



FAQ: Research on Mobility and Bike Infrastructure

Recent national research conducted by PeopleForBikes in major metropolitan areas provides insight into how people feel about mobility and where bike infrastructure fits into their desire for more livable communities. These frequently asked questions prepare bike and transportation advocates to talk with policymakers in their cities about how bike infrastructure can benefit all of their constituents, whether or not they bike.

Traffic is bad enough. How do I make the case for bike infrastructure when there is hardly enough room on our roads as it is?

Traffic is bad, and it will get worse if we don't make room for more transportation options. Few people who live in metropolitan areas think it is easy to get around. While the vast majority drive cars and express a preference for cars, they also realize their cities need more transportation options to help drivers, walkers, bikers and those who take public transportation get around more quickly, easily and with the greatest safety. Our research found that a majority (71%) believe that more people on bikes will reduce traffic congestion, evidence of a growing understanding that providing people with more and better coordinated options for getting around will ease traffic problems now and in the future.

So are you telling me that bike lanes will solve all of our transportation problems?

No. Our transportation problems are too big to be solved by any one solution alone. But your constituents believe that thinking about your city's transportation needs as a whole and making everything work together as best as possible will make our city more livable—whether you drive, bike, walk or take public transportation. Bike infrastructure can and should be connected to improvements in roads, sidewalks and transit—76% of our survey respondents believe that this would help people get around faster. When carefully planned and constructed, bike infrastructure can help everyone get where they need to go with the greatest safety, reliability and the least amount of hassle.

What do you mean by “bike infrastructure?”

Bike infrastructure is like the current road and sidewalk infrastructure we have for motorists and pedestrians. It's a completely connected, comfortable system of bike lanes that allow people on bikes to get to where they're going safely without inconveniencing drivers and walkers. Protected bike lanes are located on or next to the road, but physically separated and only used by people riding bikes or scooters. Good bike infrastructure doesn't leave bike riders, motorists or pedestrians to navigate incomplete connections that force everyone into unsafe and confusing situations. Everyone can get where they are going with the greatest safety and the least amount of hassle because the traffic flow needs of all are met through careful planning and smart construction.

Many people in my city don't bike; how can I justify something for so few people?

In every city where we researched, people expressed a desire to bike more. Sixty-three percent (63%) said they would bike more if they felt safer. Integrating bike infrastructure and biking behavior into driving and walking systems provides the predictability and safety people need to feel comfortable to bike more. While some will bike to work, others see themselves as biking to restaurants, entertainment, social events and to see friends—all of that relieves pressures on traffic and parking in neighborhoods and around town.

My city is car-centric. Why should drivers' tax dollars be spent on bike infrastructure when they won't be using it?

The benefits from bike infrastructure are experienced by all who use the road, whether or not they bike. Connected, protected bike lanes make traveling safer and less stressful not only for bikers but for drivers and pedestrians as well. Bike infrastructure provides cities with more opportunities to move people where they need to go, and it helps all people have a more peaceful commute. The conversation should be about us for us, not about us versus them. In cities with many transportation options, people take different options that give them the most control over their schedule. Having these options opens up opportunities for everyone—for job opportunities, commuting, recreation and even health.



What will be taken away if protected bike lanes are added?

Adding bike infrastructure, in combination with other transportation improvements, doesn't always mean that other resources will be taken away. Though there may be some tradeoffs, in many cases there are ways to keep parking spaces and actually use parked cars as part of smart bike lane protection and design. Sometimes we might lose a lane for traffic, but that loss of a lane or parking is mitigated with the more positive effect of reducing traffic congestion, calming unsafe speeding in neighborhoods, making walking safer and encouraging people to bike for short distances where they would otherwise take a car.

We can't create progress without change. In our research, 75% of people believe that incorporating bike infrastructure into transportation produces large gains in creating a forward-thinking and livable community that is capable of dealing with growth while helping people and communities grow stronger.

How do I make the argument for adding bike infrastructure when fixing our roads, sidewalks and public transportation is a higher priority for my city?

The great idea is to do it all together with smart planning and careful construction that takes everyone's traffic flow needs into consideration. How many times do we need to rip up our streets or improve our sidewalks or change our transit schedules? It's inefficient to look at these improvements as individual projects or things that don't work together.

The interaction between drivers, bikers and pedestrians is a concern since people aren't held accountable to the rules of the road. How do we ensure that people on bikes don't make commuting more dangerous?

Everyone is responsible for knowing and following the rules of the road. But, in order for cyclists to do that, they need a place to be on the road. People do unpredictable things when they are put in unpredictable situations. Look what happens when drivers come to an intersection where the lights are out—or they suddenly come on to a newly paved street with no lane markers, or they have to swerve to avoid a pothole. Drivers have lanes that guide their behaviors; bike riders need the same lanes. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of survey respondents say that protected bike lanes would make the rules of the road clear for bikers, motorists and pedestrians. When everyone has a piece of the road, everyone can have peace on the road. This is how we learn to travel safely as a city.

Shouldn't we just require drivers and bikers to have more education on how to share the road?

That's a part of the solution, but it won't help as much as giving each their own piece of the road. Our research shows that drivers and bikers are both very concerned about each other and their safety. They want to share the road, but they are also forced into unpredictable situations where roads narrow or meet, where trucks are parked or parts of streets are in disrepair. Infrastructure solves that problem and allows for greater impact from education. We need good bike infrastructure that won't leave bike riders, motorists or pedestrians to navigate incomplete connections that force everyone into unsafe and confusing situations. Drivers, walkers and bikers can get where they are going with the greatest safety and the least amount of hassle because everyone's traffic flow needs are met through careful planning and smart construction. Done right, that biker will stay in their lane, out of the way of other modes of travel.

How can bike lanes help those in my city who don't own a bike or aren't comfortable biking?

Not everyone bikes, and there are those who can't bike, but more people on bikes are helping your constituents get to where they are going in any mode of transportation they choose. It's fewer cars on the road, less congestion in inner cities and less wear and tear on the roads over time.

Bike lanes are just for affluent people and gentrifying neighborhoods. What do they do for the underserved?

Actually, bike infrastructure benefits are for everybody. Our research found that those in low-income communities are most apt to use a bike to get to work or run errands. More would use bikes if they felt safer, and they see bike infrastructure as contributing to providing greater access to opportunity, jobs and more recreation and health choices. Improving roads, sidewalks and bike infrastructure in underserved communities sends them a message that you care to elevate their lives.



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People in my city have grown accustomed to sharing the road with bikes, but now we have scooters and other new modes of personal transportation. How does bike infrastructure help me provide drivers, scooters and pedestrians with greater safety?

While we don't have specific research on scooters, our research shows that mobility and safety are paramount concerns for everyone—and that is applicable to scooters. Bike infrastructure gives scooters and other people-powered transportation the space they need to travel safely without inconveniencing drivers and walkers. Bike infrastructure will help us safely integrate new modes of people-powered transportation, making the rules of the road clear, getting them off sidewalks and out of traffic where accidents and injuries are most likely to occur.