Russell Andlauer

Professor Petersen

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Problem Background Essay

Bike-specific Infrastructure Planning

One of the largest debates in the world of cycling has to do with urban development. Governments on the local, state, and federal level are concerned with balancing expenses for development of infrastructure. Federal tax dollars are allocated to states for repairing and improving the infrastructure of its transportation systems. Most of that money goes to constructing or repairing highways and roads. Cycling advocacy groups and environmental groups are interested in arguing that more funds should be given to developing roads that are bike-friendly. Cycling groups such as the Rails to Trails Conservancy argue that there are many economic and health benefits by bicycling to work. Environmental groups are going to argue that there needs to be fewer automobiles on the road, and more people commuting by either mass transit or cycling. According to the Encyclopedia of Sustainability, 33 percent of all carbon dioxide pollutants emanating from the United States come from transportation sources. Environmental groups can argue that more people riding bikes to work would decrease the amount of pollution from vehicles. On the other side of the debate there are some transportation officials and congressmen. They are arguing that the United States’ bridges, highways, and roads are in need of repair and expansion. They think that the infrastructure budget should allocate as much money as possible to these aspects of transportation since they are crucial to transportation safety.

Commuting by Bike

Another debate in the world of cycling is balancing the health benefits and safety risks of commuting to work by bicycle compared to driving to work. While there are health benefits attributed to bicycling, there are also negative health consequences from automotive pollution that bicycle commuters are exposed to in congested urban environments. There is also the risk of collisions between cars and cyclists. This debate ultimately is part of the dedicated bike infrastructure debate. Cycling advocacy groups argue that the risk of injury or death when commuting by bicycle is significantly lower when there are bicycle paths that are separated from roadways.

Prominent Authorities

The primary authorities in the world of cycling are advocacy groups and government departments. Some of these organizations include the ‘League of American Bicyclists’ led by Andy Clark, and the ‘Rails to Trails Conservancy’. Some government departments that deal with cycling issues are the ‘National Center for Bicycling and Walking’, the ‘National Association of City Transportation Officials’, and the ‘Department of Transportation’. There are also some coalitions of organizations such as the ‘National Complete Streets Coalition’, ‘Smart Growth America’, and ‘Transportation for America’. One organization that does transportation planning geared towards creating more pedestrian-friendly routes is Trailnet. Trailnet is focused on the St. Louis region and the director is Kay Barnes.

Specialized Terminology

There is not a lot of specialized terminology in regards to bicycling and infrastructure. One important term is the ‘Rails-to-Trails’ initiative. This bill passed in the 90’s and is targeted towards converting unused rail lines into bike trails. There are also ‘Bike-Sharing’ programs. These are programs that have various stations in a city that house bikes that a customer can rent to commute between stations.

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