

BUILDING EQUITY

Race, ethnicity, class, and protected bike lanes:
An idea book for fairer cities

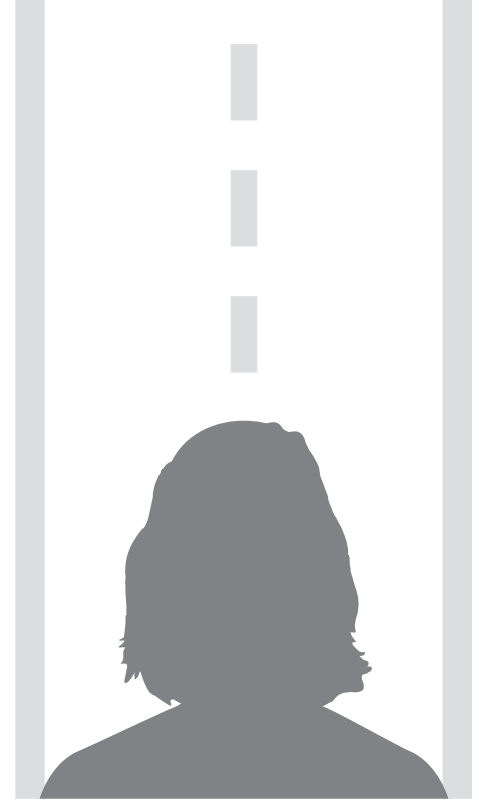
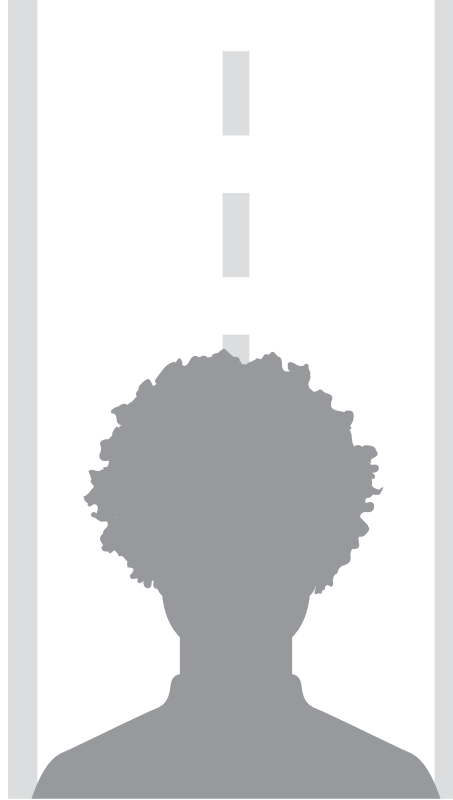
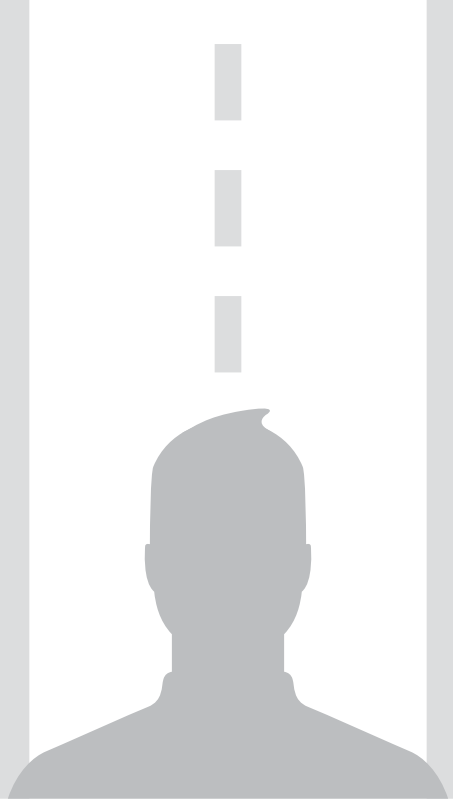


A report from PeopleForBikes and
Alliance for Biking & Walking



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Diversity created the city. But diversity has never been easy.

American urbanism has been a process through which communities—diverse in ideology, in interest, in income, in ethnic background and in racial identification—have negotiated space.

Some of this evolution has been brutal. Today’s cities are, among other things, the result of generations of racism and classism and struggles in the face of those discriminations. As decades and centuries have gone by, racial boundaries in the United States have shifted; discrimination has remained.

Transportation has been near the heart of that struggle from the start. From housing choice to bus frequency to freeway routing to sidewalk quality, cities have often failed to equitably distribute the costs and benefits of mobility.

Today, U.S. cities are using a new tool to help make bike transportation a mainstream part of urban American life: protected bike lanes. As this investment has taken place, city leaders and community activists have asked us

for advice on how to make sure their decisions about this infrastructure don’t continue the cycle of oppression.

We all want to make sure the process of lacing green bike lanes across city maps doesn’t repeat the damage that redlining diverse communities once did.

To explore this issue, we interviewed organizers, planners, leaders and activists in communities of color around the country who are working to build connected, all-ages bike networks.

The result is a diverse range of perspectives: some conflicting, but all united in the belief that done right, great infrastructure can help create great cities.

Done right, great infrastructure can help create great cities.

We hope these neighborhood-level experts, along with the national and international context we provide, will give you new ways to think about these questions:

- How can protected bike lanes fit into efforts to make American cities less inequitable? In what ways are they failing?
- How can city staff and advocates better infuse transportation justice into bikeway planning?
- How should bike infrastructure investments combine with other issues to diminish inequities between communities?

In the words of Memphis Mayor A C Wharton, bicycling is “for everybody, in every neighborhood.” The people on the pages that follow want to build cities that reflect this.

At PeopleForBikes and the Alliance for Biking & Walking, we believe deeply in the future of the American city. In this report, we’re proud to help spread the expertise of people who share that enthusiasm and who are at the front of the effort to make our cities better.

PROTECTED BIKE LANES SHOULD BE:



LADDERS OF OPPORTUNITY

By helping make bike transportation mainstream, protected lanes make biking safer and more accessible for more people—lowering household transportation costs, enabling compact development, broadening individual autonomy and increasing mobility and access for low- and no-car households.



PATHWAYS TO HEALTH

Normalizing bike transportation can help people who are part of demographics that disproportionately struggle with high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity and respiratory illness.



POSITIVE FEEDBACK LOOPS

The rapidly rising biking rate among people of color is a major force behind the biking boom. Making biking safer and more comfortable helps everyone who already bikes, including the millions of people of color who are already pedaling.



DESIGNS FOR SAFETY

People of color and low-income Americans are disproportionately at risk while on bikes. Safer bike infrastructure helps address this urgent issue.

WORDS WE'RE USING

Complicated issues demand clear language. Here's how we think about some key concepts in these pages.

RACE is a type of cultural and social identity. Race has no genetic basis; rather, racial identities are social constructions that have shifted over time based on context and power. But race has often been used to justify social inequalities, and racial dynamics have massive impacts on American life.

This report references four of the most common racial groups according to the U.S. Census' American Community Survey: White, Black, American Indian and Asian. We capitalize "Black" because it's a distinct American identity.

ETHNICITY refers to the origin of cultural and national traditions. In keeping with definitions from the U.S. Census' American Community Survey, this report considers Hispanic / Latino origin as an ethnicity, independent of racial identification. We use "Latino" rather than "Hispanic," except when source data does otherwise.

CLASS refers to socioeconomic stratifications beyond race, ethnicity and other factors. This report often uses household income as a proxy for class.

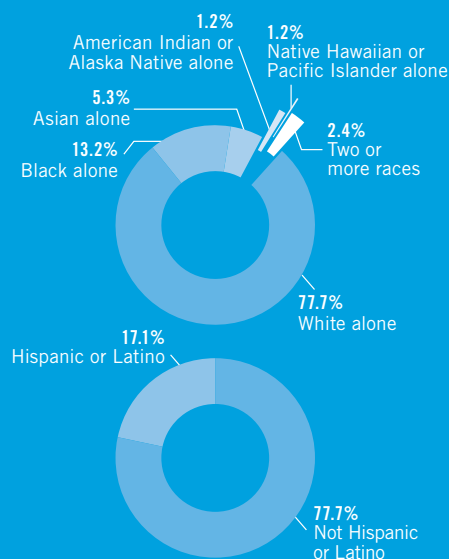
EQUITY is the fair and impartial distribution of resources and opportunities.

REDLINING was a practice begun in the 1930s defining acceptable areas for federal mortgage loans based on the "desirability" of neighborhoods. This triggered systemic underinvestment in neighborhoods where many Jews, Asian-Americans, Latinos, immigrants and Black people lived, leading to widespread blight in redlined communities and financial

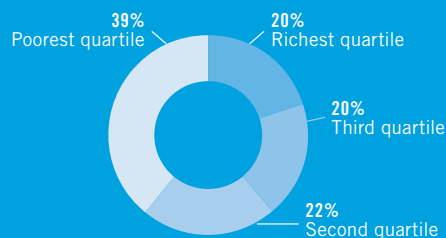
disadvantages for generations of families of color in the United States.¹

PROTECTED BIKE LANES, sometimes called "cycle tracks" in the engineering world, are physically separated from automobile travel lanes by parked cars, plastic posts, concrete curbs or other materials. They are tools for making bike transportation broadly viable in auto-dominated cities.

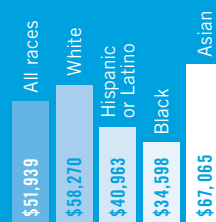
RACE & ETHNICITY IN THE U.S., 2013²



BIKE COMMUTING IN THE UNITED STATES BY INCOME QUARTILE³



REAL MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME BY RACE AND ETHNICITY, 2013²



DOWNTOWN ATLANTA

AUBURN AVENUE

REBUILDING THE SOCIAL STREET

In central Atlanta, Nedra Deadwyler is using bikes and protected lanes to redesign urban space for the social connections her community needs.



NEDRA DEADWYLER | ATLANTA, GA

If anyone in Atlanta knows the size of the shoes Nedra Deadwyler was stepping into when her business opened a storefront on Auburn Avenue, it's Deadwyler.

Once promoted as “the richest Negro street in the world,” Auburn was one of the Main Streets of America’s post-Reconstruction Black middle and upper class. Then the 20th century tore it up.

“In the 1900s, it was among the most integrated neighborhoods in Atlanta, and then around the 30s, the Black middle class began to move over to the west side,” Deadwyler says. “This became more of like, working class, lower class, poor, poverty. Just an impoverished neighborhood. And that has been the decline ever since. With the expressway, 85, coming in, it just changed the makeup of the neighborhood.”

Deadwyler knows her history for a reason. Her four-employee business, Civil Bikes, offers bike tours exploring the history of the Civil Rights Movement that was born, in many ways, on Auburn. Down the block is the church where the Rev. Martin Luther King Sr. preached for decades and from which his son helped lead the

movement and raise enough money to keep it rolling. Across Auburn is the King Center that carries on their work.

But Deadwyler is just as interested in the people of Auburn today: Ethiopian immigrants, longtime locals strolling down from Wheat Street Towers, workers at the urban farm a few blocks north, and people she watches pedal past, “just kickin’ it in the hood,” as she puts it.

We’re learning how to change our bike lanes, how to look at our sidewalks ... How to create these community spaces.

Auburn Avenue continues to change—with a streetcar opening in 2015 and, in a two-day demo in the summer of 2014, a pop-up protected bike lane.



Photo Credit: Robin Urban Smith

to be more community spaces. And not just ‘community centers.’ That’s institutional and it’s static.”

“We’re learning how to change our bike lanes, how to look at our sidewalks,” she says. “How to create these community spaces.”

Deadwyler is under no illusions that a temporary bike lane barrier could create them alone. But Deadwyler sees it as a step in reknitting the fabric of public life that started to unravel a century ago on Auburn and many other streets.



Photo Credit: Robin Urban Smith

“This street plan initiative, blah blah blah, that’s part of bringing back some energy,” she says good-naturedly. “But it’s really up to us to cultivate the deep community that’s needed to get past all of these initiatives. The roots have to go deep. They have to go far and wide. Like an oak tree’s roots.”

“I’m glad the city is on this turn of increasing bike infrastructure with the cycle track,” she says. “However, it’s like—we need more.”

Deadwyler, wiry and bespectacled, breaks into her big laugh.

“Calm the cars down, make our sidewalks more interesting,” she says. “Make the bike lanes more visible. ... It’s not that bikes have rights that we should take the entire street. But we can share this, you know? Figure out a better way to use the space.”

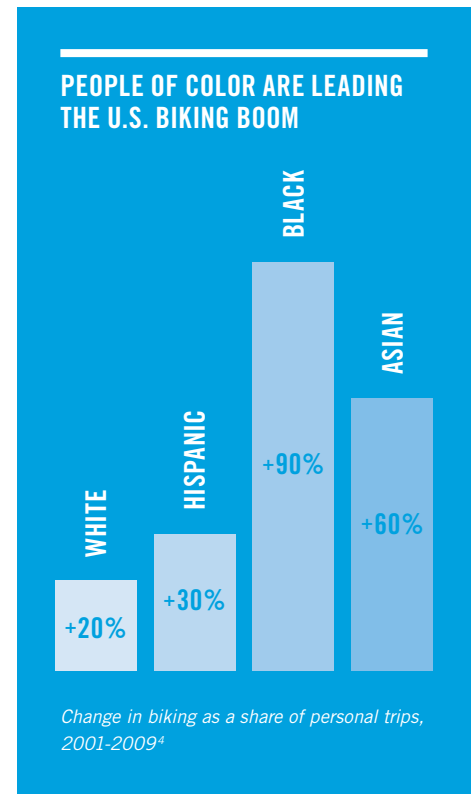
Deadwyler, who has social work degrees from Georgia State and New York University, thinks a lot about space and the ways it can create

the “community” the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. once spoke of.

“It’s this idea of community that does not really exist in our world any more,” she says. “There’s a community in this shallow sense, but there are very few of these holistic, deed-centered communities.”

Rediscovering those communities will require ending the domination of cars over urban space, she says.

“We, all these citizens and businesses—we’ve got to communicate, we’ve got to educate and we’ve got to take action,” Deadwyler goes on. “It’s more than just having restaurants and bars. There needs





RETROFITTING SUBURBIA FOR SAFETY

In California's Inland Empire, self-taught international bikeway wonk Marven Norman is standing up for everyone's right to safety.



Photo Credit: Marven Norman

MARVEN NORMAN | INLAND EMPIRE, CA

Three years ago, Marven Norman started bicycling for the reason so many of us do: money was tight and it was cheaper than driving.

“Most of the time I was just toting myself and a bag around in my car, so there was no point and it really wasn’t all that much slower,” recalls Norman, now 26 and working as a substitute teacher. “I found a bike for \$75.”

Bicycling was a new way to see the place he’d grown up: California’s sprawling inland counties that serve as, he says, “the bedroom and the warehouse of L.A. and O.C.”

“I started riding around and I thought, hey, this place kind of sucks,” he says.

So Norman started Googling for ways to fix it.

First he found Mikael Colville-Andersen’s blog about bicycling in Denmark. That led to David Hembrow’s blog about bicycling in the Netherlands. And from there, Norman was hooked.

Today, serving as vice president of the Inland Empire Biking Alliance, Norman has spent “many hours on Google Translate” poring over Dutch engineering manuals to learn the nuances of bike-friendly street

Photo Credit: Streetsblog LA



design and press Inland Empire governments to start adopting them.

He's motivated by the drumbeat of bike-related tragedies he sees in the paper regularly, like the local person killed alongside a 55 mph arterial street by a man driving carelessly.

"Guy just drifted to the right and ran through two riders," Norman says. He cites a recent finding that rear-end collisions from cars cause about half of fatal bike crashes. "We could prevent almost half with protected lanes. And then if you include the protected intersections, you could probably prevent at least another 50 percent of the intersection conflicts."

What bike infrastructure Inland Empire cities get, Norman said, goes "perpetually" to "those who have the time and the resources to ask for and demand the goods from the government."

"The part of town where the buffered bike lane is is where you see one bike a day, maybe three," he said. "The part of the town where everyone is pedaling around the corner all the day? There are no bike lanes. Everybody's on the sidewalk."

It's a vicious cycle, Norman says. Though many residents of color ride, they rarely get to work that way, so the Census ignores them. Seemingly low biking rates then

let governments rationalize putting comfortable bikeways elsewhere.

"Black/Brown communities lack bike accommodations," Norman says. "Of the 6 Es of biking, 'engineering' is by far the most crucial in getting people to do it. The need for 'encouragement' and 'education' are a distant second and third place. And many in the Black community are well acquainted with 'enforcement' already."

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The only road to equitable engineering, Norman says, is for more biking advocates and government workers to spend time in Black and Brown communities.

"I take time to go to the meetings, and I make sure that I speak up for the areas that I perceive as being underrepresented," he says. "But I'm only one person."

Over the long run, Norman says the Inland Empire's infrastructure equity gap creates the budding car culture he sees among his low-income students in San Bernardino. Families who own cars, he said, sometimes drive a quarter mile to sit in traffic outside the school rather than let children walk or pedal the wide streets alone.

"They're, like, genuinely disturbed that I rode a bike to school," Norman said. "Like, 'Teacher, you can't afford a car?' I should be asking you, 'How can *you* afford to drive two blocks to school?'"

PROFESSIONAL PLANNERS ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY WHITE



This graph is made up of regular members—primarily practicing planners working in public agencies or private consulting practice.⁵



FEEDING HEALTHY COMMERCE

From fast food to freeways, American cities have been rebuilt to serve car owners. In Los Angeles, Nancy Helpern Ibrahim is making protected lanes part of a return to traditional, healthier urban life.



NANCY HELPERN IBRAHIM | LOS ANGELES, CA

Nancy Ibrahim had been working in South Central Los Angeles for a few years when she came to understand it wasn't so much a "food desert" as a "food swamp." There was affordable food to be found. But it was dangerous food.

"There are no supermarkets in the Figueroa corridor," explains Ibrahim, executive director of Esperanza Community Housing. "It is cheaper for a working family to bring home a bucket of chicken."

The fast-food joints along the eight-lane Figueroa Street were zoned and developed for "affluent, transient students" to visit in their cars, Ibrahim says, not for families who live nearby and get around "by public transportation, by bicycle and by foot."

In 2001, that realization led Esperanza, a nonprofit developer, to open a culinary hub called Mercado La Paloma in a former garment sweatshop three blocks from Figueroa. Today the space is a bustling indoor market powered by 16 first-time small business owners. Ibrahim says it "entirely revitalized a neighborhood of Los Angeles that had no pedestrian community."

"It is a community hub, a culinary hub, and increasingly a place of political importance," she says proudly.

One of the Mercado's latest victories: helping push a plan through city council to dedicate three of Figueroa's eight lanes to protected bike lanes, bump-out bus platforms and a dedicated bus lane, all of which Ibrahim said will help the Mercado bring in patrons.

The plan, called MyFigueroa, emerged from a pair of community open houses in 2010 in which residents asked the city to dramatically improve transit, biking and walking.

Ibrahim says the new Figueroa “is putting in a level of accessibility and connectivity to working folks, including working poor folks, who contribute profoundly to what’s best about this neighborhood.”

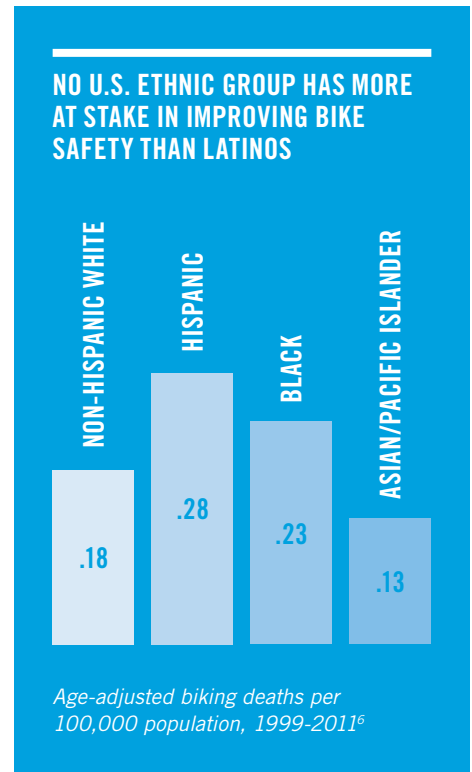
The project nearly died on the vine. Institutions like the University of Southern California, the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles, the California African American Museum and a chain of auto dealers told the local city council member that they were worried about congestion. That concern nearly kept it in analysis until federal funding would have expired.

But Ibrahim sent two Mercado representatives to join more than 60 locals, mobilized by the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition, to testify at city council in support of the plan. The multicultural grassroots surge made it impossible for opponents of MyFigueroa

to claim it was something locals didn’t want. The council member switched his vote; construction starts in 2015.

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“A lot of the development in this neighborhood has been going, so far, to separating—to making this community one where it’s not particularly desirable or healthy to get out of your car,” Ibrahim says. “The Figueroa corridor has been dominated by gentrifying interests that have resulted in a fast-foods swamp. ... It is so important that community residents have a say.”



BRINGING JOY TO DAILY LIFE

Like so many Americans, many middle-class Black people see biking as transportation of last resort. In Denver, Councilman Albus Brooks is turning his peers on to the fact that biking in protected lanes tends to make you happy.



Photo Credit: Albus Brooks

ALBUS BROOKS | DENVER, CO

Albus Brooks had never owned a bike before joining a PeopleForBikes study tour of Copenhagen's protected bike lanes. By the time he headed home, the Denver city councilman knew those days were over.

"We biked every day, so I found myself, on a personal point, increasingly happy," Brooks says, laughing. "I was a very happy person by the end of that trip."

So when he got home Brooks, 35, went to a Denver shop and bought his first bike, a Danish-style city bike. Though he was back to his politician's

grind of late meetings and urgent calls, he discovered the physical sensation of happiness lingered.

"It's just amazing what happens when you're active," Brooks said. "It's after work, going to have a beer, and it's going to ride and clear my mind. It's almost like I found a whole new life."

Fully converted to the idea that making biking a mainstream activity would be a huge boon to his city, its businesses and its residents alike, Brooks rode his bike to a meeting of other Black community leaders.

Fully converted to the idea that making biking a mainstream activity would be a huge boon to his city, its businesses and its residents alike, Brooks rode his bike to a meeting of other Black community leaders. There he got a first-hand lesson in the size of the task he had decided to tackle.

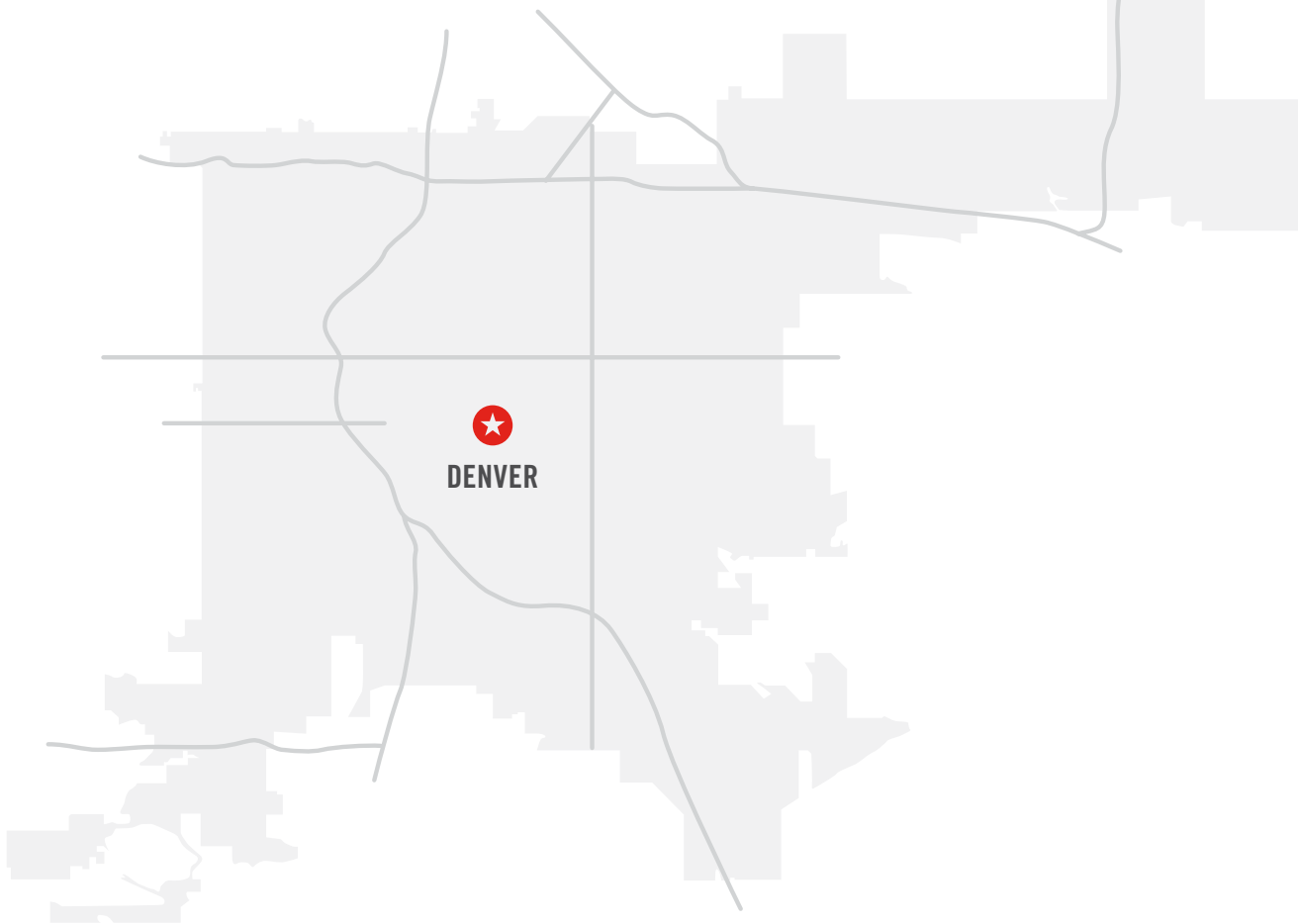
"I came in in a suit and a bike helmet," he recalled. "These were all middle-class African-Americans

that do not ride bikes. And they looked at me as if I were an alien."

The reaction fit a familiar, false stereotype: that Black people don't bike. But Brooks' awkward moment did tap a deep truth about transportation in the United States: In communities where car ownership isn't taken for granted (*see chart*), driving can be a particularly important source of pride and status—and choosing not to drive can be stigmatized. "These are people who don't really see biking as an advantage for getting around downtown, or an economic advantage, or an advantage for health," Brooks said.



Photo Credit: San Francisco Bicycle Coalition



So the councilman decided to do something about it. He started planning a series of rides that would get Denver’s Black leaders pedaling—on streets made temporarily comfortable by blocking car traffic completely.

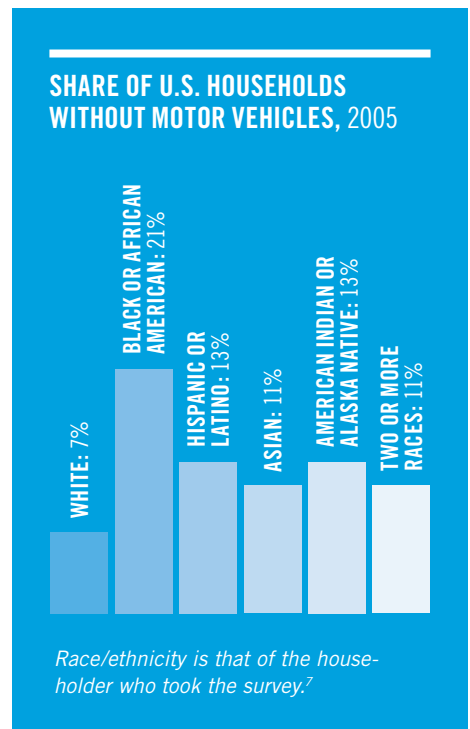
“We’re going to go on cultural rides where we block off a couple miles of streets and try to introduce to leaders in the community what bike infrastructure is all about,” Brooks says.

He’s betting that a taste of low-stress biking will open their eyes, too, to the ways that comparatively cheap investments in comfortable riding could bring more health and happiness to many thousands of Denverites.

“The old-school of thinking was, let’s just build around the car,” Brooks said. “I want to build our city around people. Around diverse interests and individuals in our city—not around vehicles.”



Photo Credit: San Francisco Bicycle Coalition





REJOINING DIVISIONS

After a hurricane broke the best bikeway in Jocelyn Dicient and Sabastian Rahman's Queens neighborhood, the pair and other youth leaders designed a plausible plan for a new one. Now they're fighting to get the right people to listen.

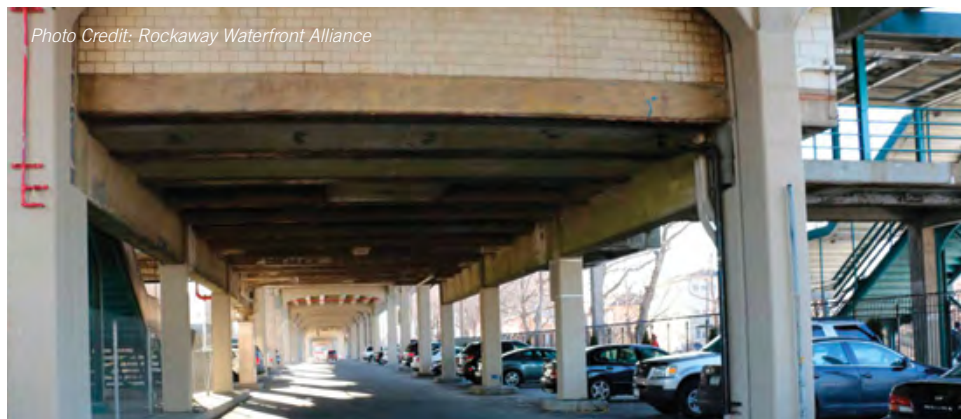


Photo Credit: Rockaway Waterfront Alliance

When Jocelyn Dicient walks home from school, she has a choice between two streets.

One is Rockaway Beach Boulevard, a route her friends have urged her not to take because, as she says, “a lot of shady people get on that road.” The other is the Rockaway Freeway, a route beneath the A Train viaduct that has seen 117 traffic injuries and two fatalities in the last three years.

More often than not, she takes Rockaway Beach. At least it has sidewalks.

JOCELYN DICENT & SABASTIAN RAHMAN | QUEENS, NY

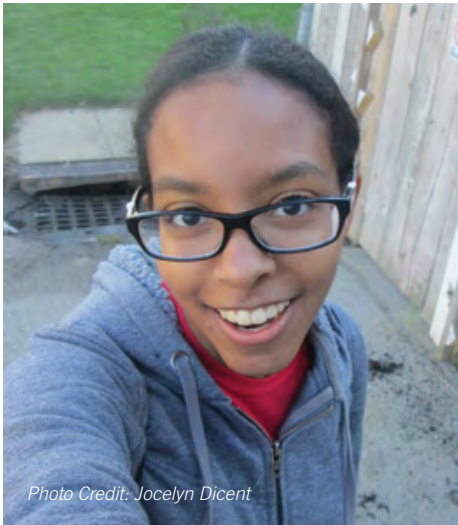


Photo Credit: Jocelyn Dicient

Dicient, 16, is one of a handful of youth leaders in this isolated, deeply multicultural corner of Queens who, since early 2014, have been searching high and low for government officials who'll take a serious look at their plan to improve the Rockaway Freeway.

The simple concept: put a physical barrier between cars and other users, returning a comfortable biking and walking route to a waterfront community hit hard by Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

"After we lost our boardwalk, we had lost a mode of connectivity between the east side and the west side," says Sabastian Rahman, who like Dicient is 16 and works as an intern for the Rockaway Waterfront Alliance's (RWA) Shore Corps. "That was kind of like the jewel of this community. ... People really enjoyed biking along there."

Dicient says nearby Shore Front Parkway, whose bike lanes were upgraded in 2013 with jersey barriers, should be a model for the project they call the Underway.

"I know for a fact, having lived here all my life, I was not really keen on biking on Shore Front in the bike lane that was painted onto the road, because I just felt like I might be too close to the cars," she says. "So I would just bike on the boardwalk. But once they put

the jersey barriers there, I would gladly do so."

She says the same thing would work on the Underway, where only a striped shoulder currently separates people biking or walking from speeding car traffic.

On Earth Day 2014, RWA's student-led team temporarily closed part of the freeway to auto traffic to hold a community design charrette, complete with butcher paper, markers and a miniature model of the viaduct. They've also conducted in-person counts of biking, walking and driving traffic on the Underway and, with the help of RWA's adult staff, gathered neighborhood-level statistics on obesity and physical activity.

All of that, plus block-by-block summaries of their proposal, went into a 35-slide presentation to the New York City Department of Transportation in June. They've also lobbied two local community boards, been featured on the local CBS News and personally gathered 2,000 signatures in support.

State Sen. Joseph Addabbo has made the concept "one of his campaign foundations," Rahman said. But few other politicians have showed interest.

"They have so many things to deal with, so many issues, so many things that they would categorize as 'bigger,'" Rahman says.

Rahman and Dicient say that as longtime locals, they are certain the concept is both achievable and beneficial.

"We know our roads," Rahman says. "We know the things that we need and we know the things that we don't need."

"We know our roads," Rahman says. "We know the things that we need and we know the things that we don't need."

Dicient says that as she gathered signatures in support of the plan, some adults told her it could never happen. One upside of being young, Dicient says, is that such dismissals don't faze her.

"As a teenager, I'm like, well, we're doing all this stuff, so how is it that we would not receive some sort of outcome?" she says. "I just can't see how we wouldn't get something done."





Bogotá, Colombia | Photo Credit: Juan Felipe Rubio

PROTECTED LANES FOR EQUITY: THE GLOBAL MOVEMENT

Here's a problem in U.S. bike infrastructure policy: We talk too much about Europeans.

For all the lessons Northern Europe's cities have to share, focusing only on them obscures the broad appeal of protected lanes and other great bikeways.

The American advocates in this report are offering local responses to a global problem: how to fairly divide public space among private vehicles.

These stories from three continents show how universal these problems are—and suggest what large-scale change can look like.



BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA

BOGOTÁ: DEMOCRATIZING URBAN SPACE

It's no coincidence that one of the core ideas of transportation equity emerged from Bogotá.

For decades, Colombia's cities have been among the most unequal in Latin America.⁸ By the 1990s, a fifth of the population of the country's capital was living in informal settlements near the urban periphery.⁹ Average daily commutes from these clandestinos took two and a half hours and required transfers among multiple informal transit services. The buses of the poor sat in streets clogged by the 22 percent of Bogotá's population who owned cars.¹⁰

Cars parked without restriction on sidewalks. A tiny fraction of a percent of the population commuted by bicycle.

Facing that situation, a pair of young Bogotano politicians began to make an interesting argument: if everyone is equal under the law, then public road space should be distributed to everyone equally.

"A city could find oil or diamonds underground, and it would not be

as valuable as road space," Enrique Penalosa, one of the politicians, explained in 2013.¹¹ "A bus with 80 passengers has a right to 80 times more road space than a car with one."

A pair of young Bogotano politicians began to make an interesting argument: if everyone is equal under the law, then public road space should be distributed equally.

During the decade that Penalosa and his contemporary Antanas Mockus alternated mayoralties, this radical idea—democratizing space—became the basis for two initiatives that transformed Bogotá: the TransMilenio bus rapid transit system and the ciclorutas, a 180-mile network of protected bike lanes that integrate with and feed the bus lines.

Bogotá raised its gas tax, restricted rush-hour car use, banned sidewalk parking, and enlarged ciclovías, the open-street events that clear city streets of cars on Sundays. Because the new rapid bus lines were popular, land prices rose nearby; but the city's Metrovivienda program also created transit-oriented, income-restricted housing for working-class residents.

In the years that followed, biking rose to 4 percent of trips, one of the highest rates in South America. Citywide commute times fell 34 percent. Traffic fatalities fell 88 percent.¹² A 2011 survey found that 53 percent of ciclorutas users were in lowest third of the country by socioeconomic status.¹⁰

Bogotá's inequalities remain deep. But the principal they inform has spread around the world.

"A citizen on a \$30 bicycle," Penalosa says, "is equally important as one in a \$30,000 car."

DENMARK: ENABLING CLASS MOBILITY





Copenhagen, Denmark | Photo Credit: Jonathan Maus

Denmark has used many tools in its fight to become one of the most egalitarian countries in the world. And though it's rarely been seen in this way, one of them has been the bicycle.

People of all incomes bike in Denmark, but biking delivers its biggest advantages to the country's neediest residents.

After embracing cars in the 1950s and 60s, Denmark took a U-turn around 1970 and began using protected bike lanes and low-speed side streets to make bicycle transportation an efficient, comfortable and dignified option. Today, this peninsula has the second-highest biking rates in the developed world after the Netherlands.

Because bikes are everywhere in modern Denmark, low-income residents can remain mobile in Danish cities without facing pressure to devote a huge share of their money to cars.

Only 41 percent of the poorest Denmark residents' trips happen in cars¹³, compared to 72 percent

of trips by the poorest Americans.³ And though people in Denmark bike more, they don't walk less or ride transit less. Essentially all of Denmark's additional biking is due to one thing: less reliance on cars.

Because bikes are everywhere in modern Denmark, low-income residents can remain mobile in Danish cities without facing pressure to devote a huge share of their money to cars.

In most of the United States, by contrast, a huge share of jobs essentially drop out of reach for anyone without a working car. For 73 percent of Americans, the typical job would take more than 90 minutes to reach

by public transit.¹⁴ Living carless in most American cities can mean being cut off from many of the family and friends who help people find work, feel happy, care for children or recover from emotional or economic bad fortune. This problem shackles millions of the poorest Americans, four in ten of whom never leave the lowest fifth of the economic ladder.

Things are different in Denmark. Three-quarters of people born into the poorest fifth of the country's population improve their situation by middle age. About one in seven lands among the country's richest adults, almost twice the rate in the United States.¹⁵

Denmark has not eliminated poverty or racial discrimination. But it has made poverty much easier to escape. And one of the many ways it's done this has been making it normal and comfortable to do the daily business of one's life on a bicycle.

HANGZHOU: PRESERVING HEALTHY NORMS



Photo Credit: Bradley Schroeder

In some Chinese cities, the rising wealth of many families came at a major cost to the others left behind.

Between 1995 and 2005, the estimated number of bicycles in China plummeted 35 percent.¹⁶ In 2004 the country's largest city, Shanghai, responded to pressure from car owners and banned bikes from all major roads.

"Police officials blame bicycles for causing traffic problems by ignoring traffic lights and occupying vehicle lanes," the BBC reported at the time. "But while bikes may not be considered cool by the new middle classes, there are still a lot of them about."

Meanwhile, 100 miles to the southwest, Hangzhou took the opposite strategy: it responded to rising transportation inequities by making it more safe and pleasant to use the modes that poorer residents used.

Hangzhou's decades-old network of protected bike lanes was preserved. Today, bikes and cars are physically separated on 84 percent of the city's main and secondary roads.¹⁷

Hangzhou responded to rising transportation inequities by making it more safe and pleasant to use the modes that poorer residents used.

As part of the Public Transit Priority policy Hangzhou launched in 2004, the city launched the world's largest bike sharing system and began offering a free 90-minute ride with every transit ticket.

The result: bicycles remain central to urban transportation in Hangzhou. A 2014 study by Anne Lusk of Harvard and Xu Wen and Lijun Zhou of Zhejiang University found that 44 percent of middle-school parents who owned cars rode a bike at least once a week—just like 62 percent of the parents who didn't.¹⁸

As poverty in Hangzhou has plummeted, biking rates have certainly fallen. They're down from 61 percent of trips in 1997 to 31 percent in 2007. But the decline of biking was far sharper in Beijing—from 63 percent in 1986 to 18 percent in 2010.¹⁸ By prioritizing a fundamentally more equitable mode of transportation in its street system, Hangzhou avoided pushing bikes to the margins of its society and the gutters of its streets.


HANGZHOU, CHINA



Photo Credit: Bradley Schroeder

CLEARING THE AIR

Redesigning roads to include protected bike lanes can help cut pollution. In East Harlem, Angel Mescaín helped his neighborhood fight for the air it breathes.



Photo Credit: Streetsblog.org

ANGEL MESCAÍN | HARLEM, NY

Look at a map of transportation habits in New York City, and you'll see three biking capitals: lower Manhattan, northwest Brooklyn and East Harlem.

In 2011, the NYC Department of Transportation was lacking protected bike lanes through the first two areas. But after proposing the city's most ambitious such project, a 125-block-long protected lane up First Avenue into East Harlem's historically Spanish-speaking neighborhoods, NYCDOT reversed course and built only the downtown section.

Many Harlem residents protested.

"It was wrong," recalls Angel Mescaín, who became district manager of East Harlem's Community Board 11 during the debate that followed. "The safest model that we're aware of, at least that the city's using, is the offset-parking-protected bike lane. So that's what we asked for."

The local city council member, Melissa Mark-Viverito, took the fight to the steps of City Hall, publicly calling out the Bloomberg administration for neglecting East Harlem. But East Harlem wasn't united on the issue, either.

In a neighborhood with the city's highest rate of child asthma hospitalization, many feared that devoting a full traffic lane to bikes would further snarl traffic and increase air particulates.

"It's understandable that folks would deduce that if it's this congested with four lanes, it's only going to be more congested with three," Mescaín says. "There was a lot of concern about what would be the environmental impact."

In a neighborhood with the city's highest rate of child asthma hospitalization, a street redesign reduced congestion and pollution.

But then, Mescaín said, Community Board 11 lined up meetings with experts outside the transportation department.

An air quality expert from the city's Department of Health looked into the situation and told community leaders that First Avenue's congestion problem came less from a shortage of car lanes

than from all the cars waiting for left turns or swerving around each other.

"Drivers were doing as drivers do in New York when it's not sufficiently restricted," Mescaín said. "They were driving badly."

By narrowing the lanes and creating left-turn bays, a street redesign would actually reduce pollution.

Hearing that analysis from someone outside the transportation department's power structure persuaded East Harlem leaders, Mescaín says.

"It was not the planner types—it was those guys who are on the middle floor way in the back," he recalls. "Those are the scientist types. ... You're not going to get that guy from the Department of Health serving the company line."

First Avenue's new design, including the planned protected bike lane, arrived in late 2012.

"There's a lot of vehicular traffic coming through there, but it runs very smoothly," Mescaín says. "So I think folks have come to accept it and even come to like it."

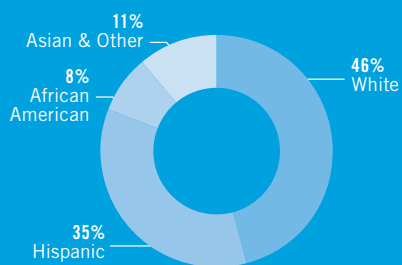
East Harlem residents have changed their bike routes, too, to enjoy the new comfort and safety of pedaling on First.

"Though there were not a lot of cyclists there at the time, there's tons of cyclists on those roads now," Mescaín says. "It took a while for the word to get around, but they're very well used."

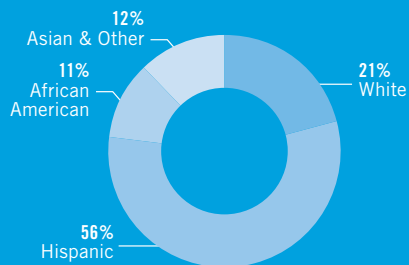


CHILDREN IN NEIGHBORHOODS WITH DENSE TRAFFIC ARE FAR LESS LIKELY TO BE WHITE¹⁹

Children in all of California:



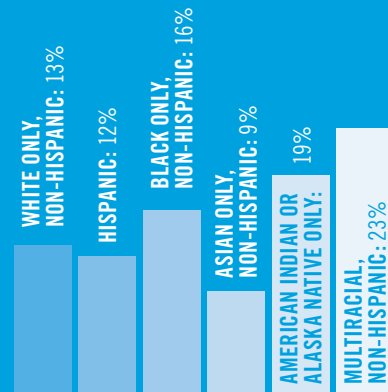
Children in traffic dense areas:

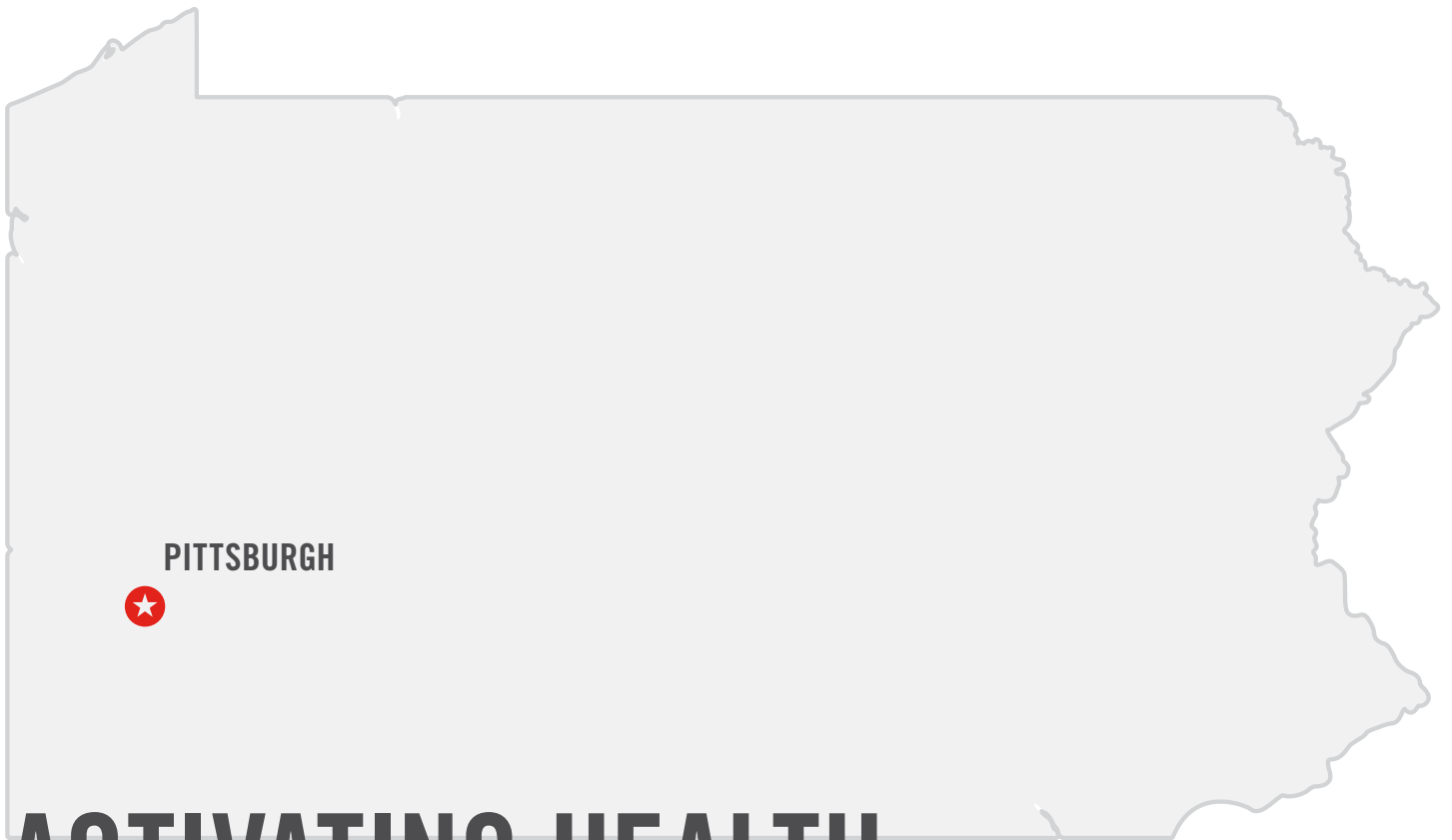


In the 20th century, racist practices in place throughout the United States, such as redlining and race-restrictive covenants, combined with existing wealth inequality to push people

of color into neighborhoods near highways. Highways, meanwhile, were often deliberately routed near or through communities of color.

ADULTS WHO HAVE EVER BEEN TOLD THEY HAVE ASTHMA²⁰





ACTIVATING HEALTH

Bruce Woods came to bike advocacy after he discovered that it was his favorite exercise. And in his hometown of Pittsburgh, he believes bike education must come first but protected lanes should follow.



BRUCE WOODS | PITTSBURGH, PA

As he always does when leading a group through Pittsburgh, Bruce Woods signals carefully that he's slowing his bike.

His gesture down and to his left points straight to the fresh new row of white posts along Penn Avenue. "This is our centerpiece," he says.

Woods, wearing Lycra from neck to knees, is quite aware that he would be riding his bike with or without the flexible sticks separating Penn Avenue's new bike lane from auto traffic.

But Woods, who serves both on the board of the advocacy group Bike Pittsburgh and as president of the National Brotherhood of Cyclists, the country's biggest network for athletic and recreational Black bicyclists, is a man who's very conscious of the multiple communities he's part of.

When he started riding 13 years ago at age 42, Woods said, "I just wanted to ride my bike."

But as his love of riding deepened, so did his desire to share



it—especially with people in, as he puts it, Pittsburgh’s “inner city.”

“The area where we have the most bike lanes and the most cycling infrastructure is the east end of Pittsburgh,” says Woods, whose day job is as an arborist for the local power company. “It’s there, but our people aren’t taking advantage of it, basically.”

“Bicycling just is one of those things that naturally people don’t gravitate to in the inner city,” he said. “But it doesn’t have to stay that way.”

Woods is generalizing. But with years of outreach and mentoring under his belt, he’s comfortable with that.

“Bicycling just is one of those things that naturally people don’t gravitate

to in the inner city,” he said. “But it doesn’t have to stay that way.”

As he maps rides for his local Major Taylor riding club, Woods varies his routes. It’s good for everyone to see people enjoying themselves on bikes, he calculates.

From what Woods sees in his outreach, he thinks relatively few people in east Pittsburgh are likely to use any sort of bike lane unless they’re also getting more face-to-face education about riding.

Until he can win more public funding for that, he and his multiracial group of riders will keep riding their loops through town.

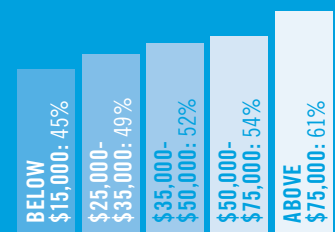
“Education first, infrastructure second,” he says. “Infrastructure is vital. ... Not number one, but strong number two.”

“I’m greedy,” Woods says with a laugh. “I want it all.”

PERCENT REPORTING AT LEAST 150 MINUTES OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PER WEEK²⁰



Race/Ethnicity



Income

LINKING THE UNLINKED

San Francisco's unsafe streets and tight housing can isolate its poorest residents from the life of their city. Chema Hernández Gil helps neighborhoods visualize change.



Photo Credit: San Francisco Bicycle Coalition

CHEMA HERNÁNDEZ GIL | SAN FRANCISCO, CA

As a community organizer with the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition, Hernández Gil's job is to find common ground in a city of incredibly dense diversity.

About 40 percent of San Francisco residents are white and non-Latino/Hispanic. More than a third are Asian. About 15 percent are Latino/Hispanic.

"Each neighborhood has its own culture," explains Hernández Gil.

The city's overlapping enclaves boast diversity within diversity. Within the Latino community alone, Hernández Gil meets San Franciscans three generations removed from immigration just as often as he meets newly immigrated indigenous Central Americans for whom Spanish is a second language.

"You really need to create new methods for organizing within those communities," he said.

Hernández Gil has his work cut out for him. Through the Coalition's long-term Connecting the City initiative, the organization is pushing bit by bit to lace low-stress bikeways throughout the city. San Francisco leaders hope to build protected crosstown routes that anybody from an 80-year old grandmother to an eight-year-old child could comfortably bike.

Because road redesigns depend on the city's paving schedule, Hernández Gil and his colleagues are on a timeline to explain the benefits of separated bikeways to residents in each new section of the network.

"What has been most important for me is just letting people know the advantages of having separated bicycle infrastructure," he says. One message resonates especially well: safety.

"The neighborhoods that are most burdened by collisions, fatalities, and serious injuries are the communities that are the most diverse, usually exclusively communities of color," he says. "They understand the data without having seen the data."

Hernández Gil explains that for San Francisco communities that suffer the most from traffic crashes, protected bike lanes often make intuitive sense.

"Car ownership is incredibly low in these neighborhoods," Hernández Gil says. "People bike, and people want to have bike lanes, because they see it as a way to protect themselves from cars. The car drivers are often seen as outsiders to their neighborhoods."

"The neighborhoods that are most burdened by collisions, fatalities, and serious injuries are the communities that are the most diverse, usually exclusively communities of color," he says. "They understand the data without having seen the data."

In a city where so few can afford large living spaces, preserving more public space for people also enables life outside the home.

"Many people live in very small apartments—these are usually the poorest people in San Francisco, marginalized, very often people of color," he says. "And they have a really unique perspective as to how streets are used. Streets help them connect



SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

with everybody else and help them live their lives in a dignified manner.”

Hernández Gil and his colleagues don’t expect to win over every stakeholder group in a neighborhood. “When all is said and done, it’s challenging and, honestly, impossible to get the buy-in from everybody,” he explains.

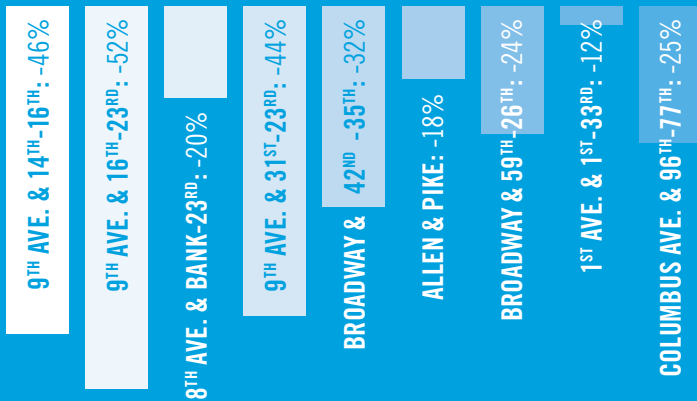
Hernández Gil’s advice for advocates and city leaders who have less experience organizing diverse communities: humility and caution. Relationships and trust-building must go hand-in-hand with disseminating data and facts. Neither can be sacrificed for the other.

Walking into a meeting with stacks of authoritative information, but little understanding of the way a community sees itself, can actually end up undermining the messenger’s credibility.

“People need to be careful about good intentions,” Hernández Gil said. “When you don’t take into account how relationships with power have impacted these communities over generations,

and the very critical work of building trust with individuals, with stakeholders ... the authority of information and knowledge actually ends up backfiring.”

REDUCTION OF TRAFFIC FATALITIES²¹



By reducing traffic weaving, shortening crossing distances and controlling turns with signals, protected bike lanes reduce all types of traffic injury. Here’s what’s happened since New York’s first protected lanes went in.

REINVESTING IN BELOVED STREETS

Poor infrastructure is nothing new in many communities of color. In Seattle, Phyllis Porter is working to turn around decades of underinvestment and build her neighbors' trust that civic action can pay off.



PHYLLIS PORTER | SEATTLE, WA

It's a sunny Sunday afternoon, and Phyllis Porter is walking down the middle of the street she's spent her whole life returning to.

"Rainier Avenue is one of our major roads," she says, looking at the little shops that line its four lanes. "So many people want to ride on it, but they just don't."

But for one weekend a year, people bring their bikes. During Rainier Valley's annual Heritage Parade and Culture Fest, Seattle's most racially diverse neighborhood

opens its main commercial artery to foot and bicycle traffic only.

"You can tell that the people in the area really, really love the city," she says, watching two families greet each other in the street. "But you know, this neighborhood isn't connected to the rest of the city."

Porter grew up just off Rainier Avenue. It wasn't until she was old enough to bike and walk to the store that families who looked like hers were even allowed to live in many Seattle neighborhoods. By the time she had

children of her own, crime and drugs in South Seattle were on the rise. Porter moved to a distant suburb and didn't return until her kids left home.

Today, she's a leader in Rainier Valley Greenways, a volunteer-driven nonprofit pushing for the neighborhood to get the low-stress bike routes that are already spreading rapidly through the parts of town that remain, decades later, 75 percent white.

"We've been neglected for too many years," Porter says. "How does that make you feel about your city? A lot of people are like, if they're not going to do anything, I'm not going to do anything."

"I go to downtown Seattle, I have a ball," she says. "Bike lanes, protected bike lanes. Love it. ... If you go to the north end of Seattle, it's become you can pretty much ride a bike everywhere."

Not so on the south end. So for the day's festival, Porter set up a protected bike lane demo, lined



with potted plants, to help the community see what she feels it's missing. Part of the problem, she says, is that city government has made south Seattlites cynical about standing up for what they want.

"We've been neglected for too many years," Porter says. "How does that make you feel about your

city? A lot of people are like, 'If they're not going to do anything, I'm not going to do anything.'"

She hopes that with enough support from South Seattlites, the city will start to reverse that cycle by making it comfortable for people to get to Rainier Avenue's local shops on a bike. It might be working. City officials and

council members have begun to say they want to do just that, she says.

But for Porter, getting officials to say it is just step one.

"We hear talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk," she says, looking over her paint-and-paper demo. "It's time for shovels."

A COMMON THREAD: SPACE FOR LIFE





We began this report knowing how protected bike lanes work. As several of the people we spoke with noted, their advantages are obvious.

We also understood the benefits of bicycling itself.

What we hadn't realized, until we'd gathered these stories, was that the social-equity case for bike infrastructure isn't just about using bikes. It's just as much about taming cars.

This isn't to say that protected-lane campaigns should demonize motor vehicles. On the contrary: like most other Americans, most people of color see cars as useful, culturally important tools.

But in interview after interview, the same theme showed up: Cars don't belong everywhere. They belong in their place.

By narrowing auto lanes, protected bike lanes slow traffic. By signaling turns, they make crosswalks safer. By buffering sidewalks, they help make stoops and storefronts places to gather once again.

For Nedra Deadwyler in Atlanta, the on-street interactions that fast-moving cars deter (but bike lanes encourage) are essential to her tour business. They're also the key to her dream of reknitting community into her great American neighborhood.

For Nancy Helpert Ibrahim in Los Angeles, highway-style streets create the dangerous culture of the drive-through. But complete streets—fit for transit, biking and walking—are antidotes to highways as surely as Mercado la Paloma is an antidote to highway food.

For Angel Mescaín in East Harlem, protected bike lanes are a way to keep bike users safe, and also to score the funding required to redesign a too-wide street.

Some stories are different. For Denver's Albus Brooks, the space is psychological: protected bikeways are a way to shake off the assumption that driving a car is always the best option. For Bruce Woods in Pittsburgh, infrastructure is second priority to education; for Marven Norman in Loma Linda, it's infrastructure first.

From Queens to San Bernardino to South Seattle, it's also clear that disinvested neighborhoods all have unique needs, but all share the same problem: political processes that unintentionally but consistently ignore their residents. Whatever the cause—an English-only web survey; a midday public hearing; an overreliance on homeowner-dominated organizations; a deaf ear to the needs of youth, immigrants and other nonvoters—the effect is the same.

The lesson: Cities that build protected bike lanes without thoughtful, proactive, and meaningful involvement with historically marginalized communities will continue to systematically underinvest in poorer neighborhoods.

Chema Hernández Gil's work in San Francisco is a perfect example: city visionaries can help everyone in the community see what's possible on their streets. And in many cases, community members already know what their streets need. Leaders need to design public processes that can truly hear their voices.

Protected bike lanes are tools that can make cities more equitable. But in the end, tools don't do the work. People do.



NEW DATA ON EQUITABLE BIKING

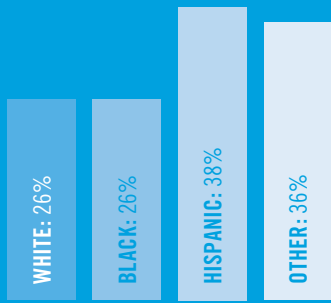
Race, ethnicity and income facts from a 2014 survey about bicycle use in the United States

In 2014, PeopleForBikes commissioned a national survey, conducted by Breakaway Research Group, to establish the benchmark for total bicycle riding participation in the U.S. A total of 16,193 adults completed the survey and reported on 8,858

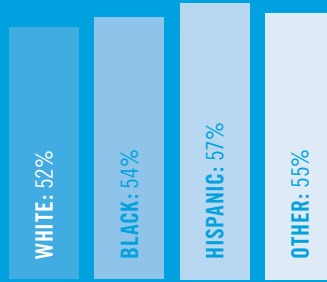
children ages 3 to 17. The final sample was weighted to represent the U.S. population ages 3 and older for gender, age, region, ethnicity and income. The survey was designed specifically to measure participation in all types of bicycling across all

types of riders. Participation results were externally validated against research conducted by the Pew Research Center. Participation study materials are located at [PeopleForBikes.org/participation](https://www.peopleforbikes.org/participation).

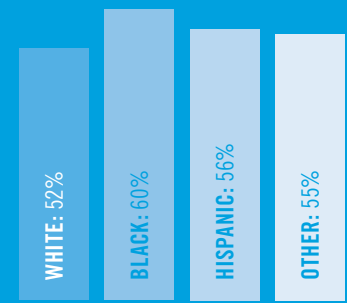
MORE THAN A QUARTER OF AMERICANS BIKE ONE OR MORE TIMES A YEAR



PEOPLE OF COLOR WANT MOST TO BIKE MORE

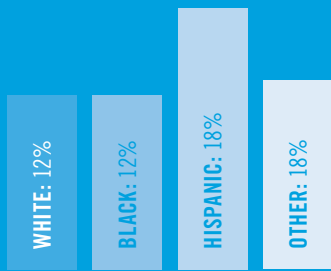


"I would like to ride a bicycle more often"



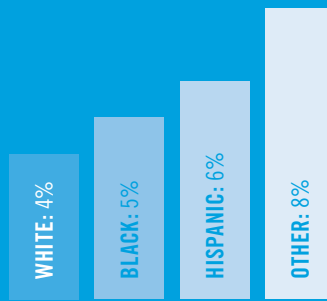
"Bicycling is a convenient way to get from one place to another"

HISPANIC PEOPLE BIKE FOR RECREATION MOST



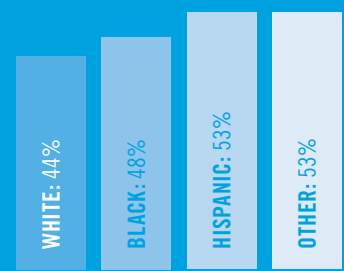
Percent who report bicycling for recreation 25 days a year or more

PEOPLE OF COLOR BIKE FOR TRANSPORTATION MOST



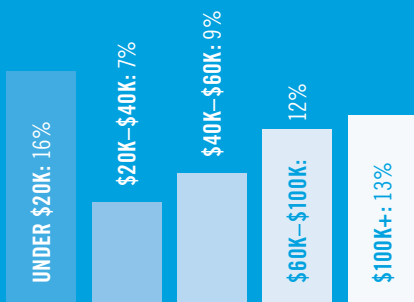
Percent who report bicycling for transportation 25 days a year or more

PEOPLE OF COLOR CARE MORE ABOUT PROTECTED BIKE LANES



I would be more likely to ride a bicycle if motor vehicles and bicycles were physically separated by a barrier

THE LOWEST-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS BIKE FOR RECREATION MOST



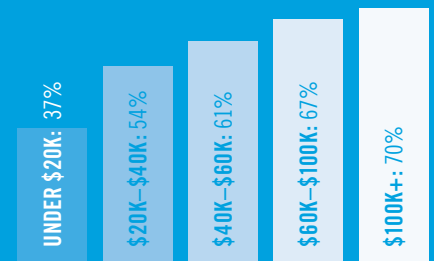
Biked for recreation 25 days or more per year

THE LOWEST-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS BIKE FOR TRANSPORTATION MOST



Biked for transportation 25 days or more per year

THE LOWER YOUR INCOME, THE LESS YOU DRIVE



Use a motor vehicle "nearly every day"



CITATIONS

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ABOUT US

The **PeopleForBikes Green Lane Project** is a program helping cities build better bike lanes to create low-stress streets. PeopleForBikes is the movement to making riding better for everyone by uniting millions of individuals, businesses, community leaders and elected officials.

The **Alliance for Biking & Walking** is the North American coalition of over 200 state and local bicycling and walking advocacy organizations. The Alliance creates, strengthens and unites leaders who are transforming communities into great places to bike and walk.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Written and edited by Michael Anderson/ PeopleForBikes Green Lane Project and Mary Lauran Hall/Alliance for Biking & Walking.

Special thanks to report advisory committee:
Julian Agyeman | Tufts University
Chema Hernández Gil | San Francisco Bicycle Coalition
Janice Li | San Francisco Bicycle Coalition
Adrian Lipscombe | City of Austin
Adonia Lugo | League of American Bicyclists
Katie Monroe | Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia
Jessica Roberts | Alta Planning + Design
Stephen Zavestoski | University of San Francisco





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