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The Bicycle as a Transportation Mode

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BICYCLES AND LEGISLATION

Edward I. Koch, U. S. Representative, New York City

Several approaches to the problem of bicyclists are discussed on the state and federal levels. Examples of state and federal legislation to make bicycling safer and more appealing are presented.

•REQUESTS to turn down thermostats, awaken when it is still dark, and decrease use of the automobile contradict the statement made by Presidential Assistant Peter M. Flanigan in 1973: "The United States is not going back to the cold, the dark and the bicycle."

These measures, coupled with the fact that there are now more than 80 million bicyclists, indicate that Flanigan's statement has come full cycle.

A study conducted by the Ford Foundation estimated that 14 to 23 percent of the energy consumed in this country is used by the automobile and at least 50 percent of this automobile travel is trips less than 5 miles (8 km) long. The U. S. Department of Transportation (DOT) has estimated that, if 5 percent of the motorists using cars for 2.5 to 3.5-mile (4 to 5.6-km) trips would convert to bicycles, 12.5 billion gal (47 hm³) of gas would be saved during the next 16 years.

The energy crisis combined with foul air and congested city streets makes the bicycle an appealing remedy.

We are all in agreement that the bicycle is the most energy-efficient mode of transportation. However, as any urban or suburban cyclist knows, the automobile and the bicycle are not compatible roadfellows.

Citizen groups have familiarized people with the positive qualities of the bike: It is quiet, clean, and healthful. And they have lobbied, often quite effectively, for legislative changes. However, they have only begun to gain widespread acceptance of the bike as a commuting vehicle as well as a recreational resource.

Many states have begun to address some of the problems facing bicyclists. Washington and Oregon have laws mandating the use of a small percentage of state Highway Trust Fund money to promote bicycling. In New York, the 1972 legislature passed a law that includes bike safety guidelines for the first time. California, however, has made the most dramatic advances. In 1973, the legislature passed a bill mandating a minimum annual state expenditure of \$360,000 for bike facilities and provided an additional \$360,000 to local agencies for the same purpose. Bicycle path systems are springing up all over the state; the largest is planned to run 444 miles (714 km) from north of San Francisco to south of Los Angeles along an abandoned aqueduct.

Cities such as New York, Cleveland, Atlanta, Boston, Denver, and Washington, D. C., either have in operation or have planned bikeway systems.

What additional legislation is needed on the state level? Moneys from state departments of transportation must be made available for bikeways. Abandoned railroad rights-of-way provide a superb foundation for bicycle roadbeds. Ohio recently passed a law requiring the return to state jurisdiction of these rights-of-way for conversion to bikeways. In addition, the Bay Area Rapid Transit System in San Francisco has provided bicycle racks at stations, and they have been a success. Many of these monthly rental lock-ups have 100 percent occupancy.

On the local level, building developers should be required to construct space for racks in both residential and commercial buildings. Police departments should be encouraged to launch annual registration drives.

On the federal level, Congress overwhelmingly accepted as part of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973 provisions to make available \$40 million per year from the Highway Trust Fund (for fiscal years 1973 through 1975) for the development and

construction of bicycle lanes and paths, traffic control devices, and parking shelters. DOT issued new regulations allowing these moneys to be used apart from primary and secondary road systems. In addition, the Secretary of Transportation authorized a \$2 million study to be conducted on bicycle and pedestrian safety.

According to a 1972 study by the California Department of Highways, it costs \$4 million to construct 1 mile (1.6 km) of freeway and \$500,000/mile (\$312,000/km) of secondary road. When compared with the Ann Arbor bicycle study estimate of \$24,000/bikeway mile, the difference is significant.

Incentives such as safe routes and ample parking facilities are needed. In addition, use of the car must be discouraged through higher parking taxes, negatively graduated tolls on bridges and turnpikes, and less construction of new highways.

As a result of these and other glaring needs, I drafted legislation entitled the Urban Bikeway Transportation Act of 1975. This bill includes provisions for \$20 million, half from the Highway Trust Fund and half from general revenues, in a bicycle transportation fund to be administered by the Secretary of Transportation. This money would be available for planning and construction of bikeways, traffic control devices, and parking shelters within urbanized areas (at least 50,000 population) and would be granted on an 80-20 basis to states or local municipalities within urbanized areas.

In addition, letters have been sent to DOT requesting inclusion of bicycle provisions for driver education programs and a change in existing parallel designs for sewer grates, which represent a hazard for the cyclist and possible liability suits against the state.

Finally, I have drafted a letter to request the Secretary of Transportation to form an office of bicycle transportation to coordinate the approximately 92 federal programs that have jurisdiction over bicycle transportation.

All this and much more can spur expansion of bike use and in so doing make life a little safer and healthier for us all. But the key to it all lies in the need for massive letter writing campaigns and lobbying legislators on all levels of government.

This is a process of psychological conditioning. Many of us, particularly city dwellers, recognize the practical and pleasurable aspects of cycling. However, too many of us have become accustomed to an unhealthy dependence on the automobile not only as a form of transportation but also as a symbol of prestige. We also have correctly recognized the danger of cycling unprotected from the automobile.

The future of the bike is now, especially in American cities. To ensure this future, we must act on legislation needed to pave the way for more bikes with separate bike lanes, not more cars.

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