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For immediate release
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Tucson region receives 'Gold Award' as bicycle friendly community

PAG Regional Council Chairman and Tucson Mayor Robert Walkup and RTA Chairman and Pima County Supervisor Ramon Valadez received the Tucson region's Gold Award today from the League of American Bicyclists in recognition of the region's ability to provide a bicycle friendly environment.

After a bicycle ride across the Diamondback Bridge to the podium, the league's executive director, Andy Clarke, presented the first-time award. The 1,923-square-mile area includes the city of Tucson, the more urban parts of unincorporated Pima County, including Green Valley, the city of South Tucson, the towns of Marana, Oro Valley and Sahuarita, and parts of the Tohono O'odham Nation and the Pascua Yaqui Tribe.

"The League is extremely pleased to present the first ever regional Bicycle Friendly Community Award to the Tucson Arizona /Pima Eastern Region," Clarke said. "We now hold the Tucson/Pima region up as an example to metropolitan areas throughout the rest of the country as to how they can collaborate to make both bicycling and their communities even better. We greatly appreciate the cooperative efforts of the Tucson Region local governments, their staffs, and the greater Tucson cycling community, and look forward to even greater accomplishments for cycling in future years. And of course, we are delighted to be holding our 2007 National Rally in Tucson, in conjunction with the 25th El Tour de Tucson."

Shortly after the city of Tucson received a silver award as a bicycle friendly community, a steering committee was formed with the support of the Tucson City Council, the Pima

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County Board of Supervisors, the PAG Regional Council and the Tucson-Pima County Bicycle Advisory Committee.

“The Tucson region puts quality of life and quality of place first,” Walkup said. “This award shows that this region is dedicated to bicycling because it adds to our quality of life and place. Thousands of Tucson residents and visitors use their bicycles for transportation, recreation or sports. We are also committed to enhancing bicycling safety in the region and to encouraging others to hop on their bicycles and take a ride around Tucson.”

The idea to form the committee was generated in May 2004 by Bill Katzel, a former member of the Tucson-Pima County Bicycle Advisory Committee, who envisioned the Tucson metropolitan area as the first regional community to earn the platinum designation.

“On May 20, 2004, right here at this nationally award winning Diamondback Bridge, the city of Tucson was conveyed the Silver Level Award, as a Bicycle Friendly Community, by the League of American Bicyclists,” Katzel said. “Four days later, I had a vision and issued the Platinum Challenge. The challenge was for the city to be the first community to ever receive the Platinum Level Award from the League. That challenge was not only embraced by the City, but unanimously endorsed by all nine members of the Pima Association of Governments’ Regional Council.”

The Platinum Challenge Steering Committee involved in preparing the application included: Chair Jesse Morales, former chair of the Bicycle Advisory Committee, along with members Melissa Antol, Roger Carrillo, Vince Catalano, Richard Corbett, Richard DeBernardis, Jean Gorman, Bill Katzel, Mike Pryor, Steve Wilson, Diana Tolton, and Matt Zoll.

Since the region did not receive a platinum award, the committee plans to continue meeting to build upon the gold rating for the next renewal cycle in 2008.

“The region’s bicycle system will continue to expand, especially with the recent approval of the Regional Transportation Authority’s 20-year transportation plan,” Valadez said. “The RTA plan includes 550 miles of new bike lanes and paths in addition to pedestrian and road improvements to help improve the overall transportation system.”

The gold award is expected to attract more bicycling enthusiasts to the region. Local resorts such as Canyon Ranch offer cycling as a key component of their services. Both professional and amateur cyclists use Tucson as their winter training grounds and some

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have chosen to take up permanent residence. Bicycling brings business and revenue to Tucson.

A study conducted by North Carolina University found significant economic benefits of providing pedestrian and bicycle facilities. The study found that investment in bicycle lanes and pathways used by bicyclists and pedestrians resulted in a 9-to-1 return on the initial cost to build the facilities.

Another regional event that may draw more participants as a result of the Gold Award is the annual El Tour de Tucson. An economic benefit study, done by the University of Arizona in 2000, computed a total event weekend financial impact of \$5.9 million to \$6.6 million from about 4,800 riders, and a year round impact of \$7.3 million to \$14.8 million. As ridership increases, the economic impact will result in even greater revenues for the region. Last year's race had about 8,200 riders.

“This type of recognition for the region enhances Tucson's image as a great destination for bicyclists and outdoor enthusiasts,” Walkup said. “When people visit the Tucson region, they have an opportunity to experience all the natural and cultural amenities we offer. We are proud of the gold award, and we will continue to improve in the future.”

Pima Association of Governments is an association of local, state and tribal governments with a mission to build consensus among its members and the public on regional planning for transportation, air quality and water quality. PAG's staff gather and analyze data, provide accurate information, and coordinate an open and cooperative planning process to promote good decision-making for the region. Please visit www.pagnet.org for more information.