September 22, 2011

For immediate release
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Regional bicycle programs are working: Survey shows more people cycling in Tucson

Data indicate a 58% increase between 2009 and 2010

Data released from the American Community Survey this week show that the Tucson bicycle-to-work rate increased 58 percent in 2010 from the prior year, placing it in the top 10 large cities with the highest level of bicycle commuting. In 2009, the census data showed the commute rate was at 1.9 percent, while the 2010 rate jumped to 3 percent, moving Tucson to No. 6 in the national ranking.

The American Community Survey is a U.S. Census Bureau ongoing survey that provides data on age, race, disabilities, income and commuting patterns each year.

This information is significant to Tucson for many reasons. For one, this is the highest bike-to-work rate ever for Tucson. For the past decade, the rate stayed constant at about 2 percent and the sudden increase suggests investments in the regional cycling efforts are working. Improvements include projects funded through the Regional Transportation Authority plan, such as filling gaps in bicycle lanes and installing signalized crossings that help bicyclists cross major roads.

The data also support the work being done to become a platinum-level bicycle friendly community. Ann Chanecka, Senior Transportation at Pima Association of Governments, attributes the increased ridership to several recent achievements including:

- An expanded annual BikeFest including the signature Cyclovia event that was first initiated in 2010
- Enhanced education and outreach that reached over 1,000 adults in 2010
- Planning and partial implementation of safer “low stress” bicycle facilities including the development of the river path system, bicycle boulevards and buffered bicycle lanes

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• Increased participation from citizens and awareness through media outlets such as tucsonvelo.com

“This is fantastic news that shows the regional efforts are paying off and bicycling is becoming an easier transportation option,” said Ian Johnson, chair of the Tucson-Pima County Bicycle Advisory Committee. “Imagine what could happen if we expand the programs, implement a larger outreach program and fund more Cyclovias.”

PAG staff says the census data is consistent with the data that is collected through the annual bicycle count program, which also showed a significant increase in 2010. The 4th annual count will take place next month and an even greater increase is anticipated.

“Every commuter who chooses an alternative mode of transportation reduces congestion, improves our air quality and helps make Tucson a great region to live in,” Chanecka said. “We need to continue to make cycling a safe, fun and convenient mode of transportation so that we continue to see a rise in our commute rates.”

To learn more about bicycle commute options in the Tucson region, visit www.pagnet.org.

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, energy, air quality and water quality. Please visit www.PAGnet.org for more information.