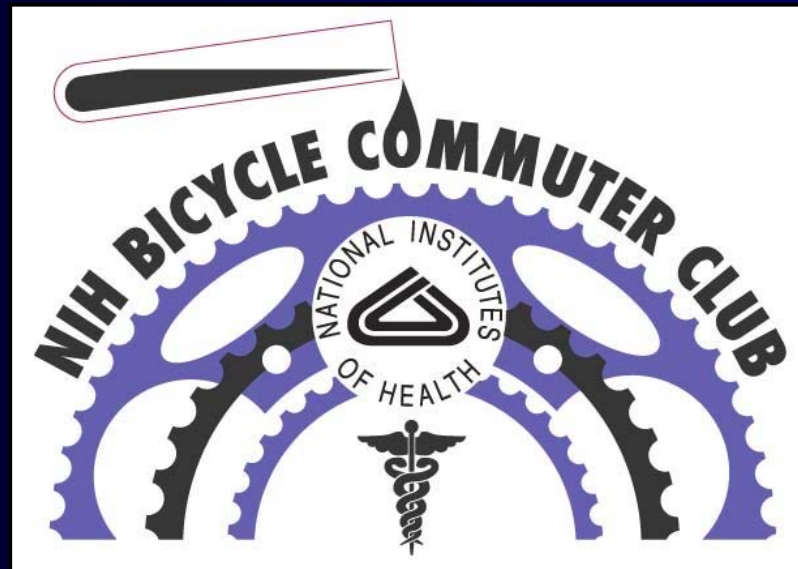


The NIH Bicycle Commuter Club

Trying to make the National Institutes of Health
a Healthier and Happier place for its employees



Angela Atwood-Moore,
President, NIH Bicycle Commuter Club
March 12, 2009

National Institutes of Health

Mission Statement

NIH is dedicated to improving the health of Americans by conducting and funding medical research. NIH also train scientists, and communicate medical and health sciences information to patients, their families, health care providers and the general public. NIH guides America's efforts in medical research. The NIH goal is to uncover new knowledge that will help prevent, detect, diagnose, and treat disease and disability, from the common cold to the rarest genetic disorder. The investment in understanding such diseases as AIDS, diabetes, heart disease and cancer returns dividends in longer, healthier, and safer lives.

NIH continues to make major inroads in fighting humanity's most enduring illnesses.

Some back-ground information about The National Institutes of Health, its employees and their transportation options.

- **NIH employs about 20,000 people in several states, including approximately 15,000 at the Main Bethesda campus and at nearby satellite facilities (many easily within biking distance) .**
- **Many of our employees and contractors are visiting researchers who come from countries or cities where getting around using a bicycle is a matter of routine. Many of our short-term community members are also young students and interns, readily inclined to utilize more active modes of transportation. We also employ many doctors and research scientists well versed in the health benefits of regular physical activity such as riding a bicycle.**
- **The Medical Center Metro station on the red-line of the WMATA Metro system services the main NIH campus in Bethesda. In addition to the Metro trains, multiple Ride-On and Metro Buses also service this station and connect it to many other local stations and business centers including Silver Spring, Bethesda, Rockville, Wheaton, Friendship Heights, Van Ness and Cleveland Park.**
- **The NIH is also situated on or very near some major highways and regional arterial roadways (I-495, I-270, Wisconsin Avenue/Rockville Pike, Old Georgetown Road, Connecticut Avenue) designated Bike Routes (Jones Bridge Road, Beach Drive) and Bike Trails (Bethesda Trolley Trail, Capitol Crescent Trail, Georgetown Branch Trail).**

Driving and Parking at The National Institutes of Health

- **Almost 9000 automobile parking spaces are provided for NIH employees, contractors, patients and visitors. These spots are available free of charge for employees and some long-term contractors.**
- **More than 2000 automobile parking spaces at NIH were made available within the past five years by either paving what were previously green spaces or erecting multi-level parking garages (or MLPs). Our three newest MLP construction projects resulted in an expense of about one hundred million dollars.**
- **According to 2004 Budget figures, NIH spent approximately \$250,000 that year to issue and monitor automobile parking permits (and issued almost 20,000 parking permits, at a cost of approximately \$13 per parking permit).**
- **That same year NIH spent almost \$700,000 for leasing and monitoring satellite parking facilities.**
- **The NIH operating budget for 2004 to cover the cost of providing parking services on campus was more than \$5,500,000.**

Mass Transit Benefits for National Institutes of Health Employees

- **More than 6000 NIH employees (contractors are not eligible) participate in the federal Transshare program, and receive up to \$120 dollars worth of fare each month towards the cost of bus, metro or train commuting.**
- **This amount was recently increased in the ARRA Stimulus to \$230 dollars per participant, expected to be implemented at NIH by May 1, 2009.**

Bicycling at The National Institutes of Health

- NIH provides about 650 bicycle parking spots, mostly in the form of inverted u-racks but also including 38 secure, covered lockers. These parking facilities must be shared by bicycles and mopeds, scooters and other lite-weight motorized vehicles.
- Bicycle parking spots at NIH (including lockers) are provided on a first come / first-served, day-use only basis.
- ~100 Bicycle parking spots (including 38 lockers, available for a fee and by reservation only) are also available at the Medical Center Metro station. These bicycle amenities are not monitored or policed by the NIH.
- The decision to provide bicycle parking at satellite facilities is at the discretion of the building management of the leasing company itself. NIH currently operates under no requirement to ensure bicycle parking when entering into lease agreements for satellite facilities.

During the past five years, hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent at NIH to provide increased and improved automobile parking, and to expand participation in the Transshare program.

Over the same time period the total number and quality of bicycle commuting amenities has actually experienced a notable decrease.

Still bicycle commuting participation has almost doubled at NIH since 2003.

So, if NIH is not devoting resources to meet the needs of the growing ranks of its bicycle commuters, and if NIH is not implementing programs to encourage and support more of its employees in this cleaner and greener, less-polluting, waistline-reducing commuting choice, who is stepping in to fill the void?

Meet the NIH Bicycle Commuter Club (NIHBCC)!



**Some of our members at a break in the monsoon during the infamous “Swim to Work Day”, 2005*

Meet the NIH Bicycle Commuter Club (NIHBCC)!

We are a group of approximately 500 NIH employees and contractors who routinely or even periodically commute by bicycle instead of by motorized vehicle.

- Of those ~500 bicyclists, 270 are currently subscribed to our club list-serve. Any NIH employee or contractor who rides a bicycle to NIH even periodically is welcome to consider themselves an NIH Bicycle Commuter Club member. Since we require no dues payments or applications of any kind, our only means of measuring membership, however, is by tracking those who self-subscribe to our club list-serve.**
- We are recognized as an official club under the umbrella of the NIH Recreation and Welfare Association. This provides us an annual budget of \$350.00 (not to be spent on food, or other consumables).**

How can a club :

- with only volunteer membership (no dues, no paid staff)
- with a pittance of a budget (\$350.00 annually)
- with limited institutional support
- operating in a very bicycle hostile/ car worshiping culture

encourage, support and incentivize bike commuting in order to effect constructive bicycle-friendly change?

I'll share with you today some of what we've tried from the very simple to programs a bit more involved.

1. Start a list-serve, get a webpage



<http://www.recgov.org/r&w/nihbike/index.html>

- We use our website to provide updated information data bases (Bikely “NIH” routes, NIH shower and locker room facilities ranked for cleanliness and operability, bike parking maps, webpage links to local bike clubs, shops, rides, etc.
- We use our list-serve to alert NIH cyclists to local bike advocacy efforts, cycling related fund-raisers and legal issues or pending legislation relating to cyclists*.

* Of late we have experienced efforts from the NIH Office of Ethics to censor some of such list-serve notifications, on the explanation that we are in danger of violating the Hatch Act. The NIH OE claims that some of our bicycle advocacy efforts and attempts to share information about pending bicycle friendly legislation by using our government e-mail accounts is akin to transmitting partisan political e-mails.

2. Perform annual bike counts and surveys

Why? To estimate the number of cyclists using NIH bicycle facilities and to identify precisely where NIH most needs new and improved bicycle facilities. NIH does not otherwise survey for the number of employees who use the NIH bicycle amenities or the physical condition of these bicycle amenities.

How? Club volunteers commit to count and tag bikes at bike racks/lockers around their buildings/facilities and make recommendations about needed improvements, better placement of racks/lockers, abandoned bicycles. (Tags are small notes with information about how to find the club website, join the club list-serve, or attend upcoming club activities. Tags can also remind cyclists of policy abuse, warn of enforcement actions, etc.) We also use the counts and surveys to help identify and tag for removal bicycles that appear to have been abandoned. This is a common occurrence and can be a serious access problem for cyclists at NIH.



Greetings from the NIH Bicycle Commuter Club

We are counting bikes this week, and thought we would take the opportunity to make sure you are aware of our e-mail list-serve and web site. Our website is posted at <http://www.recgov.org/r&w/nihbike/index.html>

You can sign up for our list-serve by following the instructions on our home page. The list-serve is now moderated to reduce spamming, and results in, on average, about five messages per week. We use the list serve to keep NIH bike commuters updated about club activities, community cycling events, regulations effecting cyclists, and to provide alerts for supporting bicycle transportation.

Our website has links to and detailed information about our annual activities calendar, our Top 10 List of NIH bicycle advocacy goals, and lists of bike racks, lockers and shower facilities here at NIH. This year the club is working to continue to host basic bike maintenance classes and bicycle safety classes. We also host a Ride Mentor program that matches potential new bike commuters with veteran NIH bike commuters and we are always looking for bicyclists interested in mentoring or being mentored.

If you would like more information about the club, please contact Angela Atwood-Moore (atwood@box-nih.gov). Thanks for commemorating International Car Free Week by choosing less-polluting commuting.

Ride hard! Ride safe! Ride on!

3. Make Club Jerseys



How? We had no trouble finding creative members of our volunteer club to submit design ideas and work with a jersey design and production company. The very act of designing our jerseys enhanced club camaraderie.

Why? Since we got our jerseys (first orders distributed on Bike to Work Day, 2007) club morale and volunteerism has notably increased. Campus unity among bicycle commuters has also increased and participation in activities has also unexpectedly improved. We are also enjoying the nice, bright color we chose for safety and advertising purposes.

*Clubs COULD use jersey sales with mark-up to raise funds, but we found this prohibitively expensive for us.



4. Host informal activities to share with the community



Seasonal “Polar bear” receptions



Annual “Car Free Day” festivities



Seasonal group rides



“Energy Awareness Month” festivities



Annual “Earth Day” receptions

**“Take Your Kid to Work
BY BIKE” Day Observations**



**Monthly “Vino and Velos” socials
(brain-storming/strategy sessions)**

and, of course, Bike to Work Day...

NIH has drawn the highest number of employees and won the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government's award for the area employer with the highest registered BTWD participation the past three years running (2006, 2007 and 2008).



Keys to our success

1. Chose a highly visible and accessible location. (We like to set up outside the office window of the NIH Director).
2. Work with WABA to be your own designated Bike to Work Day pit-stop. Take advantage of all the organization, work and resources offered by WABA, Metro COG, etc.
3. Get competitive. We organize an inter-institute competition, and reward institutes with the highest registration/participation.
4. Organize and publicize group rides.
5. Send targeted and individualized invitations to VIPs you would like to see attend. Invite them to join in a group ride, give a speech, and recruit Bike to Work Day participants and volunteers within their divisions.
6. Develop a relationship with your Local-Bike-Shops (LBSs) to get wrench support, SWAG, raffle items. We have requested items like shop jerseys, gift certificates, helmets, etc.



5. Host and advertise simple community service projects



**Perform maintenance on local paths and trails;
Adopt a local roadway or bike route**

**Host basic bicycle maintenance clinics;
work with local bike shops or recruit club volunteers**



**Host a bicycle reclamation event;
Work with Bikes for the World to recycle unwanted bikes**



**Host a League of American Bicyclists
Bicycle Safety certification course;
recruit LCIs within your club**

6. Develop a Bike Mentorship program



- Club members volunteer to mentor inexperienced riders needing support before attempting to commute by bicycle
- Mentors are matched with inexperienced riders seeking a route similar to their own
- Beginning riders and mentors work together to select a safe and convenient route.
- Mentors share their veteran's secrets: what to wear, what equipment to bring along, how to prepare your bike for commuting, notes on lights, helmet-sizing, etc.
- Mentors work directly with their mentees to select a date and time to co-commute once or twice, to help the beginning commuters gain confidence, skill, experience and the beginnings of a healthier life.
- We find that events like Earth Day, Bike to Work Day, Car Free Day, etc. make for excellent opportunities to support new riders and high-light the value of our club's mentorship program.

7. Bike Bucks: Providing Financial Incentives for Cyclists



The basic idea of our NIH Bike Bucks program is that registered NIH Bicycle Commuters log their bike-commuting miles and for every one hundred (100) bike miles logged, five (5) Bike Bucks will be rewarded.

- NIH Bike Bucks are actual, physical “monies” that have real fiscal value with select participating vendors. Vendors who have so far agreed to honor NIH Bike Bucks have helped to define parameters for specifically how Bike Bucks may be honored in their establishments.
- To begin logging their commuting miles and earning NIH Bike Bucks, bicycle commuting participants must complete the NIH Bike Bucks Program Application after reading and agreeing to the rules for earning and spending NIH Bike Bucks.



**Angela spends the first Bike Bucks;
Jill honors the first Bike Bucks.**

Bike Bucks began as the brain child of Jill DiMauro, owner of Proteus Bicycles. It was inspired by her experiences with Ithaca Hours as she grew up in Ithaca, and borne out of her passion to support bicycling and bicyclists in every way she can think of. After several passionate discussions in her bike shop about the possibilities of making the world a truly bike-friendly place, we decided NIH might be a great place to set up a pilot Bike Bucks program.

What's in it for the Bike Bucks vendors?

Bike Bucks bring in new customers and generate sales much the way coupons or other discounts or promotional events do. Bike Bucks could save vendors the trouble and the expense of designing, printing, mailing, etc. such sales or promotional materials.

From Jill: “In this drive-by culture, customers are desperate to feel that they are a part of something good and real that allows them to connect to something locally. Businesses that accept Bike Bucks would give their customers a chance to partner with something positive for the community, the Earth and themselves. There are customers who shop at a store for just the product, but there are so many more that will choose to shop for the experience. This kind of experience builds loyalty and referrals. Bike Bucks gives stores the opportunity to not just accept the currency but also to embrace the experience.”

So, how are we doing thus far?

In our first year (2007), 68 registered Bike Bucks participants logged 52,776 miles and earned a total of \$2435 Bike Bucks.

In our second year (2008), 89 registered Bike Bucks participants logged 77,070 miles and earned a total of \$3840 Bike Bucks.

Our combined two year totals:

152 registered participants

129,846 bicycle commuting miles logged

\$6275 NIH Bike Bucks earned

We currently have 139 registered NIH bicycle commuters and three vendors participating in the program. We hope and expect to continue to expand both the number of bicycle commuters and the number (and types) of vendors participating in the program.

As our intention was to create a template program for incentivizing bicycle commuting, we are very excited that NOAA recently began a Bike Bucks program of their own.

If you would like help establishing a Bike Bucks program at your institution, and want details about how we got started, please contact me Angela Atwood-Moore, (atwood@box-a.nih.gov).