

A Bicycling Community? – Jeff Tinsley

Can Indianapolis be called a Bicycling Community yet?

Upon first glance one might question calling Indianapolis a vibrant bicycling community. Especially if your eyes reside in the well-known popular bicycling communities of Portland, OR, Seattle, WA, or even our Midwest neighbor Chicago, IL. I believe one of the largest issues skewing the perception is our state of health. We have a relatively high obesity rate (ranked 16th in 2007 compared to other states) as well as smokers (ranked 6th in 2007). Indiana was ranked 49th in 2007 on Forbes Magazine's list of America's Greenest States (thank you coal industry). Besides health, a common perception (fueled by disparaging definitions of Hoosier in many dictionaries) is that Hoosiers are backward thinking yahoo's bombing around in old pick up trucks that would rather run bicycles off the road than give them (us) a little space. Although I can't argue about the above facts on our health, I would like to dispel the hostile cyclist's environment myth.

Believe it or not Indianapolis is actually a fairly vibrant bicycle friendly community and is on a path (albeit some work to do) to dance with those big boy cities mentioned above. How can that be? Let me share some insight:

- Last fall Mayor Ballard announces his support for a citywide initiative to have over 200 miles of bike lanes by 2015. I rode my bike that morning to the press conference on Mass Ave, where well over 75 people came in on bicycles to be a part of the backdrop of the press conference. There was plenty of positive energy at the announcement as well as a great show of support from the bicycling community.
- We have three (to my knowledge) custom bike frame shops in the general Indianapolis area. Shamrock Cycles in Broad Ripple who manufactures hand made bicycles (see photo), Don Walker Cycles in Speedway, and Roark Titanium Bicycles in Brownsburg. These are high-end custom frames built by master craftsmen. When buying one of these you truly get a bike for life.
- We have in this area a large bicycle social organization by the name of Central IN Bicycling Organization (CIBA). It is considered a well-organized active bicycling club with over 1,500 members.
- Last month The North American Hand Made Bicycle Show had its 5th annual show here in Indianapolis for the first time. Over 6,000 people attended the show. Exhibitors considered it a great success.
- In conjunction with the show the Big Car Art Gallery located in the Murphy building in Fountain Square hosted an ArtBike party on Friday evening. Kind of a bohemian stylish gathering where like-minded art and cycling enthusiasts gathered to celebrate all things relating to art and bikes. It was very cool to see the large number of cyclists who rode down to attend the event (if I recall the temperature that evening was in the mid twenties). Sidewalks were filled with parked bikes.



- Last but not least.....we're actually going to get a bike lane on Broad Ripple Ave! A bicycle lane will eventually be constructed on 62nd Ave after the new road construction is completed.

To me those are some solid facts indicating the greater Indianapolis area is on the path of becoming a better and stronger bicycling community. As residents of the greater Broad Ripple area I believe we have some advantages over other communities in our city:

- We are strategically located with having both the Monon trail and the Central Canal Tow Path right in our back yards. Those paths can conveniently get you to the IMA, downtown, as well as northern locations such as the Nora district and the commercial districts of Carmel.
- We have a high density of residential streets that makes it convenient to get around the greater Broad Ripple area without having to travel on busy streets. Green Broad Ripple envisions having Green Alleys in Broad Ripple available for commuting in the future.
- The Broad Ripple Village District lends well to bicycle use. As matter of fact it's arguably easier to navigate (including parking) this area on a bicycle than a motorized vehicle.
- We have several grocery stores in our area that makes it convenient to ride bikes to get our groceries rather than drive a vehicle.

As citizens of the Broad Ripple community how can you support this endeavor?

- ***Ride your bike....frequently!*** As more cyclists use our roadways the awareness factor will increase with motorists. As the awareness increases then I would like to think motorists would begin to get conditioned about having cyclists on the road and accepting them as a normal every day part of the roadway system. And you might even shed a few pounds and tighten up some loose areas on the body.
- If your bike inventory is light consider purchasing one. The three custom builders mentioned above all have web sites. If a custom bike isn't in your future there is also the Bike Line located in Broad Ripple. The Bike Line offers both quality production made bicycles as well as a couple of custom-made manufacturers.
- Use your bike for local commutes whenever possible. Most errands are done within five miles of your home. It will help you get in shape and you'll have more fun. It also looks pretty cool seeing a bike loaded with groceries.
- Communicate with your local politicians. Make sure Mayor Ballard's Bike Lane initiative isn't a PR tactic. Hold him to his commitment by getting involved politically.

I hope this article will inspire some to jump on the saddle and start riding. At a minimum be cognizant of cyclists on the road when driving. Please share the road!

Photo: Hand Made Bike by *Jeff Tinsley*

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