

Feedback

Bicycle Friendly Community Application

Tucson and Eastern Pima County, AZ

Spring 2012





The League of American Bicyclists has once again designated Tucson and Eastern Pima County, AZ as a Bicycle Friendly Community at the Gold level. The BFC review committee was hugely impressed by the herculean effort the Platinum Task Force Committee, staff, community leaders and everyday bicyclists have undertaken to create a truly Gold-level Bicycle Friendly Community. Through this review it is clear that Tucson-Eastern Pima Region is the largest bicycle-friendly effort in the history of the program given the size and scope -- multiple jurisdictions working together in an area covering over 2000 sq miles. The Tucson-Eastern Pima County Region is a destination for bicyclists to train, tour and participate in world-class events like the Tour de Tucson and more. The region remains a national leader in delivering bicycling and motorist education, coordinating a diverse bicycling task force and continuously implementing first-rate policies and programs to better welcome and accommodate bicyclists in the region. Below you will find the feedback produced by our review team, to help get the community to the next level.

We understand there will be significant disappointment that the Platinum designation is still not awarded. Here are a few significant things that stand out when comparing the Tucson-Eastern Pima County Region BFC and the average Platinum-level BFC:

1. Ridership – The percentage of workers commuting by bicycle in an average Platinum BFC is 12%. In Tucson-East Pima it is 1.7% (American Community Survey five- year average 2005-2010). The percentage of workers who commute by bike is roughly seven times lower than the average Platinum BFC. It was noted in the application that the student population isn't being counted. It is well known that the ACS data is not a perfect measure but the only consistent data available nationwide which allows us to make comparisons. For example, conditions in Tucson with regards to student populations are comparable to that of Platinum-BFC Boulder, CO., which has a 9.59% bicycle commuter modeshare compared to 3% in the city of Tucson. Our review team is very excited about the current effort to expand the counting program and looks forward to the data.
2. Crashes and Fatalities – The number of bicycle/motor vehicle crashes per 10k daily bike commuters in an average Platinum BFC is 64. In Tucson-East Pima County it is 212. The number of bicycle/motor vehicle fatalities per 10k daily bike commuters in an average Platinum BFC: .42, Tucson-East Pima: 2.32. The Tucson-Eastern Pima County Region has three times as many bicyclist/motorist crashes and five times as many bicyclist/motorist fatalities per 10k bicycle commuters than the average Platinum-level Bicycle Friendly Community. The community is working very hard to reduce bicyclist/motorist crashes and fatalities across the region and is seeing good results. Still, the numbers are very high and must be significantly reduced to be considered a Platinum-level BFC. Reducing motor vehicle speeds, ensuring bicyclist safety and connectivity at intersections and providing a variety of options for safe and convenient bike trips are essential to addressing this.
3. A comprehensive bicycling network – Percentage of total road network with dedicated on-street bike facilities in an average Platinum BFC is 21%. In Tucson-East Pima County it is 11%; Total bike facilities mileage to total roadway miles in an average Platinum BFC is 60%. In Tucson-East Pima it is 14%. The Tucson-East Pima County Region has a solid Gold-level percentage of arterial streets with bike lanes at 62% but it must continue to expand and close gaps in the bicycling facility network, and strongly consider innovative solutions such as buffered bike lanes and cycle tracks found in the



NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide. The average Platinum-level BFC has nearly double the percentage of on-street facilities and more than four times the percentage of total bicycle network mileage to total roadway miles than that of the Tucson-East Pima Region. The community doesn't have to have a bike lane on every street, but a better connected network of bicycle facilities that includes these along with bicycle boulevards, shared lane arrows and cut-throughs will help welcome riders and potential riders of all ages, abilities and comfort levels. The plan to build 180 miles of bike boulevards should be implemented as it will likely increase ridership and improve safety.

In addition to these, reviewers thought that it is important to encourage continued improvement in land use. The population density in an average Platinum BFC is 4929 per sq. mile. In Tucson-Eastern Pima County it is 448 per sq. mile, due in part to the regional nature of the application. The current Platinum BFCs are more compact communities with a good mix of land uses and human-scale streetscapes, which makes active transportation convenient and enjoyable. Continue to invest in improvements in the higher-density core of the region while working to improve the entire region by reducing barriers for people to get to their desired destinations safely by bike. It was noted in the application that "Traditional land use planning has not only jeopardized safety, but has created a sprawling environment in which common destinations, such as employment centers, can be hard to reach by bicycle." Our review team recognizes the enormous challenge and long time frame it will take to change the land use through better land use policies that more effectively cluster development and minimize large lot low density and single-use development, allow and encourage a mix of uses, and incentivize medium to high density infill development throughout the community to effectively shorten the distances people need to bike. However, these land use changes and better streetscaping will be necessary to create a top-notch bicycle-friendly community

Some **highlights** of this application were innovative bike facilities like Green Lanes and Buffered Bike Lanes, 'Cross-Bike' treatment, Way-finding Dinner Plates, Diamondback Snake Bridge, Basket Bridge, Mountain Avenue bridge, several bicycle underpasses, bicycle HAWK signals and The Loop pathway. The outreach and bicycle culture can be seen in groups like BICAS, Living Streets Alliance, Tucson Velo, the Santa Cruz Valley Bicycle Advocacy Committee and the Pima County Bike Ambassadors. Bicycling education like free weekly bicycling skills classes, Safe Kids Tucson, providing biking safety course materials in Spanish and public outreach campaigns. Also, events and activities like Bike Fest, the weekly Tuesday Night Ride, Cyclovia Tucson, El Tour de Tucson, Kid's Riding for Those Who Can't program, New Belgium Urban Assault and the Great Arizona Bicycle Adventure are just a tiny fraction of the great many of ways the community celebrates bicycling.

The reviewers felt that many of the most important steps are being taken to address the needs of current bicyclists and to encourage other residents to become regular cyclists as well:

- **Engineering:** The community has a policy to engineer streets with the consideration of bicyclists. The community has adopted good tools to implement their Bicycle Accommodation policy. Community has made significant investments and is on its way to an integrated network. Community and transportation planners, and civil engineers receive training in bicycle and pedestrian planning and engineering. Facilities conform to the currently recognized safety standards. Most destinations have bike racks or storage units.



Most public buses are equipped with bike racks. The community has plenty and well-designed street and off-street bicycle facilities. More than 60% of arterial streets have bike lanes or paved shoulders. Two thirds of natural surface trails and singletrack are open to bicyclists. Bike infrastructure includes innovative facilities such as cycle tracks, bike cut-thrus, and way-finding signage with distance and/or time information. The community uses road diets and area wide traffic calming to make roads safer for all road users. Cyclists are accommodated at busy intersections through advance stop lines/Bike Boxes, loop detector markings, bicycle signal heads and video detection.

- *Education:* Some elementary, middle and high schools have Safe Routes to School programs with bicycling education. The community has recently educated motorists and bicyclists on sharing the road safely through community newsletters, bike ambassadors, dedicated bike page on the community website, blogs on cycling, social media, share the road signs and public service announcements, among others. Traffic Skills 101 classes, Cycling Skills classes and Commuter classes are offered frequently in the community. Community requires safe driving training for city staff, transit operators and school bus operators.
- *Encouragement:* There are a large variety of community cycling events for all ages and skill levels and several incentive programs. The community has a BMX track, a pump track, a mountain bike park and a cyclocross course (and proposed velodrome).
- *Enforcement:* A police officer is an active member of the bicycle advisory committee and the community has an identified law-enforcement point person to interact with cyclists. Officers have received specific training on the relationship between bicycling and law enforcement. Completion of Smart Cycling course by Police officers. There are specific penalties for failing to yield to a cyclist when turning and/or it is illegal to park or drive in a bike lane (intersections excepted). There are penalties for motor vehicle users that 'door' cyclists. The community uses photo enforcement for red lights and/or speed.
- *Evaluation & Planning:* Bicycle mode share is above average for U.S. communities (1.7%). The community is familiar with and responsive to the needs of cyclists. The community has a specific plan/program to reduce bicycle crash numbers. Community has a bicycle master plan and meets annual targets for bike plan implementation. Bicycling is an integral part of all land use, transportation and economic planning efforts. There is a trip reduction ordinance or program. Programs target traditionally underserved communities.

Reviewers were very pleased to see the continued work and commitment to make Tucson and Eastern Pima County an even better place for bicyclists. Below, reviewers provided recommendations to further promote bicycling in Tucson and Eastern Pima County in the short and long term.

The key measures Tucson and Eastern Pima County should take to improve cycling in the community are:

- While the bicycling network is impressive, there are still some critical gaps that remain, especially to key destinations like downtown Tucson and the university. Regional funding should be dedicated to improve the connections to these centers as these could dramatically increase bicycle ridership.



- Complete and expand the bicycling network. Access for bicyclists of all abilities and comfort levels should be promoted through the use of bike lanes, protected bike lanes, cycle tracks, shared lane arrows, bicycle boulevards and bicycle cut-throughs. Adding facilities like bicycle boulevards in addition to addressing high speeds and improving intersection safety are keys to creating a low-stress bicycling network that will accommodate more citizens. On-street improvements coupled with the expansion of the off-street path system will continue to increase use and improve safety.
- Implement a multi-year intersection safety action plan. Prioritize and improve the most dangerous intersections based on statistics and user input.
- Ensure the best possible pavement condition of the transportation system. Reviewers reported increasingly deteriorating conditions of roads and bicycle facilities.
- Given that this is a regional effort, constituent communities should continue to improve collaboration, dedicate more staff resources to bicycling projects at the municipal and regional levels and work to expand dedicated funding for bicycling projects and programs across the region.
- Collaboration between the University of Arizona and the community should continue to be strengthened. Cross-pollination of ideas, programs and infrastructure will strengthen the overall bicycle-friendliness of the community and serve as a national model.
- Complete The Loop and expand the promotion of it as the signature “must ride” of the community for all residents and visitors.
- The advent of the Street Car is a positive development for the community. There is a concern about the dangers posed by tracks—especially at first—and reviewers recommend substantial public information and education campaign.

Reviewers provided the following menu of recommendations to further promote bicycling:

Engineering

Low hanging fruit and fast results:

- There are an enormous amount of great educational resources in Pima County. Bring all agencies within the applying area on board. Offer a [Smart Cycling](#) course for all municipal staff in the applying region to better understand cyclists’ needs, behavior, and their right to use city streets as well as multi-use paths for transportation. Your local bicycle advocacy group are a great resource for this kind of training.



- Consider broader policies and practices such as maximum car parking standards, no minimum car parking standards, paid public parking, shared-parking allowances, congestion charges, narrowing road corridors by [selling surplus right-of-way](#), [streetscape design guidelines](#).
- Join NACTO and actively participate in the [Cities for Cycling program](#). Cities for Cycling focuses on implementing world-class bicycle transportation systems through design innovation and the sharing of best practices.

Long Term Goals:

- Further increase the amount of [secure bicycle parking](#) at popular destinations such as transit stops, schools, recreation and entertainment facilities, retail and office clusters and churches throughout the community. Implement bike parking ordinances like Tucson's in municipalities throughout the county.
- Allow and encourage a mix of land uses and compact development patterns throughout the city and the county to shorten the distances people need to bike. Consider mixed-use zoning, [form-based/design-based codes](#), a requirement for new developments to meet [LEED-Neighborhood Development](#) silver standards or higher, human-scale building design guidelines, etc.

Education

- Continue to expand the reach of bicycle-safety education as a routine part of public education as part of the [Safe Routes to School program](#) in elementary schools, middle schools and high schools.
- Consider expanding the motorist education program for professional drivers to include delivery and taxi drivers in the community.

Encouragement

Low hanging fruit and fast results:

- Support cyclovias more often across the entire region.
- Consider passing an ordinance or local code that would require larger employers to provide shower facilities and other end-of-trip amenities.
- Consider a public bike sharing system, perhaps starting in the downtown Tucson/UA area. A bike share system is a convenient, cost effective, and healthy way of encouraging locals and visitors to make short trips by bike. See what is being done across the country at <http://nacto.org/bikeshare/>.



- Encourage more local businesses to promote cycling to the workplace and to seek recognition through the [Bicycle Friendly Business](#) program. Businesses will profit from a [healthier, happier and more productive workforce](#) while the community would potentially profit from some bicycle-active businesses as well: increasing the bicycle mode share, less commuter traffic, better air quality, public bike parking in prime locations provided by businesses, new and powerful partners in advocating for bike infrastructure and programs on the local, state and federal level, and public bike events, skills and maintenance classes hosted or sponsored by businesses. The city should be the model employer for the rest of the community.

Enforcement

Low hanging fruit and fast results:

- Actively facilitate stronger connections between bicycle advocates, the wider bicycling community and law enforcement. Particularly increase the number of police officers patrolling multi-use paths *and* streets on bike, as it gives officers a better understanding of the conditions for cyclists and keeps secluded multi-use paths safe.
- Enforcement practices could also include positive enforcement ticketing. Police officers could team up with local stores to reward safe cycling practices by handing out gift certificates to cyclists who are “caught” following the law. See what Tewksbury, MA is doing: <http://www.wickedlocal.com/tewksbury/news/lifestyle/x1837747400/Tewksbury-police-reward-young-cyclists-for-wearing-their-helmets#axzz1WdjHHfMo>
- Pass more laws or ordinances that protect cyclists, e.g. ban cell phone use and texting while driving.

Evaluation/Planning

- Create, fund, and implement a new regional bicycle master plan.
- Integrate the implementation of the bike plan into all land use plans, zoning ordinances and larger development projects.
- Continue to focus on safety and crash mitigation, to reduce the number of crashes and fatalities in the region.

For more ideas and best practices please visit the [Bicycle Friendly Community Resource Page](#).