

## **PEDAL POWER: MAKING BICYCLING A TRANSPORTATION OPTION**

by Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks, September 2009

Bicycling is growing more popular, and its health benefits, fuel savings, convenience, and non-polluting aspects are encouraging even more people to pedal. In Denver last June, 11,000 first-timers took part in the annual Bike-to-Work Day, and in Minneapolis, the number of bike commuters has increased by more than 40% in the last two years.

Innovative cities are working to make cycling safer and more accessible, including a concept developed in the Netherlands in the 1960's that is just now making its way to the United States. The program, available in over 100 cities worldwide, offers a network of stations where people can rent, at low or no cost, a bicycle that they can ride and return to another station. It allows people to take short trips without the wait associated with other types of public transportation like trains or buses. In European cities such as Barcelona, Brussels, Berlin, and Vienna, bike stations can be found in clusters 0.2 miles apart. In areas that have clusters farther apart, Call-a-Bike service is used which allows people to rent bikes by cell phone and pick up and drop them off at any spot.

The Paris and Lyon bike share programs are used by thousands of cyclists each day and are funded by a private company that receives advertising rights at the station. Some programs bring in profits through memberships. Montreal expects to have 2,400 rental bikes on the street next fall.

In the United States, Portland is looking to add a bike share program in order to increase their bicycle commuting public. They currently have over 14% of residents using their bike to occasionally commute to work, and 20% of those living downtown riding their bikes. The bike share program has spread to Washington, Arlington County, and will soon be coming to San Francisco.

More than 30% of all trips in Amsterdam, Copenhagen, and many smaller European cities are made by bicycle. . In Copenhagen the distance people travel by bicycles surpasses that of cars. In Davis, California and Boulder, Colorado 12% and 15% of the trips, respectively, are made by bicycle. Transportation planners are finding that more people are willing to ride a bike than take a bus to work when there are improved facilities for bicycling. They have also found that as more of the population cycles, the more commuters are respectful of cyclists.

However, with the popularity of bicycles increasing, so are concerns for bicycle safety. Fear is a major factor discouraging people from riding, and it is well founded. We all know who loses when a fast moving 6,000 pound car collides with a cyclist. Cyclists take their lives in their hands when they share the road with cars because sometimes drivers aren't attentive, and sometimes cyclists don't obey traffic laws. The best solution is separated bike paths that don't require cyclists to share the road. Can you imagine how many school children would ride to school if there were safe bike paths to our schools?

When bike paths separated from the road are not possible, taking routes with less traffic, commuting during non-peak times, and using wide bike lanes lessens the potential for accidents. Some cities, like Thousand Oaks, allow cyclists on sidewalks. While this isn't optimal, particularly when pedestrians are present, it is safer and sometimes necessary when traffic lanes are too narrow to accommodate cyclists, as is the case on Lynn Road north of the 101 Freeway or Lindero Road south of the 101 Freeway.

In August I took advantage of a lull in meetings which regularly have me driving to Ventura and throughout the region, and began riding my bike to my office on Thousand Oaks Boulevard. I found a route that I feel safe on that avoids major intersections, incorporates pathways, and uses a short section of sidewalk where the road loses its bike lane. I've found the ride to be something to look forward to, and one of the best parts of my day. I've had strangers give me thumbs up and words of encouragement, a neighbor offer to tow me, and others comment they should get out and join me. Maybe I'll see you out there too!