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May 18, 2006

The wheel deal

Are local bike activists succeeding at making Indy more bike-friendly, or just spinning their wheels?

BY NEAL TAFLINGER
INtake correspondent

The Indy Greenways are the envy of many major cities, but according to Randy Clark, the owner of Bicycle Garage Indy, if riders must pedal past the limits of Greenway trails, "then it's bike for your life."

Not only are the Greenway trails not connected to each other, but the city's designated bike lanes are few and far between. Unless you live at one end of a trail and work or shop at the other, you must ride with traffic.

Clark is also an active member of INBikePort, a major public-private initiative created in late 2005 to encourage Indiana residents to ride their bikes more. The initiative urges local businesses and organizations to create short-term and long-term bicycle parking for their employees, among other bike-friendly amenities.

The bike port project is only one of many initiatives currently underway to encourage an increased interest in cycling in the city.

Efforts to transform Indianapolis into a haven for safe, efficient bike travel are divided among an alphabet soup of nonprofit and government organizations: IBC, CIBA, CICF, MPO and more. It's hard even for those familiar with the issues to keep track of who is working on what.

"We have the same goals in mind; it's just a matter of coordinating our efforts," said Jim Gange, the commuter



JASON JORDAN ON VIDEO

Watch Jason Jordan do bike tricks

JOIN THE CLUB

Bike IN

Where: White River State Park, 801 W. Washington St.

When: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. May 20-21.

Tickets: free.

The White River State Park Bike IN was originally planned as a way to bring all the disparate



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committee chair for the Central Indiana Bicycle Association (CIBA).

Beyond the bike ports, Gange and others are trying to keep track of the many initiatives, like the Cultural Trail project, lead by the Central Indiana Community Foundation (CICF), and the establishment of east/west bike lanes on New York and Michigan streets, under the aegis of the Indianapolis Department of Public Works.

It is a grand vision, this bike-friendly Indianapolis many see for the future. But like the initial vision for Indy's Greenways, it's getting from here to there that's the problem.

CONVINCING BIG BUSINESS

"We're out to change the commuting culture in the state," said Clark, who believes INBikePort can do just that.

The project aims to convince businesses and organizations state-wide to invest in "secure short-term and long-term parking (for bicycles), access to changing rooms, showers and other amenities" for employees.

These ports could be as simple as a few bike racks, bicycle maps and signage, or as complex as a "Transit Center," which is tied into IndyGo routes with 24-hour access to indoor and outdoor bike storage, public coin-operated showers, a bike repair shop and café.

Cost for business owners wishing to install such centers could range from \$2,500 to tens of thousands of dollars.

Which might make business owners balk.

But Clark believes that employers could very easily charge for bike lockers. "You could get \$25 a month out of a commuter for a locker," he said. "On that basis, the locker pays for itself in four years."

And, according to the project promoter, the intangible returns of a healthier workforce and long-term health care savings are the icing on the cake.

This idea inspires cautious enthusiasm in the cycling community. "Bike ports would make bike commuting more predictable," CIBA's Gange said. "It's certainly ambitious, and if it can be pulled off, it would be a real feather in the cap for Indianapolis."

elements of the cycling scene together at one event. "From there it evolved into a popular weekend," said Bob Whit, executive director of White River State Park.

On May 20 and 21, White River State Park will host family friendly events like story telling, live music, walking tours, bike tours and a documentary film screening. Free bicycle parking will be available, and members of various cycling groups will be on hand to talk about the movement toward a more bike-friendly Indianapolis.

Central Indiana Bicycling Association

The Central Indiana Bicycling Association (CIBA) is home to a diverse group of racers, recreational cyclists and commuters.

Info: P.O. Box 55405
Indianapolis, IN 46205-0405
(317) 767-SPOKE,
www.cibaride.org

Indiana Bicycle Coalition, Inc.

The Indiana Bicycle Coalition (IBC) works on a state level to promote safe cycling.

Info: P.O. Box 20243
Indianapolis, IN 46220
(317) 466-9701
www.bicycleindiana.org

INBikePort

INBikePort is a project to provide safe storage of bikes for bicycle commuters.

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Dylan Roahrig, a lifelong cyclist who's helping on another project by the Indiana Bicycle Coalition (IBC) thinks that accomplishing even a few of the project's goals, like making it easier for storeowners to install bike racks in front of their businesses, would be a coup.



Map Quest: Dylan Roahrig, 34, an in-house customer service manager for WTH Technology who commutes to work two to three days a week, has been creating maps to help commuters find safe and efficient routes to work.

"Right now the zoning process for that is crazy," he said.

As efforts to promote the project get under way, backers are depending on the support of both the general public and the government.

"We're just beginning to market this proposal to public as well as private employers," Clark said.

"The organization has secured two commitments so far from the Indiana Government Building and the National Institute of Fitness and Sport, but both are likely months from actually installing bike ports."

Regardless of the project's progress, some business owners are making biker-friendly amenities available to employees and customers anyway.

"When we took this building, the back bathroom had a shower," said Ron Lewis, a 34-year-old who commutes "100 days a year" to his job as a manager at Rusted Moon Outfitters in Broad Ripple. At Rusted Moon, employees have access to the shower, as well as to storage space for clothes and bikes.

P.O. Box 20243
Indianapolis, IN 46220
(317) 965-5369
www.inbikeport.org

Indiana Bike-to-Work Day

Noon, May 19, Monument Circle.
Pedal pushers celebrate Indiana Bike-to-Work Day Downtown with speakers from state government and bike-related activities. Check www.bicycleindiana.org for more information.

HOW INDIANAPOLIS GOT ITS GREEN ON

In 1909, George Kessler had a vision for Indianapolis. The St. Louis, Mo.-based architect and city planner designated long thin swaths of land along rivers and creeks as greenways, and tied them into the overall city parks plan.

By 1988, the greenways had become overgrown and flood-prone, an underutilized resource in a city looking to reinvent itself as "The Amateur Sports Capitol of the World." Urban pioneer Ray Irvin was aware of Indianapolis' deficiencies when it came to quality-of-life amenities and knew of Kessler's plan. Irvin won a seat on the City-County Council and began lobbying for the resurrection of Kessler's Fall Creek, Brookside and White River parkways.

Irvin's goal was to utilize the plan laid out by Kessler to increase the amount of usable

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Clark loves Indy Greenways, but when cyclists come to the end of trail, they take their lives in their own hands, he said.

The Central Indiana Community Foundation (CICF), with help from the city, is looking to change that.

The CICF is managing a proposed Cultural Trail that "will link our existing Greenways and cultural districts," said Keira Amstutz, 37, chief counsel and director of policy for the city of Indianapolis.

According to initial design plans, the trail will integrate "with certain streets that have excess right-of-way to create space for bicycles, pedestrians, landscape buffer and other amenities."

In the works since the late 1990s, the project has "taken a pretty significant step forward" with the addition of Storrow Kinsella Associates, a design firm.

"We have the basic elements of the trail, but how they are going to come together is for the designers to help tell us," Amstutz said.

The Cultural Trail would link the cultural districts -- Fountain Square, Historic Canal Walk, White River State Park, Indiana Avenue District, Massachusetts Avenue and the Wholesale District -- as well as the Canal Towpath, Fall Creek, the Monon Trail, Pleasant Run and White River Greenways. The project is still only in the design stage, with no date set yet for its fruition.

While the trail will be great for walking, jogging, rollerblading and casual riding, not everyone agrees it will solve bicycle commuting problems.

Two camps exist: Those who think the focus should be solely on making street riding safe, and those who think the key to safer commuting is interconnectedness between street and trail riding.

"There are people who think bike trails (such as the Cultural Trail) are the answer because they think that cyclists on the road equal fatalities," Roahrig said. "I think the more cyclists on the road the fewer fatalities (there will be), because drivers will be more aware of us."

CIBA's Jim Gange, however, believes that amenities like the Cultural Trail are positive steps, because they increase the "interconnectedness between the city streets and the trails," which makes making bicycle commuting safer and more efficient, he said.

green space in Indianapolis as well as increase connectedness between neighborhoods and resources like parks, libraries and museums. Irvin said the problem was the city had "great programs, incredible museums, wonderful sports fields, incredible libraries, and unless mom and dad come home to pick the kids up, they can't even get there."

How those kids were going to feel about Indianapolis when they grew up was also a concern of Irvin's. "For young people to stay here, we have to offer them something," he said.

In 1991, the Fall Creek Trail was completed as a demonstration piece. By 1994, a master plan was completed for the restoration of all of Kessler's Greenways and then some.

And overseeing it all was Ray Irvin.

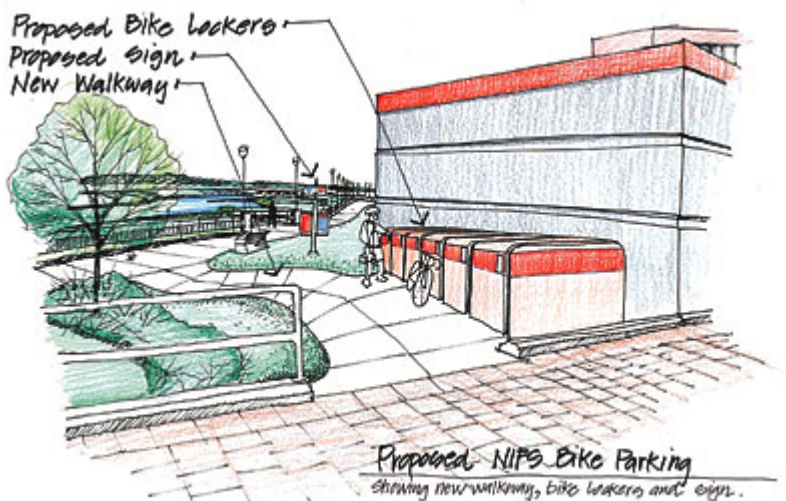
Almost 100 years after George Kessler planned Indy's Parks and Greenways, trails wind throughout most sectors of the city, proving that if you build it, they will come . . . eventually.

CHANGING LANES

The first step toward making cycling safer in Indianapolis also may be the simplest: Throw down some paint and establish bike lanes on city streets.

"I would say that having bike lane stripes, something out there to visually give drivers notice that (riders are using the street) would be useful," he said.

Until the city creates these bike lanes, Roahrig has another plan. Roahrig, 34, commutes "at least two days a week" from his home in Irvington on Indy's Eastside to his job near Butler University where he works as a customer service manager. Roahrig is volunteering his time to create a digital map of bicycle commuting routes for the Indiana Bicycle Coalition so the organization can make the map available to those who wish to ride but are unsure of the best route.



Picture this: One of the proposed designs for the bike port that would be located at the National Institute of Fitness and Sport.

Roahrig's goal: To create a citywide map that gives cyclists "the best route from point A to point B," he said. "It's going to take into account traffic census, width of the street, parking on the street (and) directionals if they are one way."

The Metropolitan Planning Office's (MPO) Multi-Modal Task Force did a study of bike safety issues and passed recommendations along this year to the Department of Public Works (DPW), recommending the addition of bike lanes to New York and Michigan streets to create an east/west thoroughfare.

But this recommendation is nothing new. In 1998, Indy Greenways, the MPO and private firm HNTB produced a transportation plan that recommended dedicated bike lanes along New York and Michigan streets, which then-Mayor Goldsmith signed off on. Eight years later, there are no bike lanes, and MPO just made the same recommendation to the Department of Public Works (DPW).

"It's something we are moving forward with, but the funding isn't available to do so," said Margie Smith-Simmons, public information officer for the DPW. According to Smith-Simmons, establishing bike lanes on New York and Michigan streets will cost more than \$100,000. DPW is currently

seeking transportation enhancement grants from the federal government to cover the cost.

"There is a 30 million dollar backlog in road resurfacing projects," Smith-Simmons said, "We have to look at everything in terms of priority and what funding is available to us."



Air Jordan: Ex-pro BMX rider Jason Jordan commutes a total of six miles to his job at The Bike Line. Scroll to the top of the page to find the link to a video of Jordan doing tricks on his bike.

Jason Jordan, 28, understands the need for an east/ west thoroughfare.

"Nobody wants to drive their car from the East- or Westside to get to the Monon and ride," he said.

The service manager at The Bike Line, a new bike shop on Massachusetts Avenue, Jordan commutes the six-mile round trip each day on his BMX bike.

But biking seems to create confusion on and off the road.

Roahrig said many drivers don't understand why he is "not on the sidewalk," because many don't know cycling on sidewalks is against the law.

That misunderstanding creates dangerous situations for cyclists like Laura Potratz.

The 23-year-old commutes daily from the Old Northside to her job.

It's only a 10-minute ride, but Potratz has had multiple encounters with hostile drivers . . . and walkers.

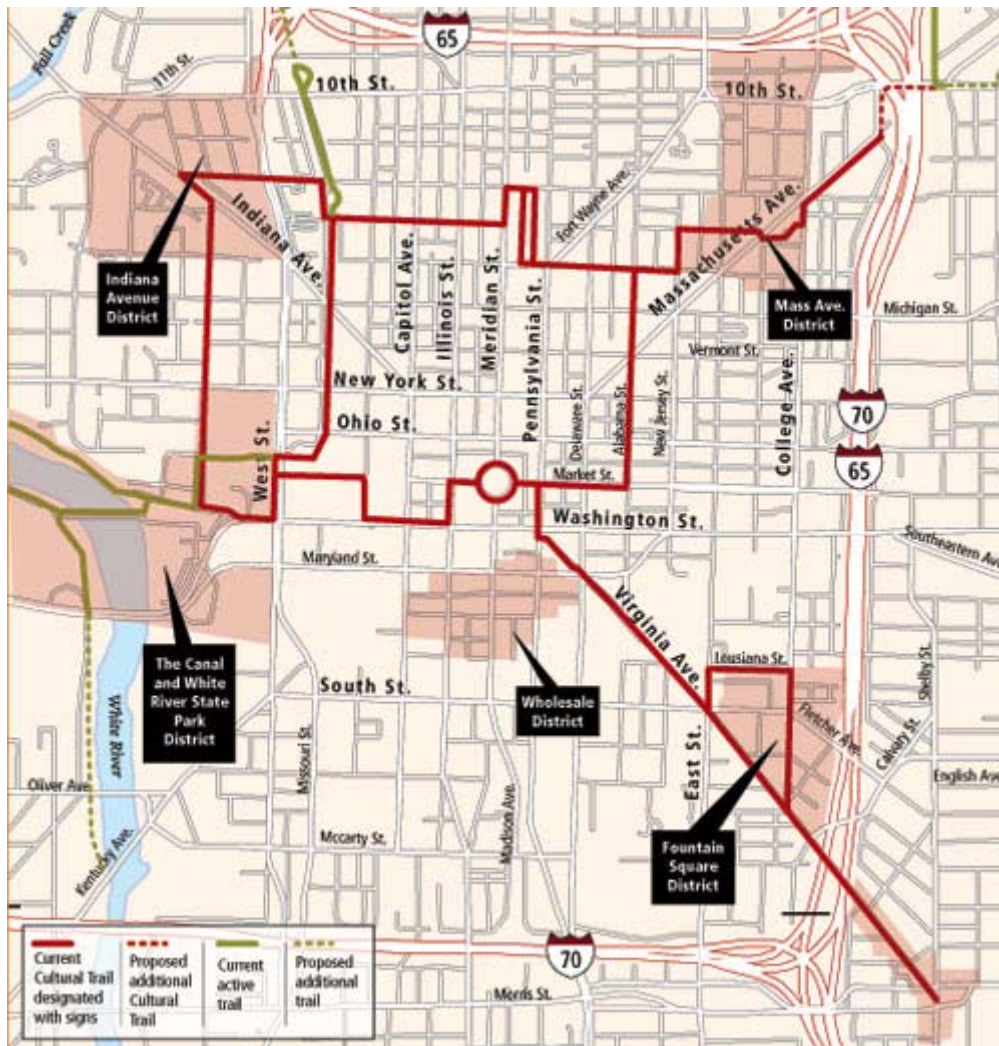
"I've been biking along in the street and had drivers scream at me to get on the sidewalk," she said. "I've been on the sidewalk and had people scream at me to get in the street."

PEDALING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Bike commuters are a dedicated group, but another factor at play here could push the city's plans forward in ways that petitioning cannot: economic development.

"The development opportunities that are coming off these Greenways and trails are remarkable," said Ray Irvin, director of Greenways and Bikeways for the Indiana Department of Transportation. "Everything from new bicycle shops to new outfitters in Broad Ripple with all kinds of sports equipment, to bicycle rentals to restaurants to coffee shops."

However, there is not a great outcry from the general public for cyclist services, partly because bicycle commuters make up a small portion of Indy's daily traffic. "There are not a significant number of (bike) commuters today, be there no mistake," Clark said. But, he said, "there will be more if certain facilities are made available to them."



The proposed Cultural Trail will connect bicycle and foot traffic to five cultural districts

around the Downtown area that offer a clustering of art galleries, museums, restaurants and retail shopping.

"People tend to go with what's popular," Jordan said. "The more people who do it, the more people will do it."

And with high gas prices, many riders believe the number of cyclists will continue to increase.

For those who want to incorporate bicycling into their routines, the Greenways are great assets. And cycling on city streets is safe as long as riders stay alert and wear safety gear.

According to Connie Szabo Schmucker, executive director of the IBC, "25 percent of all car trips are one mile or less, 40 percent are two miles or less," which can be replaced with bike commutes.

Today, all 155 fixed-route IndyGo buses are outfitted with "an easy-to-use, drop-down, spring-loaded rack" that fits two bikes, said Mike Terry, IndyGo's business development director. You can pedal down Greenway trails to a bus stop and ride the rest of the way or you can bike to work and take a bus home.



"We are seeing more people who are utilizing that opportunity," Terry said.

Still, bike lanes haven't been painted, the Cultural Trail hasn't been paved and the first bike locker has yet to be delivered.

Yet a dedicated group of cyclists continues to commute to work, to the grocery store, to the gym - with hope for a brighter, more bike-friendly future.

"What we're gonna do," Irvin said, is make Indianapolis "a better place to live."