

US Bicycle Routes System Briefing

Background

- In 2008 AASHTO established a national corridor plan for US Bicycle Routes to facilitate travel between the states over routes which have been identified as being suitable for cycling.
- USBR routes almost exclusively use roads and streets suitable for bicycle travelers with separated trails incorporated where appropriate. Facility construction/upgrade is not required - state DOTs determine road suitability and submit AASHTO applications for USBR designation.
- State DOTs must confirm that all relevant local jurisdictions support the proposed route.
- A well-defined process has been developed for route implementation: www.adventurecycling.org/routes-and-maps/us-bicycle-route-system/implement-a-us-bike-route
- AASHTO has a Purpose and Policy document (revised 5-15-09) for the USBRS: www.adventurecycling.org/default/assets/File/USBRS/AASHTOPurposePolicyStatement.pdf
- Extensive reference information is available at www.adventurecycling.org/routes-and-maps/us-bicycle-route-system
- Environmental, economic, health, and transportation benefits are well-documented: www.adventurecycling.org/routes-and-maps/us-bicycle-route-system/faq

Route Implementation Process

- State DOT or advocacy groups identify a corridor for development – at least two states must be involved unless the route connects two existing routes within a state or to Canada or Mexico.
- A specific route (turn by turn listing of roads, streets, & trails) is defined.
- Each local jurisdiction (road “owner”) is contacted to gain support. The proposed route is modified as required to obtain local jurisdiction support. Experience shows that volunteers are an efficient and effective at obtaining that support.
- The state DOT prepares application to AASHTO which includes a map and turn by turn route list. <http://route.transportation.org/Pages/USBicycleRoutes.aspx>
- AASHTO reviews applications (spring and fall meetings) for completeness but does not rule on the specific route choices of roads, streets, or trails.
- Routes can be changed through the same AASHTO application process.
- There is an existing USBR sign (M1-9 in the MUTCD) and a new (green/white) sign awaiting approval - www.adventurecycling.org/routes-and-maps/us-bicycle-route-system/implement-a-us-bike-route/sign-a-us-bike-route

Economic Drivers

- Numerous studies show significant economic impact from bicycle tourism (see www.adventurecycling.org/routes-and-maps/us-bicycle-route-system/implement-a-us-bike-route/benefits-and-building-support/economic-impact)
- Bicycling economic impact in Wisconsin approaches \$1B per year.
- Typical bicycle travelers spend \$100 per day on tour. (www.adventurecycling.org/default/assets/File/USBRS/Research/GAPeconomicImpactStudy200809.pdf)
- Return on investment is high for bicycling facilities (NC Outer Banks study - \$6.9 mill investment = annual \$60 million return in tourism generated income)
- Proximity to bicycle facilities means higher real estate values, faster home sales, and more desirable neighborhoods. (www.adventurecycling.org/routes-and-maps/us-bicycle-route-system/implement-a-us-bike-route/benefits-and-building-support/economic-impact)
- Bicycling infrastructure projects create more jobs than road-only projects (see PERI study: <http://www.peri.umass.edu/236/hash/64a34bab6a183a2fc06fdc212875a3ad/publication/467/>)
- US Bicycle Routes utilize existing roads, streets, and trails and are very low cost to implement and maintain.

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Health & Environmental Drivers

- Bicycling reduces heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, depression, obesity, arthritis and more.
- The physical environment matters - see “*Increasing Physical Activity Through Community Design: A Guide for Public Health Practitioners*” <http://atfiles.org/files/pdf/IPAchap1.pdf>
- Designating and promoting bicycle routes and trails improves safety and promotes physical activity as an element of daily life.
- Designation of bicycle routes increases mode share and bicycle safety (<http://www.bikewalkalliance.org/resources/benchmarking>)
- Active transportation saves money in the long-term by reducing public health expenditures.
- More people bicycling means reduced air pollution and less motorized congestion.
- Increased bicycling decreases energy consumption and pollution.
- Bicyclist tourism has low impact on public spaces and low cost to implement.
- Cyclists engage and appreciate the communities and natural environments they encounter.

Concerns

- Liability issues vary from state to state but generally states do not incur added liability from designating US Bicycle Routes. (See Transportation Research Board report from April, 2010 onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/nchrp_lrd_53.pdf)
- From the Michigan Attorney General’s Office: bike routes “pose no additional risk of liability.” http://www.adventurecycling.org/default/assets/File/USBRS/Research/Michigan_PedBikeSafety_Liability_Oct2009.pdf
- The limited liability of governments for bicycle routes is documented in a study “Liability Aspects of Bikeway Designation” (<http://www.adventurecycling.org/default/assets/File/USBRS/Research/LiabilityAspectsOfBikewayDesignation.pdf>).
- Some local jurisdictions are concerned about increased bicycle traffic. An increase of 2000 bicycle travelers per year would have significant economic impact on a local community on a USBR but is only 10 more cyclists per day.
- The target audience for USBRs is long distance bicycle travelers who are experienced road users and so are able to deal with higher traffic density and speed.
- There is no cost for implementing a USBR. Signage not required. There are a number of ways a route can be designated including maps (paper or electronic), signs, pavement markings, downloadable GPS coordinates, noting routes on existing state and local maps, etc.
- The roads, streets, and trails chosen for a USBR are not chiseled in stone. Route changes can be proposed to AASHTO twice per year.
- The choice of roads for a USBR is a tradeoff between low traffic, direct routing, access to services (bike shops, motels, campgrounds), access to points of interest, and scenic roads. The best route for a family weekend bike ride may not be the best route for someone on a multi-day long distance bicycle trip.