

INCREASING ACCESS TO BIKING

Justine Blincoe // Greater Richmond Fit4Kids // justine@grfit4kids.org
Brantley Tyndall // Bike Walk RVA // brantley@sportsbackers.org

WHY IT MATTERS

Transportation is Virginia's largest generator of climate change emissions. Shifting trips to bicycling will reduce emissions, but safety concerns are a key deterrent to more people of all ages and abilities bicycling. Virginia DMV reports a 36% increase in bicyclist fatalities in 2023.¹ 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 or are interested but hesitant to bike, especially in communities with disproportionate rates of traffic fatalities and serious injuries. 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.

A key strategy for shifting our transportation paradigm is starting with the next generation: youth. Providing safe bike routes to school and implementing "Bike Bus" programs can increase attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism while reducing vehicle emissions and reliance on fossil fuels.² Active transportation to school increases regular physical activity and improves long-term health outcomes and improves the air quality in and around schools.³ In addition to its climate impact, motor vehicle crashes have been and continue to be the leading cause of death for children in the United States.⁴ It's imperative to shift our transportation model away from reliance on automobiles by taking concrete steps to make transportation biking realistic for more Virginians of any age.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Virginia has not legalized the Bicyclist Safety Stop, otherwise known as the Idaho Stop or Stop-As-Yield, which limits bicyclist access and convenience in transportation and recreation settings and fails to afford bicyclists the crash-prevention benefits of yielding at certain intersections. The Safety Stop has been shown in Delaware, Idaho, and more than 8 other states to reduce crashes because bicyclists can clear intersections faster, reducing crashes from behind and from oncoming side traffic.

Virginia has not updated its State Bike Policy Plan since 2011. A modern update to this plan is critical to decision-making for investments in bicycle infrastructure, policies supportive of behavior change and safety, and implementing accessible and equitable connectivity to bicycling focusing on transportation, economic opportunity, and Safe Routes to School development.

Students & families rely on safe, bike-friendly infrastructure to get to school and other places where they live, work, play, and learn. The Virginia Safe Routes to School program has been active in Virginia since 2007 and helps schools and communities make walking and biking to school a safe, convenient, natural activity.

OPPORTUNITIES

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 million trail users in 2020; the Custis Trail in Rosslyn experienced more than 3.5 million 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. Stable, accessible funding for Safe Routes to School programs, with a priority focus on school communities that have the highest need for safe biking/walking conditions. 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.

INCREASING ACCESS TO BIKING

Justine Blincoe // Greater Richmond Fit4Kids // justine@grfit4kids.org
Brantley Tyndall // Bike Walk RVA // brantley@sportsbackers.org

TOP TAKEAWAYS

Climate goals require a heavy transition to alternative transportation, and bicycling has a high potential for change. Improving safety is essential for encouraging behavior change, and infrastructure is the most effective action to take.

There are several policies throughout the country that have been proven to increase bicycling safety, such as the Safety Stop.

Starting with youth is an effective strategy for developing a generation of people who use active transportation, and schools are the perfect place to implement programs and safe infrastructure.

Family outing on the Virginia Creeper Trail
Photo by Patti Black



ENDNOTES

1. "Virginia Traffic Crash Facts 2023," Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles, (Accessed August 12, 2024). <https://www.dmv.virginia.gov/sites/default/files/documents/VA-traffic-crash-2023.pdf>.
2. "ODOT Safe Routes to School Bike Bus Toolkit," Oregon Safe Routes to School, (February 2024). https://www.oregonsaferoutes.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/ODOT-SRTS-Bike-Bus-Toolkit_v8.pdf.
3. Davison, Kirsten K., Jessica L. Werder, and Catherine T. Lawson, "Children's Active Commuting to School: Current Knowledge and Future Directions." Preventing Chronic Disease 5, no. 3 (July 2008): A100. http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2008/jul/07_0075.htm.
4. "Child Safety," Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) and Highway Loss Data Institute (HLDI), (Accessed July 8, 2024). <https://www.iihs.org/topics/child-safety>.