

10: Recommendations

How You Can Use This Report

For Officials & Advocates

The top measurement of the success of this project is how prominently advocates and government officials use these data to argue for an increased investment in bicycling and walking in their communities. Thunderhead encourages advocates and officials to use this report to improve where their city or state fails to meet benchmarks set by cities, with a better investment in bicycling and walking. This report shows where cities and states excel and where there is room for improvement. Readers can use this report to find a city or state in their region, or of a comparable size, and create some friendly competition for improving bicycling and walking by the time the next Benchmarking Report is released in 2009. Those who are unclear on a certain data source or value can contact Thunderhead Alliance for clarity and more information.

Set Goals, Strategize, Evaluate

For Officials & Advocates

This document can be a helpful resource for communities to see what areas they are weakest in and to set goals for improving. If a community ranks low on per capita bicycle parking, then they may set a goal to increase bike parking by x number of spaces per year. Thunderhead hopes this document will be used to strategize by looking towards the best practice models from communities that excel in particular areas. Officials and advocates are generally willing to share information on their successes and provide resources to those who ask. Thunderhead Alliance member organizations have access to Thunderhead's online members' resources library where information on best practices including organizational development, winning campaigns, and specific policy topics such as complete streets, can be found. Readers can evaluate progress

over time and will see in the next report if their community has improved. Thunderhead encourages advocates and officials to set realistic and achievable goals that will increase cycling and walking in their community over time.

Improve Data Collection on Bicycle & Pedestrian Travel

For Officials & Advocates

One of the most valuable but missing pieces to this report is documentation on usage and demand. The limitations of existing standardized data sources were highlighted in Chapters 3, 4 and 9. To fill this important data gap, Thunderhead recommends that a national standardized trip-counting methodology, such as the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project, be implemented. Thunderhead supports the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project's call for an annual bicycle and pedestrian count and survey using standardized methodologies provided for free by them to participating agencies.

The National Documentation Days are in the second week of September with supplementary counts and surveys that can be conducted in January, May and July to provide seasonal data. Participating agencies and organizations should visit www.altaplanning.com for descriptions of the project, instructions, and the forms necessary to conduct a count. Thunderhead encourages communities to conduct counts as part of the National Documentation Day and report results to the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) for inclusion in the national database. If enough counts can be collected by cities using a standardized model, it will lead to a more accu-

rate means of assessing the status of communities and evaluating results. Also, if enough cities participate in these counts, researchers could extrapolate a formula for cities who have not yet participated by comparing the results to existing data sources such as the Census and NHTS. These methods of determining all trips made by foot and bike will greatly improve the ability to measure the impacts of these modes in Thunderhead's next biennial report.

Improve Data Collection by Government Agencies

For Officials

Besides accurate trip counts, there are other important variables that are needed to evaluate effectiveness. Among areas in need of improved data collection by government agencies are funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects, miles of bicycle and pedestrian facilities, number of bike racks, number of other amenities for cyclists and pedestrians such as signs, bike lockers, showers, and benches. As of this report, many states and cities have no means in place for tracking many of these variables.

Government agencies should implement internal policies for collecting data on their investments in cycling and walking including funding levels, facilities, and other amenities. Several government officials reported that data on bicycle and pedestrian projects was hard to access because in many cases it was not separated out from projects that contained a bicycle and pedestrian component. Although Thunderhead supports the integration of cycling and walking into transportation planning, because there is still a large resource disparity between motorized and non-motorized transportation, it is important to track investment in non-motorized transport so that cities and states can evaluate their results.

National agencies also need to work to improve the uniformity and accuracy of reported data. Appendix 4 illustrates how two different data sets, bicycling and walking levels and fatalities, vary between different surveys. Greater effort should

be made to standardize these surveys so that government officials and advocates will have more accurate data for evaluating their efforts.

Integrate Benchmarking Efforts to Single National Database

For Thunderhead Alliance & other National Organizations

One reason it has historically been difficult for advocates and officials to compare their progress to other communities is the lack of integrated data from various sources. The Introduction chapter of this report summarized other benchmarking-like efforts in the U.S. that have all collected some amount of data on various indicators for cycling and walking levels, attitudes, or policies. Agencies performing these surveys and studies should coordinate their efforts so that data can be accessible for the benefit of all. For local communities that organize surveys and report cards, it may be beneficial to integrate these efforts into a single standardized survey and/or methodology so that communities can use them both for their own purposes and to compare with results from other communities. A future searchable database, as part of Thunderhead's Benchmarking Project, may be an appropriate umbrella for the collection of such data. If enough communities participated in a single standardized survey/evaluation, then it would be appropriate for Thunderhead to compare and analyze the results in future Benchmarking Reports.

Expand Benchmarking Efforts

For Thunderhead

Refine Methodologies

Many lessons were learned during the process of collecting data for this Benchmarking Report which will allow Thunderhead to refine its methodologies as the Benchmarking Project expands. Thunderhead will add more time for team-building in the initial phase of the project, coordinating the 2009 Benchmarking Project team six months prior to mailing

surveys. The team will expand outreach efforts in the initial phase of data collection to increase the chances for more complete data sets in the future. Messaging and promotion of the report will also be refined in future outreach efforts. For this report, there were a few rare cases of officials and advocates that questioned the intentions of this report and how the data would be used. They were afraid their community would come out looking bad in the final report and feared the embarrassment. Thunderhead hopes that this report will ease those concerns, and in the future will be better prepared for potential fears and concerns that outreach messaging will address.

Expand Scope of Data

As the Benchmarking Project evolves and Thunderhead is able to secure more funding, there are other areas such as land use, bicycle and pedestrian amenities (such as changing facilities, bike lockers, and benches) and encouragement and safety programs that will be included. Geographic Information System (GIS) and other neighborhood-level technology will be used to compare land-uses including grocery stores, schools, transit, and bike shops locations to levels of bicycling and walking, crashes, and health data. Thunderhead will also add a survey component to measure attitudes on cycling and walking comfort and safety across communities. In addition to these areas, future data collection will include some mid-size cities in the analysis.

Create Database to Enhance Access

To better reach the objective of increasing access to data, Thunderhead will create a searchable online database with the data collected for this report and for all future data collected. This database will increase the capacity of this project by streamlining data entry and will allow multiple team members to easily work with the data. This database will be beneficial for advocates and officials who need to access more detailed information than could be detailed in this report. Because more information was collected than could be used, and because there is an infinite number of potential ways to illustrate these data but limited space, data may not have been

displayed in the most useful way for everyone. Putting these data into a database accessible to advocates, officials, and other researchers, will significantly broaden the scope and potential impact of the project. Thunderhead has already received requests from advocates that these data be available online. This proves the demand for a searchable database. Thunderhead still needs to secure additional funds to support its development.

Get Involved with Benchmarking

For Officials & Advocates

This project would not have been possible without the help and support of Thunderhead Alliance member organizations, advocates and government officials across the United States. Thunderhead has received an overwhelming amount of support from advocates and officials who recognize the value of these efforts for their communities. However, in some cases because of time constraints and difficulty accessing data, willing advocates and officials were unable to provide data for their city or state. Thunderhead recommends that advocates and officials get involved with the Benchmarking Project by dedicating a small amount of time every two years to providing data for their state or community. Advocates and officials will see the gaps for their city or state in this report and can make an effort to improve the completeness of their responses in the future.

Another way to get involved with benchmarking is to conduct surveys or counts using standardized methodology, such as from the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project. Advocates and officials can be a part of the solution to increasing the availability and access of data on bicycling and walking in their communities and nationwide by playing an active role. The end result is that everyone benefits by discarding failed models and identifying the best practice models to be emulated. Eventually, these efforts will allow Thunderhead organizations and government agencies to partner in transforming their communities into more vibrant, healthy and livable places where walking and cycling thrive.