

INCREASING ACCESS TO BICYCLING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transportation is Virginia's largest generator of climate change emissions. Shifting trips to bicycling will reduce emissions since bicycling is carbon-free. That said, concern for safety is a key deterrent to more people bicycling. Bicyclists often have to share the road with motor vehicles, which can be intimidating and dangerous. Virginia needs a commitment to improving safety for people who bike and/or are interested but hesitant to bike. This effort will require dedicated funding to build safer bicycling infrastructure, the Bicyclist Safety Stop, and updating the Commonwealth's bicycling policies for the 21st Century.

CHALLENGE

Virginia will not achieve its climate goals until bicycling is much safer and more accessible. In 2022, 652 people bicycling were injured in Virginia, a 6% increase from 2021. Forty-three percent of people report the desire to ride their bicycle more,¹ but many lack safe and accessible places to ride.

Nearly 200,000 Virginia households have no access to a motor vehicle and need to bike and walk as a part of their primary commutes.² As traffic fatalities continue to climb, Black and Brown pedestrians are up to twice as likely to be killed.³ Virginia needs to reduce its Vehicle Miles Traveled and bicycling is an excellent way to do that. Addressing these issues requires added infrastructure, funding to build it out, and policies that allow for bicycling as safe transportation to where people need to go.

To stay safe and feel comfortable, people riding bicycles need spaces that are physically separated from drivers. SMART SCALE funding for on-street bike facilities and dedicated trail funding are needed to build out safe biking facilities to save lives and give people the freedom to bike where they need to go (See TRANSFORMING TRANSPORTATION and ENSURING CONSISTENT SUPPORT FOR TRAILS). Furthermore, bicycle riders need proven injury-reduction policies, such as the freedom to yield at stop signs, to proceed on walk signals, and to travel side-by-side within a lane. That last policy is especially important for parents who want to ride with their kids and shield them from traffic.

To implement such needed reforms, Virginia's 2011 State Bicycle Policy Plan needs to be updated to better serve as a framework that encourages bicycling by people of all ages and abilities.

SOLUTION

Virginia needs to provide safe and accessible accommodations for people of all ages and abilities who are interested in bicycling. The safer our transportation network, the greater freedom people have to choose cleaner modes.

People bicycling are safest when they are physically separated from drivers, for example on protected and separated trails. The Virginia Capital Trail between Richmond and Jamestown experienced more than 1.2 million⁴ trail users in 2020; the Custis Trail in Rosslyn experienced more than 3.5 million⁵ trail users in 2021. To add to our trail systems in the Commonwealth, we need dedicated funding for multi-use trails. Localities also need funding from all government levels to provide safe bicycling infrastructure for people of all ages and abilities.

Incentivizing e-bike purchases, particularly for low-income residents, and implementing proven safety measures will make Virginia more accessible for bicycling. For example, the Safety Stop, which allows people on bicycles to yield at stop signs, was shown to contribute to a 23% reduction in bicycle crashes at intersections in a Delaware 5-year study. Allowing people on bicycles to proceed on walk signals and to ride two abreast also improves safety and should be allowed. Allowing people the freedom to choose their safest course will reduce the number of people injured riding bicycles in Virginia.

Virginia's "State Bicycling Policy Plan" and Complete Streets Policy should be updated to better incorporate trails, bike lanes, reconfigured roads, shoulders, and other safety and access measures. Adopting proven safety measures and updated guidelines will lead to more people choosing bicycling as a transportation option.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Support SMART SCALE recommendations in TRANSFORMING TRANSPORTATION.

Establish a state-funded multi-use trail budget at \$41m annually to provide access to life-saving projects across the Commonwealth.

Update Virginia's 2011 Bicycling Policy Plan⁶ and 2004 Complete Streets policy.⁷

Allow the "Safety Stop", proceeding on walk signals, and two-abreast riding, allowing bicyclists in Virginia to benefit from safety measures proven in other states.

Establish an equitable e-bike point-of-sale rebate to boost climate-friendly mobility.