



# PUSH FOR PLATINUM

## Engineering And Enforcement: Paths To Increased Ridership

*Editor's Note: This is the fourth in a series Tail Winds will publish as it tracks the Tucson-Pima County effort to achieve platinum status as a Bicycle Friendly Community in 2012.*

### The Tucson/Eastern Pima County Region's "Push for Platinum"

was recently boosted significantly with the late September release of the U.S. Census Bureau's data on bicycle commuting for the previous year. The 2010 American Community Survey (ACS) showed a 58 percent increase in the City of Tucson's bicycle commuting between 2009 and 2010!

That jump brought the total level of bicycle commuting in Tucson up to 3 percent, and raised Tucson's ranking from 12th to the 6th highest in the nation. Now Tucson is only fractions of a percentage point behind the five highest major cities for bike commuting except for Portland, OR, which remains out front with 6 percent commuting.

The increase also snapped the decade-long stagnation in Tucson's official ridership numbers, which had remained stuck at about 2 percent bicycle commuting since 2000. Furthermore, as the "indicator species" of bicycle friendliness, the number of women riding in Tucson also rose significantly. The 2010 ACS survey showed that the percentage of women bicyclists increased from 26.5 in 2009 to 35 percent in 2010.

An official press release quoted Tucson Mayor Bob Walkup in welcoming the news: "I am very pleased to see the large increase in cycling commuting in Tucson," said the mayor. "Our community has invested significant resources in recent years to help make sure that everyone can feel safe and get where they need to go by bike. It's great to see more and more

Tucsonans embrace cycling as part of their daily lives."

Mayor Walkup added that he expects the commuting increase to have a "positive impact" on Tucson's goal to achieve platinum status as a Bicycle Friendly Community (BFC). Indeed, increasing ridership was identified as the number one goal for Tucson's ability to achieve platinum, in the 2008

feedback provided by the League of American Bicyclists (LAB) when it re-designated the Tucson Region as a gold-level BFC.

So why the sudden increase? Excited city officials named various factors including: the annual, "game-changing" Cyclovia event begun in 2010; the recent creation of the Living Streets Alliance advocacy group; increased education, publicity, and media for bicycle commuting; and, ongoing investments in infrastructure and bicycle facilities in and around the city.

In other words, ridership in the Tucson Region is finally benefitting from the multiplier effect of investing in each of the "Five Es" that are the guideposts to developing a BFC – Evaluation, Encouragement, Engineering, Enforcement, and Education. The two Es that are the focus of this article, Engineering and Enforcement, are no exception.

**If You Build It, They Will Come** Engineering, of course, covers the nuts and bolts of bicycle facilities, from the simple striping of shoulders to create



**A Bike Box at 6th St. and Highland Ave. in Tucson.**

*Photo courtesy Tom Thivener/City of Tucson.*

bike lanes, to building or extending scenic and car-free multi-use paths, to sharing the road using more enhanced bike lanes and bikeways, and other facilities including bicycle parking.

Beginning in 2008, the City of Tucson began looking at better ways to increase ridership for short trips and practical purposes, and concluded that more low-stress bikeways were needed. "Bike lanes are a good core facility and you have to have them," said Tom Thivener, City of Tucson Bicycle and Pedestrian Program Manager, "but they're not going to get more people out riding."

After looking at facilities in other cities with a similar population and grid system of streets – Portland, OR, and Vancouver, BC – city officials determined that bike boulevards would be a good way to increase Tucson's ridership. After all, Portland officials credit bike boulevards as a primary factor behind its recent boom in bicycle commuting.

The City of Tucson's main bicycle web page describes

bike boulevards as "shared roadways that create an attractive,

convenient, and comfortable cycling environment that is welcoming to cyclists of all ages and skill levels... low-volume and low-speed streets that have been optimized for bicycle travel through treatments such as traffic calming and traffic reduction, signage and pavement markings, and intersection crossing treatments."

Take, for example, the recently completed Fourth Avenue/Fontana Avenue bike boulevard. Tucson's first official bike boulevard was funded by the Regional Transportation Authority and runs north-south for three miles, starting at University in the south, to Prince Road in the north. "We've added six new traffic circles, six new speed tables, signage, pavement markings, and landscaping is going in," Thivener said.

At two of its major intersections, the Fourth Avenue/Fontana bike boulevard also features bike boxes – sections of roadway covered in bright green, reflective thermoplastic where bicyclists can queue up at traffic lights, including in front

of cars. “Cars see bikes a lot better when the bikes are in front,” Thivener explained.

A network of 40 bike boulevards is in the plans, and funding has been secured for two more in the near term: upgrading Tucson’s most popular bikeway, the seven-mile Third Street/University Boulevard, to make it an official bike boulevard; and, a five-mile bike boulevard on the south side at South Liberty/San Fernando Avenue from 43rd Street to Los Reales Road.

Bike parking rules have also been beefed up in Tucson. In March 2011, the City Council approved a revised bike parking code, after numerous meetings and the successful weigh-in by bicycle advocates. New retail businesses will be allowed to provide less vehicular parking, while bike racks must be provided within 50 feet of a store entrance. Businesses can get a waiver to provide bike racks farther away than 50 feet, but only after consultation with the city’s bicycle coordinator.

“We ended up with one of the best bike parking codes, I think, in the country,” said Thivener. “Because it really follows the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals’ guidelines and best practices.”

### **The Quest for Connectivity**

Like the City of Tucson, Pima County has also placed high priority on low-stress bike facilities and on connectivity. Its biggest and longest-term project has been the Pima County Urban Loop, a 55-mile continuous, paved shared-use path that surrounds the city and is about 65 percent complete. The loop is composed of the Rillito River Park, parts of the Santa Cruz River Park, the Pantano River Park, the Julian Wash Greenway, and the Houghton Greenway.

In August 2011, a major linkage was completed in the Urban Loop, between the

Rillito River Park and Santa Cruz River Park, giving cyclists and other recreational users 23 continuous miles from the eastern end of the Rillito path at Craycroft, west under the Union Pacific Railroad and Interstate 10 where it connects a frontage road bike path that runs south to Camino del Cerro, then west to the Santa Cruz, which extends south to 29th Street. The loop will eventually provide connectivity to 29 public bus routes and to over 500 miles of other bike facilities across the region.

As part of Safe Routes to School efforts, Pima County has recently completed a number of “combination” projects to add bike lanes connected to multi-use paths near elementary schools, such as on Bear Canyon Road at Collier Elementary School; on Rudasill Road west of Sandario Road connecting Desert Winds Elementary and Picture Rocks Intermediate schools; and, on White House Canyon Road at Continental Elementary School in Green Valley.

“We always provide bike lanes the whole way, and then the shared use path is kind of an auxiliary facility, which we try to do wherever there’s a school,” said Kathryn Skinner, program manager for Pima County Department of Transportation.

### **Officer Friendly**

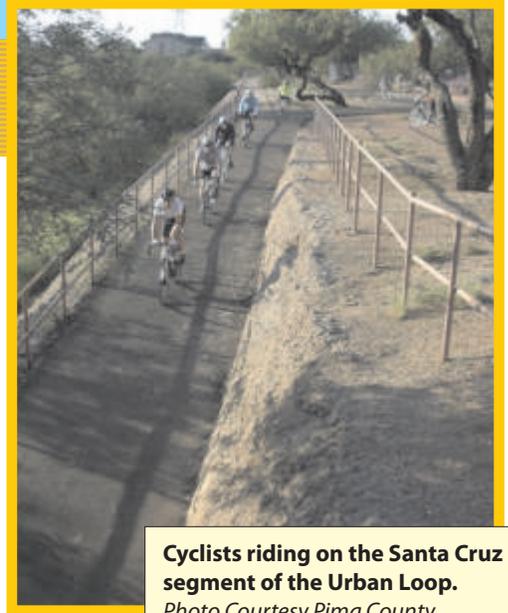
Enforcement aspects of a BFC include strong laws to keep bicyclists safe and able to share the road with motorists; establishing an ongoing liaison between the bicycling and law enforcement communities; and, promoting safety and awareness. When the Tucson Region was last designated as a gold-level BFC by LAB in 2008, one of the major concerns cited in the LAB’s feedback was the high bicycle crash rate.

The region has since placed heavy emphasis on increasing safety for bicyclists. One significant improvement has been the relationship

between law enforcement and the bicycling community. “We have excellent cooperation,” said Tucson attorney Eric Post, who conceded that that was not always the case. Post is a member of the Tucson-Pima County Bicycle Advisory Committee (BAC), and chair of its Enforcement Sub-committee.

Since 2008, concerns about high crash rates prompted the BAC, law enforcement, and the Pima Association of Governments to begin cooperating on analyzing crash data and reporting. The BAC has read hundreds of police reports, and the result has been better analysis identifying the primary bad behaviors of both motorists and bicyclists that lead to crashes that cause the most injury to cyclists. So now, when the Tucson Police Department does targeted enforcement of either motorists or bicyclists, they focus on the most dangerous behaviors.

“I began working with the BAC to come up with a plan to address the violations that were the most dangerous,” said Sergeant Jerry Skeenes of the TPD Traffic Division’s motorcycle unit, who regularly attends BAC meetings as the TPD representative. TPD’s Bike Squad – police officers on mountain bikes – works closely with the motorcycle unit in doing both targeted enforcement and education. “Because we are out riding the streets all day with [other bicyclists], we do a lot of enforcement and lots of education,” said Officer Matthew Alexander of the TPD Bike Squad. “We hand out ‘Share the Road’ educational pamphlets, a lot of times in lieu



**Cyclists riding on the Santa Cruz segment of the Urban Loop.**  
*Photo Courtesy Pima County Department of Transportation*

of giving tickets.”

Crash rates appear to be in decline, although that is difficult to determine since the TPD recently changed its reporting procedures in response to budget cut-backs.

Another major development since 2008 has been the creation of the Bicycle Safety Diversion Program, whereby bicyclists who receive a civil traffic citation can have all charges dismissed upon completion of a diversion class. The four-hour Traffic Skills 101 class is sponsored by Pima County and the City of Tucson, and it’s free. Bicyclists can earn a dismissal once a year through the diversion program.

Hundreds of bicyclists have taken the class every year, including cyclists who haven’t been cited but simply want to improve their skills and ride more responsibly. The program was praised as “quickly and effectively spreading the message of bicycle safety and the importance of the law” in the LAB’s 2011 report, *Bicycle Friendly America: The Blueprint*.

Next up: The series concludes with a look at Education. 🚲

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