

## FHWA's Livable Communities Case Study Series

### **Knoxville, TN Bicycle Program—Validating Alternative Modes of Travel**

#### **Challenge**—Effectively Promoting Alternative Modes of Travel

For the Knoxville region in Tennessee, an increase in bicycling represents a chance to alleviate poor air quality and roadway congestion while improving the overall quality of life for area residents. However, while most recognize the health and cost benefits associated with cycling, several concerns remain for those who wish to do so more than just recreationally.

Many cyclists hesitate to ride due to safety concerns—the shoulder width and road conditions may appear inadequate to maintain substantial distance between motorists and cyclists on the roadway, and the speed and volume of traffic can be intimidating. Weather conditions are sometimes prohibitive and cyclists may feel limited in how far they can travel by bicycle. Cyclists may also worry about finding places to store their bicycles and whether motorists will make room for them on the roadways. Public support of the mode is the single-most important factor in its future development as a viable option for a larger constituency. The Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) seeks to enhance public support while addressing these concerns.

#### **Solution**—Making a Way for Bicyclists

The Knoxville Regional TPO has developed regional bicycle plans since 1975. The 2002 Plan established the Knoxville Regional Bicycle Program with the express purpose of implementing the Bicycle Plan. The Bicycle Advisory Committee (BAC), which administers the Bicycle Program, seeks to integrate bicycling into the transportation system. To date, the BAC has:

- Produced bicycle maps for Knox and Blount Counties;
- Reviewed road plans to standardize the inclusion of bicycle accommodation for new and widened roads;
- Administered bicycle/pedestrian counts at approximately 12 intersections in Knoxville and Blount County, biannually;
- Installed bicycle signs, shared lane markings, and added over 500 bicycle racks;
- Collaborated with law enforcement to ensure that bicyclists are appropriately accounted for on the roadways; and,
- Educated citizens through bicycling classes, the “I Bike” awareness campaign, a Bicycling



*The initiatives of the Knoxville Regional TPO and the BAC have increased the visibility of bicycling as a viable mode of transportation.*



*Bicycling Ambassadors attend community events and encourage bicyclists to ride more often and more safely.*

Creating more livable communities through transportation choices



Ambassadors Program, and presentations to drivers' education classes on sharing the road with bicyclists.

### Funding—Realizing the Program and Its Initiatives

BAC's main role is to update and implement the Bicycle Program developed in conjunction with the TPO. The plan and its updates are partially funded through grants from the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, and the Tennessee Department of Transportation. The 2009 update of the plan provides a framework for the Bicycle Program initiated in 2002, and also highlights several other initiatives, including the Smart Trips program through which cyclists can log their commutes and receive various incentives.

### Results—Visibility and Revitalization of Bicycle Culture

TPO and BAC initiatives have increased the visibility of bicycling as a practical form of transportation (in addition to recreation). They have effectively used social networks such as Facebook where they currently have over 700 fans. They have also provided links to other bicycle promotion initiatives such as Bike Knoxville, a blog that shows the most recent Bicycle Program news and provides an opportunity for members of the community to comment. There have also been in-person events that provide the community with a more tangible sense of the benefits and importance of bicycling. The Bicycle Program coordinates several classes, including Traffic Skills, Confident City Cycling, Bike Commuting, and Bicycling with Kids. Also, special functions such as Bike to Work Day and Neighborhood Bike Ride are held annually with increasing participation each year.



*Events and promotional materials have given the community a more tangible sense of the benefits and importance of bicycling.*



*The "I Bike" campaign has raised awareness among motorists.*

Public health gains are clear. In 2010, according to the American Lung Association, the Knoxville region was still one of the "25 most polluted counties" in the United States in terms of ozone and year-round particulate matter, but in 2012 the county no longer appears on the list and air quality continues to improve.<sup>1</sup> The region now meets all national ambient air quality standards.<sup>2</sup>

TPO and BAC's efforts have been rewarded by public response and external recognition. Most recently, the League of American Bicyclists honored them with a bronze level designation in the "Bicycle Friendly Community" Award.<sup>3</sup> Knoxville ranked equally with Santa Monica, Tulsa, and New York City, among others. This support points to a potentially promising future for alternative modes of travel throughout the Nation.

More information is available at: <http://www.knoxtrans.org/plans/bikeprog.htm>.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.stateoftheair.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.tn.gov/environment/apc/eac/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.cityofknoxville.org/Press\\_Releases/Content/2010/1005b.asp](http://www.cityofknoxville.org/Press_Releases/Content/2010/1005b.asp)

