

Cyclists push Rock Hill to be bike-friendly city

Earning the label means going beyond what the average city has done to enable two-wheel travel.

By Matt Garfield
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Local bicyclists want to help Rock Hill earn recognition as a bike-friendly city.

The label honors communities that offer bike lanes, trail networks, public bike racks and educational programs promoting bikes as a means of transportation.

Spartanburg is the only other place in South Carolina to get the distinction. Charlotte earned it this year. Now, members of the Rock Hill Bicycle Club hope to add their city to the list. But plenty of work must be done before it can happen.

"It's not as simple as putting up a sign that says we're friendly to bikers," said Ed Thompson, director of the city's Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department. "It's complicated. This would mean we go above and beyond what some communities do, that we're not average."

The designation comes from the League of American Bicyclists, which reviews everything from trails and bike paths to the availability of ways to learn about the benefits of cycling.

To bolster its résumé, the city has applied to take part in the "Complete Streets" program, which gives training to police officers, planners, engineers and others involved in transportation. The goal is to make roads safer for riders.

"A lot of the roads, if you're not a real experienced cyclist, they're unsafe to ride on," said George Davis, a longtime bike club member leading the effort. "Some folks just feel afraid to get out there and do that."

Across the country, more people are turning to bikes as they search for ways to avoid high gas prices and aggravating traffic jams. Some cyclists say Rock Hill and York County have lagged in preparing for the change in culture.

But Davis said the mentality is changing.

"The attitude of the city is leaning more toward, 'Yes, this is something we ought to do. This would be a good idea,'" Davis said.

Long-term plans

The city has not installed bike lanes on any existing roads. But it currently boasts 21 miles of bike trails, including a loop around the local airport.



Rock Hill Bicycle Club members (from left) John McCart, Greyson Holder and Elizabeth Allred ride on Main Street in downtown Rock Hill on Saturday. ANDY BURRISS – aburris@heraldonline.com

Long-term plans call for adding 128 miles of trails, including 43 on sidewalks. That includes a link to the Carolina Thread Trail, a regional network that eventually will connect key points across the Carolinas.

"We obviously want to have more of a loop eventually, and destinations to get to," Thompson said.

In 2003, voters approved 34 miles of bike lanes.

Plans for a new U.S. 21 bridge over the Catawba River call for 5-foot bike lanes and 5-foot sidewalks on both sides. A network of trails will connect Rock Hill's downtown area to Manchester Village and other landmarks near the Catawba River.

Cyclists say they expect these advances to help the city earn a bike-friendly label, though it might take a year or more. Said Davis: "Little by little, things are starting to happen."

<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/breaking/story/299830.html>