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Bicycle Urbanism

Part of the Great VCU Bike Race Book Course



Parks and Parking: Bicycle Friendlessness in Urban Environments

🕒 October 3, 2015 📁 Student Post 👤 dpitt

Let me open with my biking background wherein my first experience riding a bicycle for non-recreational purposes was as a freshman at Virginia Commonwealth University. I enjoyed riding back and forth to my classes and other places around campus, because it was honestly more convenient than driving or walking, and I lived close enough to campus to make it work. I remember my first bicycle fondly as I had bought it at Wal-Mart I believe, and it had an image of Panama Jack on it, which my friends frequently teased me about. But, nonetheless the city atmosphere got into wanting to try bicycling, which I had not done in years before coming to college. Then my initial and continued struggle that stopped me from really continuing riding a bike was the lack of bicycle infrastructure and competing with pedestrians on the sidewalk and cars on the road. The pedestrians hate bicyclist because they are taking up part of the sidewalk. The cars hate the bicycles because they are taking up part of the road. It was a constant competition between two relatively unsafe situations, which I could no longer continue safely. But, living further away from campus and experiencing bicycling in other areas of the city has opened my eyes to the wider issues we face in trying to become a bicycle friendly city.

Biking around the Richmond VA particularly in the Northside area of Richmond I often see many small neighborhood parks. Some are more oriented towards children with little play sets, which seems fairly neglected which I can gather from their rusted and fatigued looks. While others are just open reserved grassy areas that break apart the sometimes-boxy architecture popularized in the surrounding area. One thing that I see that is missing from these various parks are designated bicycle areas in terms of bike lanes and any bicycle parking. Although, this may be seen as a minor oversight it unfortunately highlights the lack of forethought in how bicycles and the bicycling lifestyle fits into Richmond's infrastructure present and future.

I believe the lack of bicycle infrastructure and bicycle parking at the city parks and recreation centers give the message to the children who frequent those types of areas that bicycles are not an effective

form of transportation. It indirectly discourages the children from learning the skill of bicycling and prevents the effective building of a bike culture in the city. Given how expensive a car is in comparison to a bicycle it would make more sense to create bike programs and encouraging bicycles as an alternative form of transportation for the city. Especially with the youth around the city who may not have the funds to take the bus or other forms of public transportation, but who could participate in a bicycle sharing program if it was well run and focused. Richmond can be a bike friendly city but we need to drastically change our approach whether it is direct or indirect to do it.

In my opinion a bicycle friendly city is one we start building from the ground up by implementing aspects of bicycle life into the public sphere such as but not limited to our parks and schools. It has to start from the bottom up with those who are young to those who are older so we can build a long-term bicycle culture not centered around one group of demographic.

Submitted by Mariam

4 thoughts on “Parks and Parking: Bicycle Friendlessness in Urban Environments”



Michael

October 9, 2015 at 1:47 pm

I like your idea. Ive been riding since before training wheels. I uave a very distinct memory of pedaling super hard down the sidewalk with a big wheel tricycle, feeling like I was moving light speed and that I could go anywhere. I can easily see that if had not been introduced to the idea, that I'd probably stick to driving or walking instead.

If we can teach kids to ride, how to comfortably impose themselves in the streets and be aware of all the things going on, I could see people taking up cycling out of gamiliarity. Too manh friends of mine simply dont ride because theyre unfamiliar with the idea, or too offput by the rush of traffic and all the different routes and roads to be taken.

Neighborhoods play a huge part, especially in the city. More built up economic zones arent designed for cyclists because of the nature of business and traffic flow. Neighborhoods however are safe enough (or ought to be), that any kid or skateboarder can play in the street with ample oppurtunity to shout “CAR” and pick up all their gear before returning to the sidewalk. Neighborhoods have a tendency to reduce traffic while preserving routes through them. Utilizing neighborhoods and making them the main routes for cyclists would certainly expose more youths to the idea and would probably be a good start towards establishing a clear distinction between car routes and cyclist routes.



James
Yancey

October 9, 2015 at 3:12 pm

This is a great analysis of the lack of bike parking and programs in the city. Introducing the younger folks in the city to cycling would absolutely encourage a mindset of safety and respect towards our cycling culture. I'm glad you brought up the idea of getting children involved in cycling education, and helping them to better understand the benefits of biking in a city.



Alex Cortes

October 9, 2015 at 3:37 pm

I enjoyed reading this. Apart from riding around my suburban neighborhood growing up, I had never really experienced basic commuting by bicycles until coming to Richmond. I remember biking on my first day after moving into the dorms in 2012, and I loved it. Ok, I didn't love the threatening cars, but I felt so free and mobile on my bicycle, and I still do. It was interesting learning the nuances of bicycling in a particular city, which I had to do when moving to Richmond as well as when I moved to Copenhagen a little over a year ago. In some ways, learning to bike in Copenhagen was even more intimidating! But after a week or so, the rhythms of biking start to come naturally. In Richmond, without much bicycle infrastructure, it is kind of a weird free-for-all in terms of the rhythms of bicycling through the urban environments. There are very little times when I feel like it is appropriate to ride on the sidewalk, yet I see so many people doing it around campus, I imagine because fear of automobiles. We ought to teach motorists bicyclists rights, and bicyclists car rights, although I might not agree with their prevalence in this city (;



Michael

October 17, 2015 at 4:46 am

I ride on sidewalks when it'd be silly to do otherwise. Going up a one-way street. Thinking I can make a turn, but really not, and having to pull off and wait, than just turning onto the walk before the turn.

It often occurs to me that I probably look silly and people are judging, but I've been in it for like 5 years, its just easy. Sidewalks are strategic, I suppose.