

Lincoln bikers pedal over a network of routes

By Kathy Tharp

While lack of funds discourages some improvements, such as additional bike paths, Lincoln continues to be a fine city for bicycle travel.

"Some people complain about pot holes but no place is much better than we have here," said Darrell Brenneise, owner of the Freewheelin' Bike Shops.

About 30 miles of bike routes have been marked in the city and 10 miles of bike paths run through seven of Lincoln's parks.

Despite this, Brenneise said two areas of town are especially dangerous for the cyclist. One is a route to Gateway Shopping Center from downtown.

"You're almost forced to shoot out onto O Street," Brenneise said, "which is treacherous for the inexperienced biker."

Brenneise said bikers would need to go an average of 25 to 30 mph to keep in the flow of traffic. Those who can do it, he said, are in the minority.

Another area concerns riders coming from West O Street to downtown. Brenneise said there is no safe street for them to take.

Brenneise also mentioned smaller problems like the sewer grates on Capitol Parkway. Many bicyclists have caught their tires in them.

The Billy Wolff-Antelope bikeway is Lincoln's first and only commuter bikeway. It parallels Capitol Parkway and alleviates some of its problems. The path runs from Holmes Park to Muny Park—a distance of about four miles.

Even on the Billy Wolff-Antelope bike path there are bound to be accidents. Since its September 1980 opening there have been 10 accidents reported on the path. All of the accidents involved a motor vehicle. Most took place at one of the 10 street crossings. The average age of the cyclists involved was 32.

Accidents double

Rick Haden, traffic engineer for the city of Lincoln, said that between 1978 and 1980, the number of bicycle accidents has doubled. Most, he said, were due to violations at stop signs and signals by bicyclists.

"We need to crack down on violations," Haden stressed. There was one fatal bicycle accident in Lincoln last year, Haden said.

"Fatal accidents among cyclists are freak," he said, "from landing wrong." According to police records there were 137 accidents reported last year which involved a bicycle.

"We don't hear about the minor accidents," Haden said, "just ones reported to the police."

Because of the age of the average cyclist, and their relatively good condition, bikers rarely are injured badly, Haden said.

Bike route signs mark streets that are considered the fastest, safest route a biker can take to his destination, Brenneise said. Routes are located near the busy streets bikers try to ride on, Haden said. This takes cyclists off arterial roads.

The various passages available for cyclists shows evidence that the bicycle is taken more seriously now than in the past.

But with "budget cuts" becoming a household phrase, future bicycle projects will become a low priority for the Lincoln City Planning Department.

"Funding is a major consideration," Haden said. "We're spending less and less on improvements and more and more on maintenance of what we've got."

Too expensive

"The Billy Wolff type of trail is going to be an unusual thing in the future," Haden said.

According to Haden, the path was conceived in 1971 but wasn't built until 1979. An underpass at 27th Street and Capitol Parkway was just completed in the fall of 1980.

The Wolff trail, named for a Lincoln bike enthusiast, was financed in part by the Federal Administration Grant. Lincoln was one of 41 applicants vying for a portion of the national fund consisting of \$6 million. Lincoln received \$200,000.

The Federal Highway Administration granted the money as kind of an experiment, Haden explained. It wanted to see if such a commuter bikeway would be successful, he said.

The Billy Wolff-Antelope path helped eliminate some problems by reducing bicycle-car interaction. In the Mayor's Bicycling Committee's pamphlet entitled "Bicycling in Lincoln," it is stated that the bikeway runs into only 10 street crossings and seven of these are controlled by traffic signals.

Cost was one of the biggest bikeway construction problems, Haden said. Since Lincoln didn't have any experience in building bikeways, no one could estimate costs, he said.

The total for the original project was \$295,909 and of that \$200,000 was financed.

The 27th Street underpass alone cost \$60,000, Haden said. It was eliminated from the earlier plans because of its cost, he said. When the 27th Street and Capitol Parkway intersection was renovated, the underpass was tacked on as a companion project.

Federal money

Because the "major obstacle" of money was taken

care of, the Billy Wolff path was a great success, Haden said. The money provided by the Federal Highway Administration Grant was well spent.

"Ridership is twice what we predicted," Haden said. Haden said that ridership increased to 5,300 a week last year; about a 30 percent increase over 1979.

The increase may be because of many factors. A corridor study report for Nebraska Highway 2 states that "the increase of bicycles is believed to be due mostly to adults riding to keep fit and enjoy the out of doors."

Haden said he sees bicycling as a viable alternative to cars in that it "keeps a lot of money out of the Arab's pockets."

Brenneise said bicycles add up to more than just fitness and fun. He said he considers them a mode of transportation. Brenneise also realizes it is financially impractical to build paths to provide bikes with their own transportation system. Building paths to avoid dangerous situations, Brenneise said, is a different matter.

In 1973 the bicycle was officially designated as a mode of transportation, according to the pamphlet from the Mayor's Bicycling Committee. Since that time, bicycling has been included in the city's transportation plans, it said.

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