

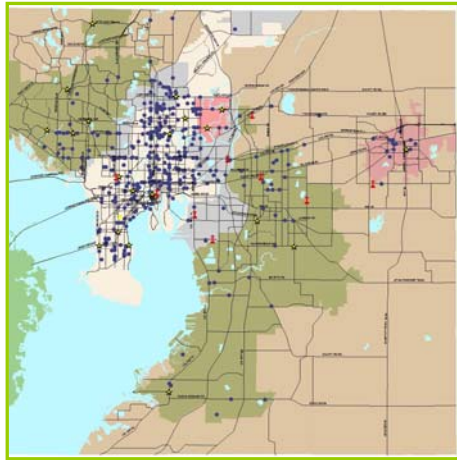
Bicycle Planning In Hillsborough County – The MPO Answers

By Gena Torres

Mom, what is it you **DO** at work? That's the question my kids ask me that starts the ball rolling...or the pedals turning. I leave out the other tasks that help the MPO reach its many goals and give them the answer that keeps me interested and excited to be at work after 17 years... "I try to make it safer for people to bicycle and walk." It's a simple mission with complicated solutions.



Thankfully, the MPO understands the challenges and is supportive of the initiatives the MPO's Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) and I have brought forward.



When people learn of Hillsborough County's daunting bicycle crash rates I'm often asked to suggest how those numbers can be reduced. I receive the police crash reports too – each week a new stack accumulates in my in-basket. My answer, hands down: **marked and signed on-road bike lanes**, and we should have them on every roadway a cyclist is legally permitted to ride. The MPO conducted three crash analysis studies reaffirming that most people getting hit are using a bicycle as their main mode of transportation. These cyclists are using the same roadways as motorists for the most direct route to work, school, family/friend's homes, groceries,

appointments, basically conducting their every-day needs.

Traditional safety education campaigns may only reach a finite number of people. However, if reaching one person who may not know an important traffic rule; that helmets are critical to safety; that there is a Bicycle Suitability Map to help guide their trip; and wearing reflective material will greatly increase visibility, then the safety outreach can be considered a success.



The MPO has recently updated the Bicycle Suitability Map and had flashing red lights and reflective wrist-bands made with the MPO logo. The dollars allocated over the years on these practical and popular outreach materials was money well spent. And just this January, the MPO's BPAC co-hosted the annual Gasparilla Bike Rodeo, by the end of the day fitting 300 helmets to area children. The MPO's presence at local events and in support of the Transportation Management Organizations (MPO has prioritized \$300,000 this year) can only

increase the number of people who will try bicycling, and do so safely.

Yet **marked and signed on-road bike lanes**

are most effective at educating every motorist and every cyclist using that roadway. There isn't a media campaign that can beat that. The motorist learns that they are sharing the road with bicycles. The road markings point to the direction the cyclist should ride (with the flow of traffic) and can be reinforced with a sign behind the bike lanes that reads "Cyclist. Wrong Way". St. Petersburg is testing painted bike lanes to bring more attention to cyclists riding there. Even with the best intentions, such as removing cyclists far from the roadway, the most predictable location where cyclists are less likely to be injured are on **marked and signed on-road bike lanes**.



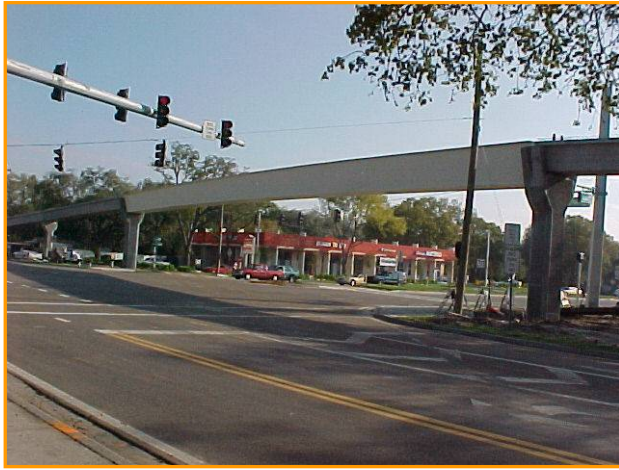
After hearing "Who in their right mind will cycle there?" more times than I care to count, the MPO is tracking bicycling (and walking) trends at 20 locations in the county and observed that the number of people walking and cycling are increasing. In addition, with the MPO's support, I spent a few months pulling over cyclists, taking their picture, and asking for their story. Once they realized that my work is legitimate, they would tell me what the uniform, hard hat, lunch box, grocery bags hanging from the handlebars, and basket full

of clothes, indicated...they indeed did not own a car and their bicycle was their means of getting around. With the number of uses of HART's Bikes on Buses Program – upwards of 6,000 uses each month - coupling a short bike ride with the bus extends the distance a person can reasonably travel around our county.

The MPO is dedicated to seeing more bicycle facilities built. The Comprehensive Bicycle Plans developed by the MPO use analytical tools to rank the long list of needed bikeways to arrive at a list of priority facilities. Actually, the Hillsborough MPO was the first in the state to develop and apply the Bicycle Level of Service and Latent Demand analyses to identify the roadways most needing bicycle facilities. With a variety of agencies and the public's input, those priorities have been

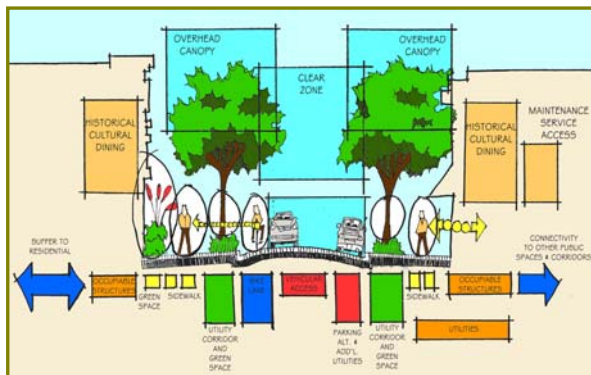


incorporated into the cost affordable Long Range Transportation Plans.



In the meantime, bicycle facilities are added in an opportunistic fashion by coat-tailing on existing road projects. The MPO passed a Restriping Resolution stating that when a road with ample width is resurfaced, the designer will look at reducing the motor vehicles lanes to allow a bicycle lane to be striped. Following that resolution, an engineering study was funded to identify appropriate roadway widths that could accommodate cars and bicycles and still meet engineering standards.

As fresh ideas are developed into new standards, the MPO realizes that local professionals benefit from hearing presentations on cutting-edge, new practices across the country. The MPO has hosted or co-hosted presentations on traffic calming, walkable communities, and livable design workshops; using MPO resources to bring experts to Hillsborough County. On occasion, road projects are still designed without bike lanes or sidewalks. The MPO continues to monitor and advise project managers on the best road designs that accommodate all road users.



The MPO staff and I are beginning a project intended to influence roadway and land-use planning that will give prominence to bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit users. What may emerge is the designation of Multi-Modal Districts in appropriate places in our county. Stay tuned for a future article on that exciting possibility.

Included at the end of this article is a table of bicycle projects the MPO has recommended for funding. Of course, the needs outweigh the funding, so only a handful of projects can be recommended. Fortunately, the municipalities expend their resources to add bicycle facilities, particularly during road widening or resurfacing. The MPO has sent many letters of support when bike lanes and trails are added to the growing network of bikeways across Hillsborough County.

My kids at least, now, understand that bicycling and walking contribute to a healthier, more livable community, and maybe their mom is doing a little to help make it easier and safer to do so.

Bicycle Facility Improvements Recommended for Funding Through the MPO's Transportation Improvement Program Over the Past Six Years

Transportation Improvement Program FYs	PROJECT
01/02-05/06	On-Street Bicycle Lanes Bell Shoals from Bloomingdale to Boyette
	Bayshore Blvd. Bicycle Lane – Gandy Blvd. to MacDill AFB
	On-Street Bicycle Lanes Morris Bridge from Cory Lakes to Pasco County
	Multi-modal Trail along CR 581 Hunters Green to Cross Creek
02/03-06/07	Upper Tampa Bay Trail – Phase IV
	Bayshore Blvd Bicycle Trail
	Friendship Trail – Phase III
	Manhattan Avenue Trail Connector
	McKay Bay Bridge Connector
	Gandy Blvd. Bridge Underpass
03/04-07/08	Upper Tampa bay Trail – Phase IV
	Bayshore Blvd Bicycle Lane
	Sweetwater Creek Bike/Ped Bridge
04/05-08/09	Temple Terrace Trail
05/06-09/10	Upper Tampa Bay Trail-Underpass at Sheldon Rd.
06/07-10/11	South Tampa Greenway – Friendship Trail Gandy Crossing
	South Tampa Greenway – Friendship Trail
	Bayshore Blvd. Bicycle Lane
	Dale Mabry Off-Road Bicycle Path

Sample of Projects Supported by the MPO:

- 40th Street – on street bike lanes and wide sidewalks in design
- BBDowns – shoulders included in design plans
- Lutz Lake Fern – on street bike lanes connecting shoulders on Dale Mabry to those on Gunn Hwy
- Cypress Point Park – growing network of off-road trails
- Sheldon Road – restriped to add 6 miles of bike lanes
- HART Bikes on Buses – bike racks used approximately 6,000 times each month
- Fowler, Fletcher, Bayshore, Ehrlich, Tarpon Springs, Morris Bridge – marked, signed, and dedicated on street bike lanes.