

● Issue

Bicycling has a significant role to play in meeting our nation's transportation, health, energy, recreation, and environmental goals – and yet it is consistently left out of, or marginalized in, legislation designed to solve these issues. We must elevate discussion of bicycling to the point where it is recognized as being in the national interest to encourage more people to bicycle, and that a national bicycling strategy is necessary to achieve the many benefits that would accrue from increased levels of bicycling.

● Background

The recent report of the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Commission on the future direction and financing of the nation's transportation system singularly failed to mention bicycling. There were more pictures of ducks and deer than bicyclists in the pages of the final report. Similarly, major energy and climate change legislation passed by Congress in 2007 failed to offer a single program or project to encourage or increase bicycle use.

Despite everything we know about the benefits of bicycling to individuals, communities, and the nation as a whole, across a wide range of critical and pressing policy issues, increased bicycling isn't perceived as a credible solution or a national priority issue. We have to change that perception, especially with reauthorization of the Federal transportation program looming in 2009, and with signature programs such as the National Park Service Centennial Initiative dominating federal land management policies.

In 1994, the US Department of Transportation delivered the milestone National Bicycling and Walking Study to Congress. The report established a national goal of doubling the percentage of trips made by foot and bicycle while simultaneously reducing crashes involving the two modes by ten percent. USDOT created a now-defunct interagency task force to coordinate efforts across Federal agencies.

However, no deadline accompanied the goals, and no measurement tools existed then or now to actually measure the ultimate success of the actions. The interagency task force was, perhaps, simply ahead of its time.

Since the report was published, physical inactivity, climate change, sustainability, and energy independence have come to the fore in national and local politics. Congestion, air quality, traffic safety, economic development, recreation and tourism remain critical policy areas in every community and in the nation as a whole. And bicycling has a role to play in all of them.

● Benefits

The Congressional Resolution documents more than 20 specific, quantifiable benefits that bicycling brings across a wide spectrum of policy issues. The document creates a compelling case statement for a national strategy to increase bicycling use and safety, and argues for bicycling being substantively included in national, state and local efforts to tackle climate change, obesity, oil dependence, congestion, etc.

A Congressional Resolution establishes a "Sense of Congress" about an issue. As such, a resolution has no immediate costs attached to it, and has no binding outcomes.

However, in the build up to significant pieces of legislation, a resolution is an excellent way of promoting an issue, raising awareness of facts and figures about a topic, identifying supporters, and establishing an issue as one of national importance. This latter point is going to be especially critical in the reauthorization process as Congress debates the appropriate Federal role in transportation funding and priorities.

The resolution calls on the United States Congress to adopt a national bicycling strategy to fully realize the incredible benefits of getting more people bicycling, more safely, more often. There is a "sense of Congress" that complete streets policies are essential to ensure wise use of the considerable Federal investment in transportation infrastructure, and that expanded funding for bicycling and walking programs is desirable and appropriate.

Finally, the resolution calls for the re-establishment of an Interagency Task Force to coordinate the efforts of Federal agencies that have a role to play in encouraging more bicycle use. This makes even more sense today than it did 14 years ago.

● Status

Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) is introducing a Resolution during the week of the National Bike Summit. We urge as many Members of Congress as possible to sign on to the resolution to send a strong message that bicycling IS an issue in the public interest.

● For More Information

To learn more, contact Walter Finch, Advocacy Director at the League of American Bicyclists, at 202-822-1333 or walter@bikeleague.org.