

DEC - 5 2007

NOACA Governing Board
1299 Superior Avenue
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I would like to commend NOACA members – especially those on the Bicycle Advisory Council – for their on-going work and commitment to bicycling in Northeast Ohio. I also thank my fellow bicyclists who have offered comments on NOACA's draft bicycle transportation plans. There are numerous well thought out ideas and suggestions in those comments. I urge NOACA members to carefully read them and take them to heart. I am the author of a book on bicycling in the Cincinnati/Dayton area who recently moved to the Cleveland area. Obviously, there are many issues that are involved in providing safe, reliable and - viable - bicycle routes. But my initial observations suggest that, with a committed NOACA, bicycle community and local leaders, Northeast Ohio can lead the state in developing a true bicycle route network.

NOACA members already know what bicyclists want and need. Yes, we want as many miles of connecting Separated Multi-Use (Bike) Path as we can get. Yes, we want as many miles of separated on-road Bike Lanes as we can get. Yes, this network connecting us to where we work, shop and exercise needs to be maintained and not left in disrepair. Yes, we want modern storage and locker facilities located in numerous locations in our city centers. Oh, and the new free bike borrowing stations – similar to subway stops – that Paris, France now has would make a great addition to bike-friendly Cleveland.

I believe NOACA planners know the needs but the cost/benefit complexities are always at work creating doubt-producing friction. A recently elected councilmember in Mentor told me that it cost roughly two million dollars to create the Bike Lane along Lakeshore Boulevard in Lake County. He said while he would like to see more bike lanes he doesn't think there is money available. There should be. NOACA planners and councils in every community should fight for every federal and state bicycle/pedestrian dime they can get. Why? Because bicyclists deserve it. Bicyclists are at the vanguard of a societal shift in lifestyle and environmental awareness. Einstein once said that problems cannot be solved at the same level of consciousness that created them. In other words, thinking needs to take place outside of the box. And when bicyclists are out pedaling to strengthen their hearts and the environmental health of their community that's exactly what they are doing. They are showing their fellow citizens a better path. Sure some of our neighbors snicker seeing us dressed in lycra as we ride down the road. Some might even think we are crazy. But most of our fellow citizens know in their hearts and minds that bicyclists are heading in the right direction. We are a visible symbol of personal and community health. Bicyclists have planted the seed of what a richly progressive, eco-friendly, place Northeast Ohio can be. The irony is we are accomplishing this by recycling a machine invented during the Industrial Revolution. Few could argue that we don't deserve a safe and enjoyable infrastructure for paving the way on this back-to-the-future conversion.

Still, most bicyclists are also motorists and taxpayers. We can sympathize with road planners that argue they are not yet seeing a groundswell of bicyclists commuting to work. That's because we have to build it – and, most importantly – integrate it before bicyclists will come. Bicycling is an experienced-based proposition. Bicyclists gladly graduate to more challenging and rewarding rides the more miles they have in their legs. First, a beginner bicyclist will try a Bike Path, if there is one in their community. As they become more skilled and excited about the activity, they will “jump off” the path and try some road riding. Soon the miles will be flying by and the experienced bicyclists will love nothing more than to show off their muscle-bulging legs by riding to work. But the taxpayer in me recognizes the cost of a comprehensive route network. Heck, we struggle to keep our bridges repaired properly.

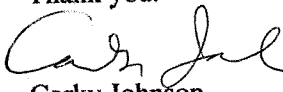
But there is hope. I have a workable solution. Sure it involves building the aforementioned bike paths and lanes as quickly as possible to create numerous bicycling “corridors”. Sure that part of the plan isn't cheap. But it doesn't have to be done all at once. Over the next 10-15 years NOACA and community leaders should plan and complete a number of additional separated pathways for commuting and fitness. Meanwhile, a Tiger Team approach of

planners, traffic engineers and bicycle enthusiasts could plan and install miles of affordable and *effective* Bicycle Road Signs. The key word here is effective. I'm not talking about the one sign you might see as you approach a bike path. This network would include hundreds of the neon green "Share The Road" signs similar to the "School" zone signs. These Share The Road signs would be spaced along roadway corridors at distances of between 1-2 miles. Such a concentration of signage will create awareness in the minds of both motorists and bicyclists. Additional signage can also be used to alert drivers to Ohio's rules of the road when in the presence of bicyclists. For instance, at varying intervals smaller "It's The Law" or "Check Speed" signs might also be placed below the Share The Road signs. Yellow flashing lights might be placed on or near signs when a Share The Road corridor approaches a major congested area or going into a city center. In places like Geauga County's Amish area, Share The Road signs would be a nice adjunct to existing "buggy" and "pedestrian" signs and lanes. As the Share The Road program begins to develop perhaps some monies could be used for a commercial or direct mail campaign notifying motorists of the law concerning sharing the road.

Some traffic engineers might suggest signage is not a panacea but only a part solution for providing traffic safety. Of course we all know bicycling will never be a completely risk-free activity. But I have seen Share The Road signage work as an effective safety measure. Such signs on a twisting road along the Ohio River in Kentucky have changed the way drivers navigate that corridor. And Marin County California is using Share The Road signs and an aggressive informational campaign – including a series of Share The Road "checkpoint" stops – to bridge the safety gap while construction on separated bikeways continues. This Share The Road campaign will cost a fraction of dedicated bike paths and once bike paths are built in one area the signs can be moved and recycled. Not only can "the usual suspects" be tapped to cover costs but outside-the-box sources such as fundraisers and bicycle manufacturing organizations could provide additional funds. Traffic naysayers should take note of what RTA officials in charge of the new Euclid corridor project say. They maintain the project, which includes bike lanes, will only be workable because of effective road signage. If Bicycle signs can improve safety in diverse places like Kentucky, California and downtown streets, they should sprout like wildflowers throughout our region.

More than 700 bicyclists die each year in traffic accidents. Let's take positive steps now to ensure bicyclists in Northeast Ohio don't become sad statistics. Bicyclists deserve the safest possible conditions. We deserve to make Share The Road a way of life, not just a slogan.

Thank you.



Corky Johnson

Mentor

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