

# County plan aims to improve biking, walking routes

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By Jon Schmitz, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

With hills and narrow streets at nearly every turn, Allegheny County is neither a breeze for bicyclists nor a paradise for pedestrians.

But motorless travel will get a bit easier today with the county's release of a comprehensive inventory of biking and walking routes and a guide for improvements down the road.

Active Allegheny "is a blueprint for improved access and choices to connect people to communities, work sites, schools, attractions and residences," County Executive Dan Onorato said.

Staff from a consulting firm and the county spent eight months and a \$300,000 state grant walking and biking their way around the county and gathering data and input from scores of groups and citizens, including avid bicyclists.

The plan identifies biking and walking corridors and routes, including arteries for commuting to Downtown Pittsburgh from the east, north, south and west suburbs and connections to parks and other transportation modes. It maps the routes and provides information about motor vehicle traffic counts, pavement widths and difficulty ratings.

It identifies priority projects for improving bike and pedestrian routes and possible funding sources, and provides guidance to municipalities on how to make improvements. It also lists the streets and roads with the most crashes involving bicycles and pedestrians over a five-year period.

One section tells municipalities how to create "complete streets" that accommodate vehicle drivers, bicyclists, pedestrians and transit riders. The document also has resources for kayakers and in-line skaters.

It can be viewed online at [www.activeallegheny.com](http://www.activeallegheny.com).

Lynn Heckman, assistant director for transportation initiatives in the county Department of Economic Development, said the benefits of biking and walking include saving money, exercise, safer communities with more people out on the streets, revitalized business districts and reduced congestion and air pollution.

Bicycling has surged in popularity in Western Pennsylvania with development of the Great Allegheny Passage, Three Rivers Heritage Trail, Montour Trail, Panhandle Trail and other facilities dedicated to non-motorized traffic.

According to census data quoted in the report, bicycle commuting in the city of Pittsburgh increased 206 percent from 2000 to 2009.

The authors said that notwithstanding the various reserved trails and state-designated cycle routes along roads, there was strong demand for more designated bike routes.

They listed 10 corridors as priorities for further study and possible improvements. First was Penn Avenue in the city, which it noted is heavily used by bicyclists yet has deficiencies including narrow travel lanes, no shoulder, on-street parking and bus stops.

Penn Avenue had the most reported vehicle-bike crashes in the county from January 2005 through December 2009, with 10, and the second-most reported vehicle-pedestrian crashes, with 46, the report said.

Overall, there were 457 reported crashes involving bikes and 2,114 involving pedestrians in the county during that time, with three cyclist fatalities and 58 pedestrians killed.

Among the other priority corridors for study and improvement were Allegheny River Boulevard, Route 8 and Butler Street from Etna to Richland, Route 19 in the South Hills, East Carson Street on the South Side and Freeport Road from Aspinwall to Cheswick.

It cited a variety of improvements that can make roads safer and more accessible to bicyclists, including striped bike lanes, paved shoulders, signage and reduced speed limits.

## Protecting peds and pedalers

**One of the goals** of the Active Allegheny plan is to improve safety for bicyclists and pedestrians. According to the report, there were **457** reported vehicle crashes **involving bikes** and **2,114 involving pedestrians** from January 2005 through December 2009. Three bicyclists and 58 pedestrians were killed.

### Roads with the most bicycle crashes

RANK	ROAD	NO. OF CRASHES
1.	Penn Avenue	10
2.	Forbes Avenue	9
3.	Freeport Road	8
4.	Fifth Avenue	7
5.	Liberty Avenue	7
6.	Butler Street	6
7.	East Carson Street	5
8.	Wilkins Avenue	5
9.	Smithfield Street	5
10.	Craig Street	4

### Roads with the most pedestrian crashes

RANK	ROAD	NO. OF CRASHES
1.	Fifth Avenue	55
2.	Penn Avenue	46
3.	East Carson Street	41
4.	Forbes Avenue	40
5.	West Carson Street	30
6.	Liberty Avenue	30
7.	Brownsville Road	28
8.	Baum Boulevard	23
9.	Butler Street	22
10.	Centre Avenue	22

Source: ActiveAllegheny

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Six roads were suggested as candidates for "diets" -- four lanes would be reduced to three (one lane each way with a center turn lane) to make room for

dedicated bike lanes.

They are Park Manor Boulevard in Robinson, between Montour Run Road and Robinson Town Centre Boulevard; Negley Run Boulevard in East Liberty between East Liberty Avenue and Washington Boulevard; Washington Boulevard in Highland Park between Negley Run Boulevard and Allegheny River Boulevard; Route 51 in Coraopolis; Bigelow Boulevard between Oakland and Downtown; and Long Run Road/Route 48 in White Oak.

The guide has maps of 26 designated commuter routes. And for the hardest of hard-core bicyclists, the county has mapped a "beltway bicycle" route that mostly follows the 91.7 miles of roads designated as the Orange Belt.

Regina E. Del Vecchio, project manager for the county's consultant, Michael Baker Jr. Inc., biked the entire route, Ms. Heckman said.

Ms. Heckman acknowledged that many of the improvements suggested in the report would take five or more years to finance, design and build.

And funding is uncertain amid the current budget-cutting fervor in Washington, D.C., and Harrisburg, she said.

Helping the cause are an expected surge in gasoline prices that will have more people looking to alternatives, and a growing awareness among developers of the need to accommodate transportation modes other than motor vehicles.

"There's a lot of potential," Ms. Heckman said.

Copies of the report have been sent to all 130 county municipalities with the hope they will incorporate pedestrian and bicycle improvements in future projects, she said.

"This has to be implemented by many, many stakeholders," Ms. Heckman said.

Read more: <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/11047/1125711-455.stm#ixzz1S6IJYRKf>