



THE **OPINION**
COLLECTIVE

powered by BERNUTH & WILLIAMSON

Perceptions and Possibilities II

Stakeholder opinion on the status of bicycling and walking in American cities

Prepared for the National Bike Summit, March 4, 2014

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OVERVIEW

- **Purpose**
- Participation
- Findings
- Recommendations



PURPOSE

- Obtain through in-depth interviews the candid opinions of city leaders about bicycling & walking
- Analyze findings
- Provide recommendations



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PURPOSE

- Candor was encouraged
- Confidentiality was assured
- Perceptions are reality (but not necessarily true)
- High consistency across cities, except as noted
- Don't assume you can identify the source of a comment

...and, no, we will not tell you



OVERVIEW

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PARTICIPATION

Interviews (January-February 2014)

40 in-depth conversations with city leaders identified by the League and ULI
(Mayors, Deputy Mayors, City Managers, Chiefs of Staff, Senior Advisors, etc.)



**BICYCLE FRIENDLY
COMMUNITY**

Platinum / Gold / Silver	12
Bronze	16
Unranked	12



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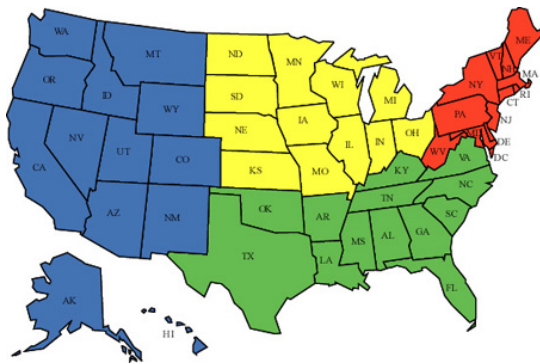
Fellowship Cities	11
Non-fellowship Cities	29



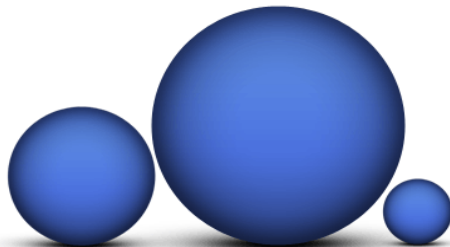
PARTICIPATION

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Northeast	10
South	13
Midwest	07
West	10



Large (> 500,000)	16
Medium	19
Small (< 100,000)	05



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FINDINGS: ACCEPTANCE

*“Everyone is bought in
and the support is increasing”*



FINDINGS: ACCEPTANCE

“We have had a lot of public interest”

– or –

“We were named one of the worst (cities for bicycling)...and that got some attention”



FINDINGS: ACCEPTANCE

Emphasizes bicycling, or bicycling and walking

Together or separate matters less than the shift to multi-modalism*

- *(Bicycling and walking are) starting to become part of a larger conversation about moving people around*
- *We certainly build to (pedestrian interests), but we talk about biking & transit*
- *Bicycling work is ahead of pedestrian work, but pedestrian work is catching up*
- *Really the focus...is on getting drivers, pedestrians and cyclists to get along*
- *Providing mobility options, so someone can have a 'Plan A, B, C, D'*
- *There's no part of transportation that's a separate conversation*
- *We've moved towards considering them as separate but related issues*
- *In concept they are together, but at the project level they're separate*

* The shift to a multi-modal planning approach was more common in the BFC Platinum, Gold and Silver cities



FINDINGS: ACCEPTANCE

“Supported, accepted, acknowledged”

Essential for the urban core, debatable for the suburbs

- *Opposition is in the minority...met with, "Really dude? That's so 70's"*
- *We're in a good place - we're committed to it*
- *We're already bought in*
- *You can't really be against bikes - it is a safe issue*
- *I can put up with the naysayers, and they're a very small minority*
- *Pushing back is part of the public dialogue*
- *The reasons are understood, but what people oppose is change*
- *(Caveat) A certain amount of skepticism...because there isn't a huge amount of it being done, but conversely it is hard to do if there are aren't the facilities*
- *(Caveat) We have areas where this will become a real factor...but if you're in a residential cul-de-sac I just don't know*



FINDINGS: ACCEPTANCE

Support that has been advanced by...

An overarching interest in “quality of life”

- *It's all a part of a good quality of life experience - not something to stand alone, but a great contributor*
- *There are certain people...who are always involved, and they care about the quality of life issues, and they want cycling, they want walking*
- *It really was quality of life (as) the mayor is trying to have this be the city of choice for people to work, live and play*
- *Creating a city where people want to live, work and raise a family*
- *It is a combination of things - a quality of life issue*
- *A livability argument - sustainable, healthy, compact communities*
- *The city has really been pushing...quality of life and that has many different facets, but one has to do with (attracting) young professionals*



FINDINGS: ACCEPTANCE

Support that has been advanced by...

An overarching interest in “quality of life,” as defined by millennials

- *I've come to understand is that in the new world I'm an anomaly, and people younger than me - 20's, 30's, 40's - are really focused on this*
- *(There is) a national trend towards it...that is really generational*
- *With any area that is aspiring to...attract that younger demographic, you have a good and accepted understanding that this demographic wants to see bicycling and walking right there*
- *(The mayor) saw that it was the professionals and the people who were younger and up and coming...and I think that spoke to him*
- *A lot of the support for bicycling...tends to be around how (our city) wants to be attractive to people, younger people who could live almost anywhere*
- *We're one of the cities that talks a lot about attracting the creative class, and people in that demographic don't want to be tied to a car*



FINDINGS: ACCEPTANCE

Support that has been advanced by...

Almost always, implicit if not yet explicit ties to economic development

- *I always bring it down to the bottom line, the economic reasons, and our ability to attract that creative class as that's going to form the basis of our economic development for the next 25 years*
- *To attract the companies (we want) and workers they need, we need an infrastructure that supports them (and when you) go around to the tech companies, next to every worker's desk there's the bike they biked in on*
- *Creating environments that promote exchange between people directly, that bring people to the street, and into contact with each other*
- *(Caution) It's acknowledged as a contributing factor, but it's not viewed as a primary economic development engine / Not part of the strategy per se*



FINDINGS: ACCEPTANCE

Support that has been advanced by...

Often fueled by competition between cities

- *If some other city thinks they can beat (my city) by installing a car only system, let 'em try!*
- *You can encapsulate it in something (another mayor) said...he pretty much challenged his city to make these investments...to steal the educated tech workers, the tech industry from (other cities), and those type of direct threats or challenges made us want to step up our game*
- *If we're going to compete for intellectual capital we have to create an environment where people want to live...this whole livability issue*
- *When these highly mobile workers look at where they want to locate, we better have done it right (as) other cities are doing (this), including cities you wouldn't expect*
- *People were contrasting (city) with (city), and there was a fear of losing out*



FINDINGS: ACCEPTANCE

Support that has been advanced by...

Occasionally important connections to health concerns

- *People get this - it makes sense not just for attracting young talent, but for our health*
- *I can't say that we ever find anyone who is opposed...when it's (positioned as) helping to promote healthier lifestyles*
- *(A national magazine) always had us as one of the fattest cities in the nation, and the mayor realized he had an opportunity to change that*
- *(My city) struggles with obesity, heart disease, diabetes - that's how it got started*
- *When you bike or you walk, you become healthier - reduces chronic disease and thereby pressure on public health systems*



FINDINGS: ACCEPTANCE

“Generally I’d say there is a long list of other arguments to make”



FINDINGS: ACCEPTANCE

However...

Some arguments are important only in some places

ENVIRONMENT

- **Majority** - *We talk about (it) but it isn't the same type of priority*
- **Minority** - *(Concern about climate change) has driven a lot of our change*

SAFETY

- **Majority** - *We want people to be safe...that's a given*
- **Minority** - *Safety is the gateway drug to these conversations*



FINDINGS: ACCEPTANCE

However...

Some arguments are important only in some places

PERSONAL ECONOMICS

- **Majority** - *People become weary of having to own cars and have long commutes and deal with congestion*
- **Minority** - *The biggest thing (in my city) right now is access and equity*

CONGESTION

- **Typical of mid/small cities** - *We have congestion, but not like other...areas, so there is not a lot of focus on getting people (out of cars and) off the roads*
- **Typical of large cities** - *(And it also helps) in our downtown with people having trouble dealing with parking and congestion*



FINDINGS: ACCEPTANCE

However...

Criticisms of (supportive) cities and cars can backfire

- *Advocates are advocates and they can go overboard*
- *I'm trying to expedite (implementation), but (some advocates) are actually pushing back...as in their minds if something is going to be done it needs to be perfect, but in government, we can't let the perfect get in the way of the good*
- *We end up feeling attacked by the bike community, the same people you're trying to please - it becomes a no win situation*
- *Sometimes the advocacy groups come at it from a very negative angle...cutting you down rather than providing constructive criticism*
- *"I'm out of my car, you should get out of yours" - I might agree with that, but I'm not going to say it out loud*
- *You can make the argument in an affirmative way, without drawing cars into it, and I worry that some of the advocates (can't do that)*



FINDINGS: ACCEPTANCE

Accepted, albeit not on par with other modes

Varies city to city, center to suburb, and is parity really important?

- *In terms of money, automobiles will be the dominant expense, (but) in terms of policy, the cycling perspective always comes up and is considered seriously*
- *No, I don't think we're there yet...we will know when every discussion doesn't end with, "well, what do we do about parking?"*
- *Still low on the list but it's on the list (and) it wasn't on the list 5 years ago*
- *I wouldn't say it has an equal place as drivers still rule the road, but it is the rate of growth (in bicycling and walking) that I'm focused on*
- *At an aspirational level we're all there...but we still struggle with a public perception that it is going to impact a lot of people*
- *We really feel (bicycling) is a transportation category that now deserves its official place within transportation and not just as (a special) initiative*



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FINDINGS: INFLUENCE

Mayors +

- *The mayor (has) the pulpit and (believes) in it...(as while) the various cycling groups and young professionals are supportive, (they) don't drive the agenda*
- *The mayor's leadership was key*
- *We have a strong set of advocates, and then the mayor came in and said, 'that's nice, but it is not enough'*
- *The mayor has embraced these plans...pushing programs that otherwise would have struggled*
- *A mayor who's looking to take interest and turn in into investment, and not pissing people off because it is tied to that economic development argument*
- *Mayors who have embraced this not because they are hardcore bicyclists themselves but because it is better for the bottom line, better for the city*



FINDINGS: INFLUENCE

Mayors + Champions* +

*translating the idea into options

- *I can't overstate the role that a champion on the inside can play...as no matter if a mayor believes in this, they aren't going to get involved in the weeds*
- *Our bike coordinator, (who) had a lot of credibility in the bike community, (as) bringing (that person) inside has made a big difference...a translator between a slow bureaucracy and an impatient public*
- *In hindsight, having that bike coordinator - part planner, part crazy-about-bikes advocate as a champion - was just as important as facilities planning*
- *An exceptionally talented transportation planner who understood more than most - that was an important internal factor*



FINDINGS: INFLUENCE

Mayors + Champions + Advocates* +

*who have learned to operate as allies

- *A very positive development for bicycling in (my city is that) the (advocates who) took more of a bulldog approach are instead (now taking) a more pragmatic, 'here's how we all benefit,' one*
- *(Our bicycling advocates were) hard to snuggle up with, but they got our attention...they used to be a bunch of combative zealots with whom it was 'all or nothing' (but) they've mellowed*
- *(An advocacy group) that has been very, very active in (our) planning process*
- *It's like that old bit about, 'we're from the government and we're here to help,' but...(a protest or) critical mass is counter productive as that just pisses off everybody, especially those of us who are (trying to help) / The minute you piss (the city leadership) off it is hard to regain trust*
- *Local grassroots groups have been consummate drum beaters (and) kept the dream alive, but have had a limited impact*



FINDINGS: INFLUENCE

Mayors + Champions + Advocates + Business*

*more from business/developers better, but collaboration key

- *Two and a half years ago there was one group that would go on about this (but now) we have...a diversity of private sector, government folks and advocacy groups*
- *It's been an interesting evolution rather than a revolution...(now with a combination of advocacy organizations, a professional staff (within city government) that 'gets it,' and a (supportive) community*
- *One of the most gratifying...has been seeing the principles we've been advocating for years become what the development industry is lobbying for*
- *(Caveat) The small businesses are mixed - some get that bikes mean business, others are just used to, 'my customers want to drive and park out front'*
- *(Caveat) They know we're going to be sensitive to these issues, but the development community in general I'm not sure they get it*



FINDINGS: INFLUENCE

Mayors + Champions + Advocates + Business

Thoughts on “who more,” or “who else” varied greatly from city to city

- *There isn't a lot of organized opposition*
- *(Our) chamber of commerce is generally silent on the subject, but I think leadership there understands the benefits*
- *It would be great if more of the business community was for it*
- *The health community, though they are already pretty much in support*
- *Hearing more from the environmental community*
- *It's a shame that bike shops don't get involved (here)*
- *School district is pretty on board...but not encouraging folks*
- *Federal agencies!*



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FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTATION

*“It’s hard to point to one thing...
it was a combination of great
vision, community engagement,
the right kind of project and
good execution”*



FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTATION

Essential ingredient - 1. Political leadership

- *First and foremost having the buy-in of the mayor, and then having an issue owner who really cares and (has the mayor's ear)*
- *Having a bold vision, a clear vision and the alignment of resources around that vision (budgets and people) - that's the secret sauce*
- *You have to have strong political leaderships that will push for this as...there are (always) people who push back*
- *There are people at every single turn who fight this - sometimes political and sometimes business - so that is why...solid leadership is so important*
- *(Leadership's) ability to engage the community and create synergy between government, the planning community and advocates*
- *We live in an era of personalities - a logical case is not always going to stick with the public...you also need a charismatic, funny, memorable messenger (and the) mayor's personality has pulled it off*



FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTATION

Essential ingredient – 2. Community support

- *If you did this...where nobody rides a bike anyway, then you won't get (very far) - we created safe (ways) for people to do what they wanted*
- *There are parts of the city that are inhabited by a younger group of people who are interested in living and working in a more urban environment and there is strong support there, but then...suburban, where it is a very different thing*
- *You have to get your hands dirty, go to the neighborhood meetings and build the relationships...that is just an essential - on a scale from one to ten, a ten*
- *I do think you can politically hurt yourself if you put (bicycling facilities) in a place where it is widely seen that nobody is using them or it is unsafe, or unpopular - that's something to think about*
- *There are some people that are never going to be satisfied, never be bought-in, and sometimes you just have to say...not worth it*



FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTATION

Essential ingredient – 3. Example projects

- *You can talk about something conceptually but then having something people can experience, that makes a difference*
- *If you build it, they're going to want it all over the place...once they go out there, they say, 'Wow!'*
- *Letting people see some results, where if you're a supporter, you're thinking, 'this is great,' and if you're a detractor, 'hey, this isn't so bad'*
- *We've kind of (adapted) our approach to doing things that are a little smaller, allow for experimental testing and if it works, keep it (but) if it doesn't, start over - the stakes don't have to be so high*
- *Having a (project) that is extremely popular was a very helpful thing for the whole program...we took that trail and put connectors to it, (all with) some sort of tie back or touchback to our downtown*



FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTATION

Essential ingredient – 4. Connectivity

- *Get some trails in different parts of the city at attractive venues, and then start connecting them*
- *Figure out where people want to go, where they're coming from, and how we can help make it happen*
- *It's the comprehensive nature of the whole approach was what captured people's imagination*
- *It (can't be) just about providing people a place to ride on this street but that it fits into a bigger vision*
- *It's all about integrating everything together*
- *Showing connections - that is a big thing*
- *(NOTE) Connecting the components of different (modes)*



FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTATION

Essential ingredient – 5. Allocated funding*

*Often unspoken, but always present

- *Talk is talk but if there is money behind it then it is prioritized and gets the attention of a lot of different people*
- *The obvious one is funding*
- *They say, 'we agree in theory,' but where are we going to get the money to do this? Their hearts are in the right place but their wallet isn't*
- *I don't recall any pushback - the main issue is, 'Do you have the resources?'*
- *Assume that you're never going to do it as fast as the activists want you to do it - it's largely driven by budget and a function of the finances*



FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTATION

Obstacles often the flip side of opportunity...

...but also included

TRAFFIC ENGINEERS

- *...but then you're talking to the DOT and they're just not interested...you have to tell them to do it, as otherwise it is something they're just not thinking about, and then (show them how to do it) as they don't know how*
- *We have a progressive (transportation) director, but if it's (a choice) between a left hand turn lane and a bike lane, he'll choose the turn lane*
- *Traffic engineers don't like to change*

EMBRACING CHANGE (ON & OFF THE ROADS)

- *(Opposition wasn't about bicycling) it was their visceral reaction to change*
- *Hard for some of the automobile traditionalists to accept...we needed some new laws...as well as some education...and, candidly...we also have cyclists who need to know...they're obligated to also obey those traffic control devices*



FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTATION

“If you look at it from the short term, it is not necessarily a good return on investment, but if you show them the benefits and the long term impacts in very real and concrete terms, for the most part you’ll see the light bulb come on in their heads”



FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTATION

Are these investments generating economic value?

Few have hard numbers

- *A weakness for us and I would guess elsewhere is data collection (as) I want to say that it has but we've not quantified that*
- *In city government, you don't have a lot of time to do your own research*
- *I know there's data out there (but the) trick with cycling is that it's hard to segregate from the bigger system*
- *(These questions are) getting into some of our discussions, but (not) driving it*
- *I've seen studies that show how it adds to business, and our bottom line (as a city), but I just don't think that having more accessible transportation could be in any way a net negative for our economy*
- *The simple answer is yes, though (when) starting to invest in this more robust infrastructure (you'll have to provide evidence) that it is going to be more than symbolically important*



FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTATION

Are these investments generating economic value?

Few have hard numbers but all have (or expect) anecdotal evidence

- *A new explosion of apartment and condo buildings with people who want to live downtown, and I bet that over half the people have a bike or means to a bike - it is that conspicuous and obvious*
- *There's an inherent understanding that people get it...property values improve when you improve walkability (even if) jury is still out on bike infrastructure*
- *I've had real estate agents tell me that if there is a bike trail nearby that increases the (sale or rental) price*
- *Local retail businesses have come around to seeing the benefits, and even developers have built housing...(that) wouldn't be there if not for the bike trail*
- *We have people calling us and asking for a bike share station outside of their buildings and that tells me that there is a real value to it*
- *We're just not there yet...(but in another city)*



FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTATION

What about bikeshare?

Those who have it like it, those who don't have it want it*

- *Bike share has been helping to get people who don't bike regularly to try it (which is important as we) don't need everyone to become a cyclist, we need them to feel like it is a viable transportation option*
- *Biking has been very recreational up to this point, and now it's beginning to be seen as more practical...I'm impressed*
- *It's helped as the more people see bicycles...they know that they're there, and cars and bikes are learning that they can, and how to coexist*
- *It's tremendously popular...it changed a lot of hearts, even of the skeptics*
- *We'd love to have that*
- *I think it makes great sense, but the city won't likely do it ourselves*

* 15 of the 40 cities who participated have bikeshare programs in place, while the remainder were in various stages of planning or consideration



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FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTATION

*“It’s politics that stand in the way
or politics that gets things done”*



FINDINGS: THE FEDERAL ROLE

Enable and incentivize...

- *Money always helps / Funding is the main thing / Always...funding*
- *Flexibility in funding streams should be the rule of the day*
- *The federal government supports almost every kind of mode of transportation in this country, from tractor trailer rigs to single occupancy vehicles, and we need more financial support for this*
- *The grants...have been exceptionally helpful to us, and that's great, but it's really been here getting the local people bought in*
- *Keep the idea of complete streets and put pressure on the states...to honor the municipality's planning documents*
- *We're doing way in excess of what they're allowing, so if they could dictate to the states, 'do 10% in transportation alternative programs,' that'd help*
- *I'm not so big on the coercive aspect, but (for) allowing the options...the worst thing is when the state or fed people have a one size fit all approach*



FINDINGS: THE FEDERAL ROLE

Enable and incentivize...

...or just get out of the way

- *Funding would be helpful, but, most importantly, get out of our way...we know what's best at the local level*
- *Federal government has a role in helping to supplement these programs, but it is not something where the federal government can initiate a dramatic turnaround unless there is local buy-in*
- *If there were a way to streamline the process (and requirements), I'd say think about it guys as it is wasting so much time and money*
- *Someone once referred to it as the tainted federal dollar where each dollar you get (for a bike or pedestrian project) actually costs you five*
- *Almost nothing...when we look to the future we assume the Feds aren't going to be there for us (so) the best thing (is) just to stay out of the way*



FINDINGS: THE FEDERAL ROLE

Talking with the Hill about the transportation bill

Varies city to city, and not always the usual suspects*

- *I don't know (but) I'd be surprised if bicycling did not come up*
- *We've got a lot on our plate so our federal agenda does not necessarily include bicycling - it's just not a top priority*
- *Not really, I mean I keep up with it, but it means a lot more to our state department of transportation*
- *It is not something that (we discuss) - we don't have high hopes for (the bill)*
- *It is part of our legislative agenda*
- *Yes, we are (and) looking for fairly wide-ranging changes in the bill*
- *For a long time you could get pork money (for these efforts), but no longer*

* Approximately three-fourths indicated that representatives from their cities are having or planning to mention bicycling in these conversations, but it was often unclear as to how focused they'd be on bicycling



FINDINGS: THE FEDERAL ROLE

Talking with the Hill about the transportation bill ...with broader ideas

- *The problem is where exactly you categorize bikes, as if you put it with transportation it gets lost but it can't yet be on its own without additional support...it's still not at the same level of subways or cars nor should it be, but it deserves its place*
- *The bigger opportunity (at the federal level) is connecting the role of public health with better transportation*
- *This administration is all about interagency partnerships, so linking Transportation to Health around some significant initiative could have a lot of possibilities*
- *They should have a complete streets approach to all of their funding...tie everything together - it should be the department of mobility*



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FINDINGS: FINAL THOUGHTS

The challenge is “institutionalizing” the change

- *We start certain things because there is an excitement, but one of the key things is to have it institutionalized...as standard operating procedure*
- *I see a number who accept it and agree with it, and would say it is a priority, but I don't know if anyone would put it in their top ten priorities...(without that champion) I don't know if we'll accelerate (what we're doing)*
- *We don't really have anyone in a formal role...an 'office of bike'(with) someone who can understand both sides (government and advocacy) and help mediate the conversation*
- *Any kind of improvement that would really drive real estate investment has to be perceived as pretty permanent (and bicycle facilities aren't there yet)*
- *Funding is the key to everything - our new dedicated stream is a big help*



FINDINGS: FINAL THOUGHTS

Additional insights

- (CHANGE THE CONVERSATION) *No such thing as a parking problem, there are only mobility problems, and if you start with that question, 'why do people feel they need a car to get here?' then you get to a very different place*
- (STAY POSITIVE) *Claim the high ground and adopt a vocabulary that is positive, visionary, active and forward looking, and then just stick with it - don't give up just because you run into a couple of naysayers*
- (PUBLIC APPRECIATION) *One compelling reason (is that) the mayor is receiving a constant stream of 'atta boys' for these projects*
- (PERSPECTIVE) *Keep advocating for (bicycling and walking) as part of an urban environment, but know it is not the only part*
- (PREPARATION) *Better bring your A game and know your stuff - the laws, street design, the available resources, the budget, the facts, figures, analysis*
- (GOOD BEHAVIOR) *What people complain about is the behavior of bicyclists and the amount of bad behavior (I see) here is astounding*



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RECOMMENDATIONS

- Appreciate and applaud the progress made
- Stay positive – an ally to champions in city government
- Come prepared, and participate in meetings
- Inwardly bike-centric, outwardly multimodal
- Share stories of success, and plans for the future (WIIFO)
- Gather evidence of economic & health impacts
- “Institutionalize” the idea (people & funding)
 - *and, of course* -
- Know your specific audience’s interests and perspective



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Prepared for the National Bike Summit, March 4, 2014

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www.bernuthconsulting.com