

Biking and Walking Resources in Virginia: Part I
Executive Summary

September 9, 2009

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BikeWalk Virginia, a 501 (C) (3) non-profit organization,
promotes biking and walking in Virginia
through education, advocacy, and partnerships.

Executive Summary

The Study

BikeWalk Virginia with cooperative assistance from the Virginia Department of Health, Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), and Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) conducted research to provide the first ever comprehensive picture of the current state of biking and walking planning, resources, accommodations, and safety in the State of Virginia. Funding for the study was provided through a safety grant from DMV.

The study consists of two parts. Part I collected data from all counties, cities, and towns between 2006 and 2009. Part II consists of a statistical analysis to assess the relationship between the current level of biking and walking resources and injuries to bicyclists and pedestrians involving motor vehicle collisions. The following report covers the findings from Part I. Findings from Part II will be reported separately.

The Need

Crowded roadways, the increased cost of transportation, environmental concerns, and increasing rates of obesity and related chronic diseases in Virginia have led to increased interest in biking and walking as efficient, healthy, affordable, and environmentally friendly forms of transportation.

Governor Kaine through an Executive Order in 2008 established a sub-cabinet structure to focus on community investment. One of the initiatives of this new structure was aimed to “invest in alternative transportation choices.” In celebration of National Bike to Work Day on May 15, 2009, Governor Kaine said: “Today’s events provide a great opportunity to encourage everyone to bike or even walk to work where appropriate. We all know the cost of energy will continue to increase, and we know our use of gasoline has a growing negative impact on our environment. We can combat both problems by using alternative transportation to commute to our jobs.”

Similar actions were taken at the national level. Representative Jim Oberstar, Chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Transportation and Infrastructure Committee said, “The failure to link transportation and land use decision making and to consider the health effects of these choices has led to a tilted playing field that has made driving the easiest and often only option available in many parts of the country.” In calling for greater inclusion of non-motorized transportation options, Oberstar stated “transportation policies and investments must do more to provide access for all through various modes. Transit, walking and bicycling all have a significant role to play.”

There is also significant need to improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists in Virginia. In 2008 alone 1675 pedestrians were injured and 76 killed in vehicle/pedestrian crashes and 716 bicyclists were injured and 14 were killed (DMV, 2008).

Methodology

In order to build a comprehensive data base of biking and walking resources, BikeWalk Virginia surveyed all 39 cities, 95 counties, and 157 incorporated towns in 2009. BikeWalk Virginia had previously collected data using the same survey questions between 2006 and 2008. For non-responding localities in 2009, data that was collected between 2006 and 2008 was used. The report includes data for 66 cities and counties. Data was not available for 68 cities and counties. Town data was limited therefore not included in this report.

The surveys used between 2006 and 2009 asked the localities the following 10 questions:

1. Does your locality have a transportation element in its Comprehensive Plan?
2. Has your locality adopted a Bicycle Plan?
3. Has your locality adopted a Pedestrian Plan?
4. Has your locality adopted a Greenway Plan?
5. Does your locality have a Bicycle Advisory Committee?
6. Does your locality have a Pedestrian Advisory Committee?
7. Does your locality have a Transportation Advisory Committee?
8. Does your locality have an ordinance requiring persons fourteen and under to wear a helmet when riding a bicycle?
9. Has your locality received any Enhancement Grant(s)?
10. (2 points possible) Your locality has ___ miles of trails and ___ miles of striped bike lanes?

A new measure, the Virginia Active Transportation Index (VATI) was developed to provide a comprehensive picture of biking and walking resources in each locality. For each “yes” answer, the locality received one point. A locality answering “yes” to all 11 of these questions would receive a perfect score of “11”.

Data collection for cities and counties was 49 percent. Gathering data from incorporated towns, many with fewer than 200 residents, was difficult and the response rate was 35 percent. Because of the relatively low response rate and the different nature of the transportation challenges faced by smaller towns, a decision was made to complete the report using only data collected from cities and counties. A separate effort to gather and report information from towns will be completed at a later date.

Findings

The survey is the first of its kind in Virginia and it established a valid benchmark. Progress in expanding biking and walking resources in Virginia can now be measured against this benchmark in future surveys. Several factors could explain the absence of data for many localities. These include:

- a. Difficulty identifying and reaching the proper contact for each locality.
- b. Localities may have simply decided not to respond due to conflicting priorities.

- c. Localities may not have the data we requested.

The most notable city and county gaps where no data was reported are:

- a. Fairfax County
- b. Prince William County
- c. Stafford County
- d. City of Lynchburg
- e. City of Richmond
- f. City of Radford

Notable statistics from responding localities include:

1. 97 percent of the cities and counties responding have a transportation element in their Comprehensive Plan.
2. 56 percent have adopted a Bicycle Plan.
3. One third has adopted a Greenway (33 per cent) or Pedestrian (24 percent) Plan.
4. On average slightly less than one-third has one or more Advisory Committees.
 - a. Transportation Advisory Committee – 38 per cent.
 - b. Bicycle Advisory Committee – 28 per cent.
 - c. Pedestrian Advisory Committee – 18 per cent.
5. 31 percent have an ordinance requiring persons 14 years old and under to wear a helmet when riding a bicycle.
6. 72 percent of cities and counties have received Enhancement Grants.
7. 76 percent report having trails and 40 percent report striped bike lanes.
8. Three cities and counties earned the highest possible Virginia Active Transportation Index score of 11 points:
 - a. City of Alexandria
 - b. Arlington County
 - c. City of Harrisonburg
9. By combining adjacent cities and counties that provided data, it was possible to calculate an approximate Virginia Active Transportation Index score for the most populated regional areas.

Region	Average VATI Score
Charlottesville/Albemarle	8.5
Northern Virginia	8.2
Upper Shenandoah Valley	7.8
Tidewater	6.7
Roanoke/Salem	6.5
Southside Virginia	5.6
Richmond Metro	4.0

10. In the Richmond Metro region no data was available for the City of Richmond. The VATI scores for the three surrounding counties are:

Chesterfield County	5
Hanover County	4
Henrico County	3

Recommendations

The initial report is a valuable benchmark. Follow up surveys to track progress should be conducted in 2011 and every two years after that. A separate survey of incorporated towns should be completed to better understand the biking and walking challenges and resources in these localities.

While most localities have a transportation element in their Comprehensive Plan, advocacy efforts should be increased to include specific bicycle, pedestrian, and greenway plans. More localities should establish Advisory Committees. They provide an excellent forum for advocates to meet regularly with planning and administrative officials to share information and work toward a common agenda.

More localities should enact an ordinance to require helmets for bike riders 14 years old and younger. The evidence is overwhelming that helmets help reduce serious injuries.

Local biking and walking advocates should use the Virginia Active Transportation Index to identify opportunities to increase biking and walking resources where they live. Furthermore, localities should leverage the experience they already have in securing Enhancement Grants to advocate for funds to add biking and walking resources.

Advocates in the Richmond metro area should work together to improve the biking and walking resources in the state capital and surrounding areas. The state capital should be a role model for biking and walking.