

## CHAPTER 9: REGIONAL BIKEWAY SYSTEM

### Bikeway Policies

The Metropolitan Council supports the development and maintenance of efficient bicycle and pedestrian travel systems as integral pieces of the region's transportation network. Increased bicycle commuting will not, in itself, solve the region's transportation problems, but it is part of a package of solutions and one piece in the overall transportation picture. Bicycle facilities also provide a very popular and essential component of the recreational infrastructure of the region.

The bicycle is especially important as a mode to access other means of travel, such as transit. Because of short average trip lengths, nationally about two miles for bikes, most of the facilities for these modes in the region have traditionally been planned for and constructed at the local and county level. More recently, there has been a push for developing an effective bicycle transportation network at the regional level. Mn/DOT, the Metropolitan Council and county and city public works departments are near completion of an effort to identify the existing regional bicycling facilities network. The region will subsequently plan recommendations for projects that complete or enhance that network.

Since 1991, the region has made an effort to direct a significant level of federal transportation funds to special facilities for bicycles, not only as freestanding projects but also as part of larger roadway constructions. Current funding criteria under the Metropolitan Council's and Transportation Advisory Board's regional solicitation process recognize that "travel on foot and by bicycle...are critical to transit-friendly land uses which are more compact and mixed in their development patterns. The pedestrian and bicyclist both support and are supported by this development pattern." Bicycle facilities are federally funded as stand-alone Surface Transportation Program bikeway projects and Transportation Enhancement projects, and as components of highway construction, reconstruction or transit capital projects. Across all funding categories, prioritizing criteria give those projects that support other modes of transportation – such as bicycling – a greater chance of selection for funding than projects that do not provide such integration of modes. These federal funds have allowed construction of many new bicycle facilities.

### Bikeway Facilities

The Metropolitan Council has identified 170 miles of regional trails and 101 miles of state trails open to the public. To date, however, other trail facilities and all of the region's on-road bicycle facilities have not been inventoried comprehensively and consistently. One of the past difficulties has been reaching an agreement on a classification scheme for on-road facilities. However, as stated previously, the Metropolitan Council is participating in a nearly complete effort to map and inventory both on-road and off-road bicycle facilities using common criteria across the region. Cities, counties and park agencies with maintenance jurisdiction over the facilities have designated the bike routes that fit the agreed-upon criteria. The product of this effort will be a base bicycle-transportation system map that incorporates both types of facilities and can be used to identify bicycle system needs within future planning efforts at both the regional and local level.

Since 1991, the region has directed more than \$76 million in federal funds to freestanding bicycle and pedestrian facility projects.

## **Bikeway Utilization**

While no system-wide utilization surveys or counts have been conducted to date in the region, some metropolitan area counties and communities – Minneapolis, for example – conduct counts on components of their trail systems. Conducting counts, especially on on-road facilities, is a difficult and costly task. Regional and national travel behavior studies can be analyzed to provide a surrogate measure for bikeway usage.

In 2001, the Metropolitan Council completed a Travel Behavior Inventory study (TBI) examining trip modes not included in the 1990 TBI, including bicycle trips. Survey data for the seven-county metropolitan area indicates about 180,000 trips were made by bicycling. Short bicycle trips and transit-access trips are typically under-represented in personal travel surveys, so this information will be especially useful for monitoring and forecasting growth in bicycle trips. Since 54% of Americans live less than five miles from their jobs and 50% of all car trips are five miles or less, bicycling is a viable alternative to the automobile for many trips.

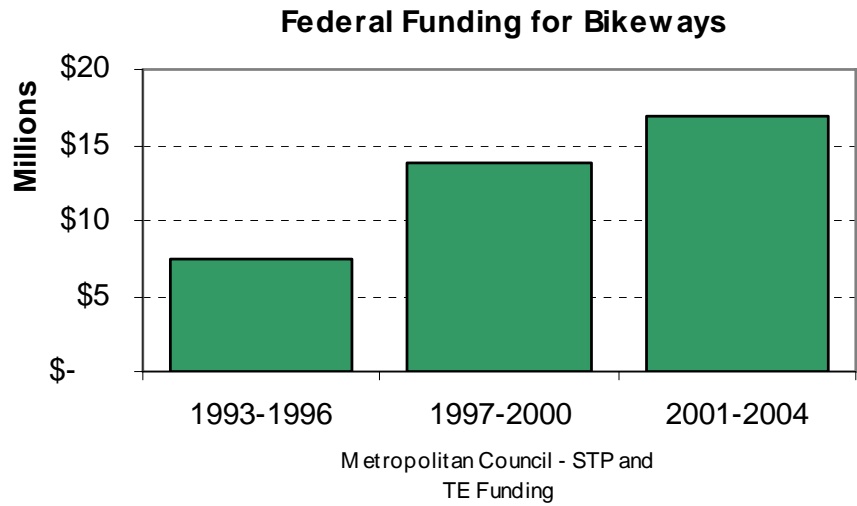
Census data suggests that the metropolitan area's investment in bikeway facilities has helped produce one of the nation's leading bicycle commuting populations. According to the 2000 Census Transportation Planning Package, a daily average of 6,675 journey-to-work trips – 0.5% of all journey-to-work trips – are made via bicycle in the seven-county metropolitan area. Based on the 2000 Census Supplemental Survey, Minneapolis is the top-ranked large city in the country for bicycle commuting, with a 2.63% mode share, or an average of 5,366 people riding to work each day on a bicycle. In comparison, warm-weather cities Sacramento, California, and Portland, Oregon, rank number two and three nationally with 2.59% and 2.55% bicycle mode shares, respectively.

## **Planning for Bikeways**

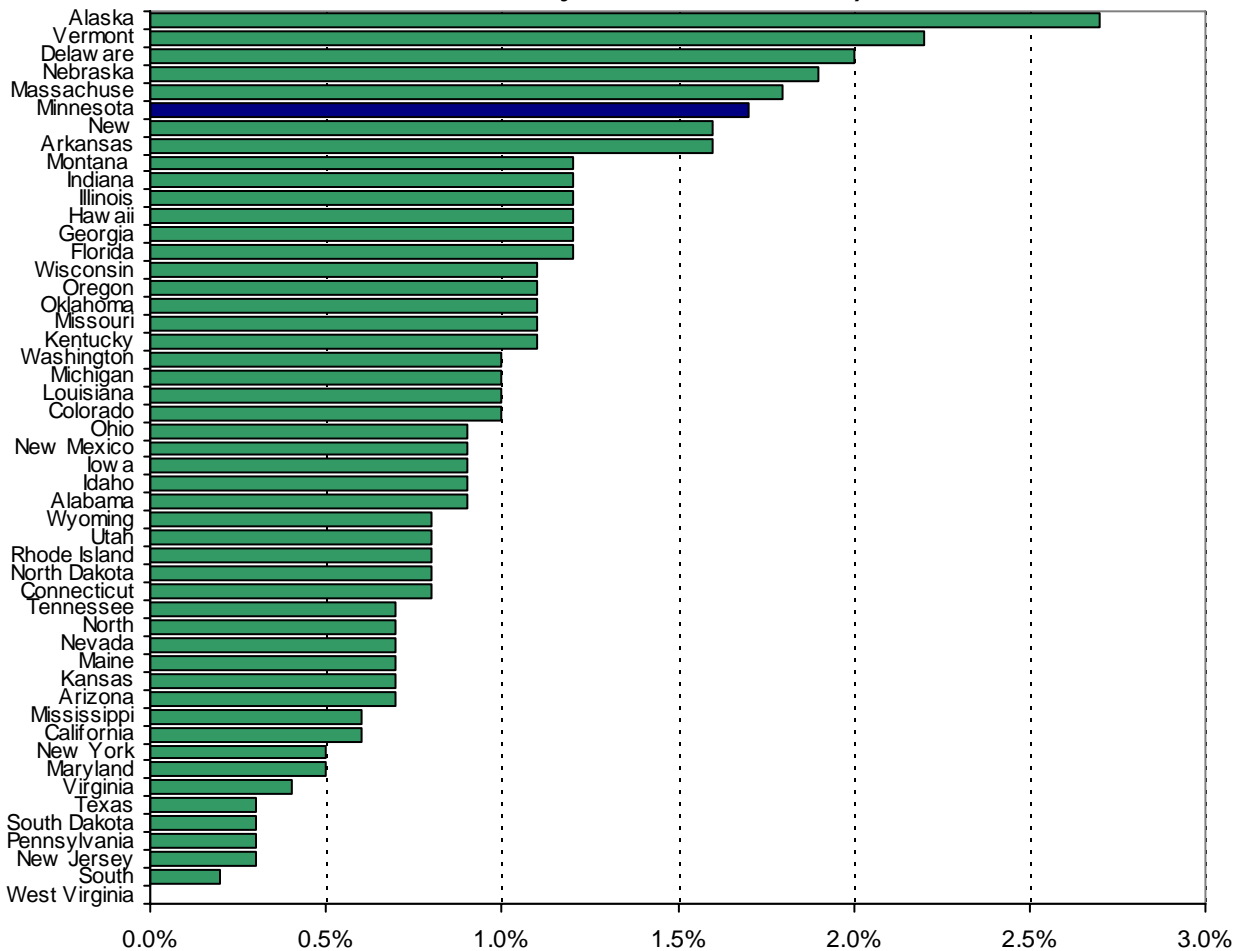
Cities and counties in the seven-county metropolitan region recognize the need for bicycle facilities. Most urban and suburban comprehensive plans adopted by the Metropolitan Council include a bicycle facility plan and/or bikeway map. No bikeway project will be funded through the regional transportation project selection process unless it is included in or consistent with the policies of a state or regional plan, a city or county comprehensive plan found to be consistent with Metropolitan Council plans, or an adopted capital improvement program. Most of the communities whose plans lack a bikeways component are located outside the urban area, where bikeway facilities are less common.

## Federal Funding for Bikeways

The amount of federal funds spent on freestanding trail and on-road bikeway facilities projects has been increasing. Continued federal emphasis on multiple modes of transportation has resulted in an increase in the region's spending on bikeways of approximately 23% over the previous funding cycle



### Percent of Federal Transportation Funding spend on Bicycle/Pedestrian Projects FFY 1998 - 2001)



Source: Surface Transportation Policy Partnership

## Conclusions

It can be concluded, based on the data collected to date on bicycling, that usage of the system increases as funding increases. This is an important concept because bicycling is a significant candidate to replace some of the 50% of all car trips that are five miles or less, especially considering the national average bicycle trip is around two miles. Much like public transit, bicycling often has to compete with the car unless separate right-of way is provided. Bikeways, bike lanes and off-street paths are viable options for improving the attractiveness of biking as a viable transportation option. In addition, coordinating with other forms of transportation, such as bike lockers at transit centers, will present an even more attractive option for potential bicyclist.

Planning for bicycling facilities should be a coordinated effort. This effort will improve greatly when the existing system is inventoried, mapped and analyzed for needs and gaps.