

Spinning Your Wheels: Looking at Bicycling's Growing Popularity



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What's the fastest way to reach any destination within three miles (5km) of your home? Is it a car? Bus? No, it's a bicycle on most days. Traffic and parking barriers make that classic, two-wheeled, manual transportation the swiftest mode for getting from points A to B. Every June Stantec participates in the [Cool Commute Challenge](#), encouraging employees to take public transit, bike or walk to work. While our offices are in the middle of this friendly competition, it is worth taking note of why and how bicycle commuting is heating up in cities across America and Canada.

Consider these three driving factors:

There's a Generational Thing

There was a time most bicycling was done by children or for sport or fitness, but this is changing. New cyclists are attracted to bicycling because of its many advantages, including its practicality for urban living. The out-of-pocket travel cost for bikes is almost zilch, especially compared with gas, vehicle repairs, and parking. It's no surprise that Millennials have shown an inclination to move to the city, live car light, and use biking for many trips.

There's a City Demand

City leaders everywhere are more interested in cycling. Why? One motivation is to attract a well-educated and younger downtown work force. Young potential recruits form a positive city image when they arrive for an interview and see an energetic bike infrastructure and culture. City leaders are also recognizing the positive impact that bicycle infrastructure has on auto traffic reduction, relief from transit overcrowding, health and exercise, and a reduced demand for fuel and carbon. Bike infrastructure also makes for a more efficient use of public space.

There are New Approaches

Cities across North America are trying to make room for safer, more attractive bicycle facilities. Striped bike lanes are a start, but we've learned that expanding trail systems which are separate from traffic while developing new bicycle infrastructure technologies accomplishes something very important: novice riders become for comfortable. Take for example the cycle track, also known as a separated or protected bikeway. [Cycle](#)



tracks are located on the street but protect the bikeway from traffic by using curbs, posts, planters, parked vehicles, or other features. Special controls at intersections can also reduce conflicts with cars and trucks. Where and how we cycle in cities changes every day.

Growth in bicycling does entail open conversations and compromise in a community. Bicycle facilities can often use space in the roadway that's typically earmarked for travel lanes or parking. The impacts can be carefully managed to reduce problems, but some believe that improving car traffic is a better investment. That's a fair argument, but traffic performance can be improved through better street planning. Additionally, auto traffic improvements are generally highly subsidized by other funding sources that cyclists also pay into.

Teams at Stantec are involved with some of the newest, most exciting approaches to creating these bike systems. The projects are urban, suburban, and rural trails in communities across North America, including Minneapolis, Southern California, Calgary, Columbus, Baton Rouge, Louisville, Rochester, New York City, Vancouver, and , among others. In every case, these projects allow us to design with community in mind.

Based on what we see in these and every community, the future for bicycling seems very bright. How can you be a part of this movement? Dust off that old bike in the garage, pump up those tires, and find a group ride in your area. Group rides are a great way to address fears of traffic, meet new people, see the city from a new viewpoint, and enjoy the fun.

By Rock Miller