include a classroom and on-road component. See what Pima County has done: [http://bikeped.pima.gov/Safety%20\(pdf\)s/April%20-%20May%202011%20Bicycle%20Diversion%20Class%20\(No%20Locations\).pdf](http://bikeped.pima.gov/Safety%20(pdf)s/April%20-%20May%202011%20Bicycle%20Diversion%20Class%20(No%20Locations).pdf)
- Education on bicycling is not only important for bicyclists but for all road users - including motorists. Start a motorist education programs for professional drivers such as bus and taxi drivers in the city. See what San Francisco has done <http://www.sfbike.org/?drivertraining> Classes can be offered by League Cycling Instructors or local bicycle advocates and material is available through the League of American Bicyclists.
- Host a League Cycling Instructor seminar to increase the number of certified League Cycling Instructors in your community, who can teach both adult and child classes. Having local instructors will enable your community to expand cycling education, recruit knowledgeable cycling ambassadors, deliver education to motorists, provide cycling education to adults, and have an expert to assist in encouragement programs. Contact the League office or visit <http://www.bikeleague.org/programs/education/> for information.

Encouragement

Low hanging fruit and fast results:

- Expand encouragement efforts during National Bike Month in partnership with local bicycle advocacy groups. Host, sponsor and/or encourage bicycle-themed community events such as a bicycle festival or a commuter challenge. Ensure to widely advertise all bicycle-themed community events. You and the local bicycle community can increase your efforts on Bike to Work Day/Week, for example by offering breakfast for bike commuters: <http://www.bikeleague.org/programs/bikemonth/>
- Promote, host, sponsor and/or encourage a variety of bicycle-themed, fun and family-friendly community events year-round, such as a bike movie festival, a 4th of July bike parade, an “increase-your-appetite” Thanksgiving community ride, a dress-like-Santa community ride before Christmas, a kids triathlon, a bicycle fashion show (fashionable alternatives to lycra), a Halloween bike decoration competition, a bike to the arts event, etc. Work closely with local bicycle advocacy groups, bike clubs, bike shops, bike teams and schools. Provide appropriate safety measures such as road closures or police escorts.
- Encourage local businesses to promote cycling to the workplace and to seek recognition through the *Bicycle Friendly Business* program. Businesses will profit from a [healthier, happier and more productive workforce](#) while the community would potentially profit from some bicycle-active businesses as well: increasing the bicycle mode share, less commuter traffic, better air quality, public bike parking in prime locations provided by businesses, new and powerful partners in advocating for bike infrastructure and programs on the local, state



and federal level, and public bike events, skills and maintenance classes hosted or sponsored by businesses. The city should be the model employer for the rest of the community. For more information about the free program please visit <http://www.bikeleague.org/programs/bicycledriendlyamerica/bicycledriendlybusiness/>.

- Consider passing an ordinance or local code that would require larger employers to provide [bicycle parking](#), shower facilities, and other end-of-trip amenities.
- Encourage local institutions of higher education to promote cycling and to seek recognition through the [Bicycle Friendly University](#) program. College and university campuses are unique environments for their high density, stimulating atmosphere and defined boundaries. These factors make them ideal environments to incorporate bikes. Many colleges and universities have built upon these good conditions and embraced the enthusiasm for more bicycle-friendly campuses by incorporating bike share programs, bike co-ops, clubs, bicycling education classes and policies to promote bicycling as a preferred means of transportation. The community could potentially profit as well: Communities near a BFU such as Stanford or University of California at Davis have a very high number of regular bicyclists (as many students bike to campus, shops and restaurants), less congestion around campus, safer streets and university-hosted public bicycle events, programs and classes.” See what Stanford University is doing for cyclists: http://www.bikeleague.org/programs/bicycledriendlyamerica/communities/bfc_stanford_university.php
- Actively involve the local bicycle community in community planning efforts, policy development and public outreach.
- Set up and promote bicycle-themed community celebrations and/or rides each time the community completes a new bicycle related project. This is a great way to show off the city’s good efforts and introduces new users to the improvement.
- Design and publish several local bike maps in paper and online, addressing diverse needs and skill levels (commuter, visitor, sport cyclist, mountain biker etc). Each map should outline the existing on and/or off road bicycle network by infrastructure type and skill level (if applicable). In addition, maps could identify the location of landmarks, greenways, low-traffic streets, public restrooms, bike routes, designated scenic routes, bike stations, bike repair stations, bike parking and transit stations. See Portland, Oregon’s commuter bike map: <http://www.portlandonline.com/transportation/index.cfm?c=39402&a=322407>
- Consider partnering with a local bicycle advocacy group or bike club to launch a bike buddy or bicyclist mentorship program for inexperienced riders. A bike mentorship program that teams experienced cyclists with newcomers is a great way to encourage and educate novice commuters. See what Spokane, Wash. and Charlotte, N.C. are doing <http://groups.google.com/group/bikementor>,



<http://www.spokanebicycleclub.org/bikebuddy.htm>

- Consider creating a Bicycle Ambassador program like Chicago's:
<http://www.bicyclingambassadors.org/>

Long Term Goals

- Develop a series of short (2-5 mi.) (themed) loop rides around the community and provide appropriate way-finding signage. Integrate these rides into local bike maps.
- Recreational bicycling can be promoted through facilities and programs like mountain bike parks, velodromes, cyclocross course or similar bicycle amenities. Ensure that the facilities are accessible by bicycle, so that there is no need to drive to ride.

Enforcement

Low hanging fruit and fast results:

- Invite a police officer to become an active member of the bicycle advisory committee.
- Actively facilitate stronger connections between bicycle advocates, the wider bicycling community and law enforcement. Ask police officers to use targeted information and enforcement to encourage motorists *and* cyclists to share the road. This could be in the form of a brochure or tip card explaining each user's rights and responsibilities. Have information material available in Spanish, if applicable. Also increase the number of police officers patrolling multi-use paths *and* streets on bike, as it gives officers a better understanding of the conditions for cyclists and keeps secluded multi-use paths safe.
- Have police officers distribute helmets and bike lights (or coupons to the local bike shop for each) to encourage all types of cyclists to ride more safely and remove the barriers to attaining these essential bike accessories. See the helmet and light promotions at Stanford: http://transportation.stanford.edu/alt_transportation/BikeSafetyEd.shtml#helmet.
- Enforcement practices could also include positive enforcement ticketing. Police officers could team up with local stores to reward safe cycling practices by handing out gift certificates to cyclists who are "caught" following the law. See what Tewksbury, MA is doing: <http://www.wickedlocal.com/tewksbury/news/lifestyle/x1837747400/Tewksbury-police-reward-young-cyclists-for-wearing-their-helmets#axzz1WdjHHfMo>
- Pass laws or ordinances that protect cyclists, e.g. implement penalties for motor vehicle users that 'door' cyclists and ban cell phone use while driving.



Evaluation/Planning

Low hanging fruit and fast results:

- Regularly conduct research on bicycle usage beyond the U.S. Census' Journey to Work report to more efficiently distribute resources according to demand. Conduct yearly counts using automated and manual counters in partnership with advocacy organizations. We also strongly encourage you to participate in the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project: <http://bikepeddocumentation.org/>.
- Expand efforts to evaluate bicycle crash statistics and produce a specific plan to reduce the number of crashes in the community. Available tools include *Intersection Magic*: <http://www.pdmagic.com/im/> and [PBCAT](#). See the report [Bicyclist Fatalities and Serious Injuries in New York City 1996-2005](#)
- Consider implementing a formal trip reduction program/ordinance. See good examples at <http://bikepeddocumentation.org/> and <http://www.portlandonline.com/transportation/index.cfm?c=43801>
- Consider conducting an economic impact study on bicycling in your community. See what Portland, OR has done: http://www.altaplanning.com/App_Content/files/fp_docs/2008%20Portland%20Bicycle-Related%20Economy%20Report.pdf

Long Term Goals

- Ensure that there is dedicated funding for the implementation of the bicycle master plan.
- Integrate the implementation of the bike plan into the master plan, all land use plans, zoning ordinances and larger development projects.
- Allow and encourage a mix of uses, a well connected street network and compact development patterns throughout the community to shorten the distances people need to bike.
- Work with the [mountain biking community](#) to develop a plan for off-road access and increase opportunities for [single-track](#) riding within the city.

For more ideas and best practices please visit the [Bicycle Friendly Community Resource Page](#).