League of American Bicyclists Position on Bicycle Facilities

Part One

Bicyclists, like all other road users, need a complete interconnected transportation network. This network may include roads, bridges, tunnels and special bicycle facilities. All of these facilities need to be designed for the convenience and safety of bicyclists.

Bicycling on Roads

In all 50 state vehicle codes, bicyclists have the rights and responsibilities of other vehicle operators. Therefore, road systems must accommodate bicyclists.

The League has supported safe and lawful use of bicycles on roads since 1880, and will continue to do so. All roads, bridges and tunnels, save some limited access highways, are bicycle facilities, and should be thought of as such throughout their design and maintenance cycles.

Roads that are good for bicycling are also good for motorists, and create more livable communities.

Road features such as adequate lane and paved shoulder widths, smooth pavements, bicycle responsive traffic signals, wheelproof drainage features and frequent maintenance are safe and effective ways to meet the needs of bicyclists and motorists. The League opposes any road feature added to the shoulder area that could hinder bicyclists' safety.

The League emphasizes the time-honored, time-proved classification of bicycles and other low-speed vehicles as road vehicles with respect to traffic law; that the right of travel by all reasonable means is universal; and that licensing of drivers and registration of vehicles are not a prerequisite for use of the roads, but rather, reflect the greater harm which can be done by larger and/or faster vehicles.

The League supports expanding the rights of bicyclists to use limited access freeway shoulders where no other reasonable alternative routes exist. The League opposes laws, policies and plans which in any way restrict bicyclists' rights to the road by forcing bicyclists to use special bicycle facilities.

Special Bicycle Facilities

The League believes that in some instances, bike lanes and shared use paths (sometimes called bike paths) enhance the road system for some bicyclists if designed and constructed in accordance with the national and state standards referenced below.

Standards and Design Issues

The League believes strongly that bicycle facilities, whether separated or on-road, should be designed according to the standards listed and only by professionals fully conversant with the benefits and inherent problems in lanes and paths, and with bicyclists' needs on the road.

Resources:

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation (AASHTO) *Guide to Bicycle Facilities*, available from the AASHTO Bookstore, https://www.aashto.org/publications/bookstore.nsf/Home?OpenForm in a print or CD-ROM edition:

State of Florida 1998 Bicycle Facilities Design Manual, http://www.dot.state.fl.us/Safety/ped_bike/ped_bike_standards.htm#Florida%20Bike%20Handbook

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety and Accommodation Training Course # 38061

Dr. William Moritz, *Adult Bicyclists in the United States*, http://www.bicyclinglife.com/Library/Moritz2.htm

For further information:

See the accompanying paper, League of American Bicyclists Position on Bicycle Facilities: Additional Supporting Information.

Part Two

League of American Bicyclists Position on Bicycle Facilities: Additional Supporting Information

Good Design and Planning are Essential

Bike lanes and shared use trails are specific applications for specific situations, and when designed and constructed in accordance with national and state standards can be tools to enhance roads for some cyclists.

However, just adhering to the standards is not sufficient to guarantee good design, because many factors that go into good design are not part of any standards manual. Good judgment by the designer is essential.

The League notes that it is difficult for a designer to design effective bicycle facilities without being reasonably proficient as a bicyclist.

The League urges all bicycle facility designers to be conversant with the League's Bike Ed program, in order to maximize this proficiency.

Bicycles on Freeways

The League notes that the U.S. has more than 25 years' experience allowing bicyclists to use the shoulders of limited access freeways. Accident data collected in the states that allow this indicate that the bicyclists' accident rate on these facilities is quite low. Accordingly, the League supports expanding the rights of bicyclists to use these freeway shoulders where no other reasonable alternative exists.

Advantages of Shared Use Paths

Separated shared use paths may be used to provide bicycle access when no suitable road exists; to bypass barriers; to avoid more circuitous, less safe routes; and as trails in scenic recreational areas, particularly where there are few road intersections.

A principal advantage of separated facilities in the U.S. is for recreation.

These facilities are a valuable and attractive feature for many people. In particular, the use of rail rights-of-way preserves a valuable rail corridor while also offering a recreational opportunity. These are also popular locations for beginning cyclists to learn to ride without the threat of high speed motor traffic.

Another advantage can be providing bicyclists access to destinations which would otherwise not be accessible by bicycle, in locations where highways interrupt bicycle routes, or no usable public road exists. (An example of this is the Mt. Vernon trail from Ronald Reagan Airport to downtown Washington D.C.) A separated bicycle facility may provide a short cut (particularly in the case of residential or office developments without four-quadrant access) or a scenic view.

For these reasons, the League supports railbanking and facilities that preserve and enhance bicycle access. But we do not support separated facilities as a first-choice substitute for bicycle-compatible road design.

Efficiency of the Road System

The League has previously noted that well-designed roads benefit all users.

Building such roads is a very cost effective use of tax dollars, because it does not take anything away from other users to provide for bicyclists.

Advantages of Bike Lanes

In some instances, it may be appropriate to use bicycle lanes to designate street space for the preferential use of bicycle traffic. Typically, this would be in locations where substantial volumes of bicycle traffic are anticipated or other situations warrant. The planning, design and installation of bike lanes should be contingent on a careful evaluation of all potential impacts of such facilities. The lanes should be part of a system plan and should also include details to improve safety through intersections such as bicycle storage pockets left of the right turn lane at the intersections.

Cities such as Davis and Cupertino, California, Eugene, Oregon and Gainesville, Florida are good examples.

Some Drawbacks of Special Facilities

Some advocates of separated bicycle facilities imply that it is possible to have a separate parallel transportation network in the United States, linking most destinations with separated bicycle facilities. This is not efficient or possible.

Because many good bicycle facilities are ordinary roads, the League does not support general public statements that state or imply that separated bicycle facilities would be generally preferred.

Separated bicycle facilities have become quite popular in the U.S. It is important to understand their appeal, but it is also important to understand their disadvantages.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to design a safe-sidepath-style separated bicycle facility in most locations. The reason is that accidents occur at intersections; every driveway or side road is an intersection; and sidepaths greatly complicate those intersections in ways that impact safety.

Poorly designed bike lanes and bike lane intersection treatments can have the same adverse effect.

The complex intersections demand that the bicyclist proceed very gingerly, at slow speed, watching for intersecting traffic from unconventional directions. This fact is counter-intuitive, and some riders attracted to separated facilities are unaware of it.

Separated multi-use paths are so popular that they are frequently congested.

Under these conditions, bicyclists must ride slowly for the sake of safety and courtesy. This, too, is counter-intuitive; many novice bicyclists do not recognize how easily they can go too fast for conditions. The need to ride slowly increases trip times, to an extent that may make these facilities less desirable than use of the road.

Historical Concerns with Special Bicycle Facility Planning

Special bicycle facilities have sometimes been viewed as the only way to provide improved access and mobility for bicycle traffic. These facilities have sometimes been developed in the absence of, or as a substitute for (1) programs for the development or improvement of the road network to accommodate bicycle traffic safely, and (2) efforts to educate the public about vehicular cycling.

In many instances, special bicycle facilities have been poorly designed, inadequately maintained or unnecessary. The problems posed by these facilities have been aggravated in many locations by laws which require the use of these facilities, however unsafe, when they are parallel to an existing road.

Since 1981, the bicycle facilities design standards of the American Association of Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) have been reasonably good, although not by themselves sufficient to guarantee a good facility. Some bicycle facilities built after that date have not met those standards.

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