

State College Bicycle Ambassador Program

In the fall of 2012, the Borough of State College is set to launch a three-year educational and safety community campaign the Bicycle Ambassador Program. The goals of the campaign are to: promote bicycling as a mode of transportation through community outreach and share the-road practices, educate the community on safe bicycling techniques and local conditions, and increase bicycle enforcement to encourage safe and legal riding.

The Borough and Centre Region have taken steps to provide safe and convenient bicycle access to all parts of the community through a network of on and off-street facilities, low-speed streets, facility maintenance, and secure parking. The Borough has advanced the equitable treatment of cyclists through a clear ordinance, the employment of police officers on bicycles, and consideration for bicyclists in the engineering of transportation facilities. However, educational and outreach programs have not been strongly pursued, and the Bicycle Ambassador Program seeks to fill that gap.

Community Outreach

The spring of 2012 will be devoted to the recruitment of the ambassador volunteers who will act as facilitators to the community and instruct safe bicycling techniques in a tangible way. The Bicycle Ambassador Program would mirror a similar program currently operating in Philadelphia with adaptations made to reflect the size and nature of the State College Community. Bicycle Ambassadors Program in Philadelphia claims its success results from the face-to-face interaction between Bicycle Ambassadors and their targeted audience allowing for “an organic conversation targeting the specific interests, questions, and needs of each individual.” There is hope to recruit on the order of three volunteers to be ambassadors for the State College community. These Ambassadors will receive training through courses taught by a League of American Bicyclists certified instructor that will be paid for by the program.

The Ambassadors will be a community presence by attending events such as Ride to Work Day, Community and Mayor-led rides, Bike Rodeos (hosted by police), Earth Day and other environmental and sustainability events, and community health fairs. The Ambassadors will partner with local advocacy group the Centre Region Bicycle Coalition as well as State College Police Department, and Borough staff. They will participate in outreach events where there is a community need and desire for bicycle education and promotion.

As part of the Bicycle Ambassador Program the Borough will develop a Share the Road Campaign in conjunction with the Police Department (through community relations officer) which addresses both motorists and cyclists. The Share the Road Campaign will

educate motorists and cyclists about the most appropriate way to interact with each other. The campaign will include a pledge drive to obtain commitments from motorists and cyclists to learn about bicycle specific traffic laws and obey the laws on the road. Motorists and cyclists would pledge to Share the Road, read educational materials or watch a video that teaches both motorists and cyclists how the share the road and take a quiz to confirm that the knowledge has been disseminated. Upon completion of the quiz, pledges will have the opportunity to request a window cling or similar display to show that they have pledged to share the road. There may also be a demonstration of the four-foot passing distance that is Pennsylvania law requires motorists to have when passing a bicyclist.

Education

The Borough's website will act as a clearinghouse for information regarding bicycling in State College. This will include: safety information, ordinances and State laws, links to maps of trails and routes as well as bicycle parking available, and links to local advocacy groups and bicycle shops in town. The launch for the Borough's revised website layout is scheduled for April of 2012, and will coincide nicely with added sustainability pages, including the topic of alternative transportation and other educational material and videos that have been prepared by Penn State students.

Materials such as this revised bicycle "door hanger" will be distributed to raise awareness for both the program and help to accomplish the goals of education in safety and laws in regards to bicycling. These will be posted on to bikes that are illegally parked on street signs or trees and will help to inform the public on vital ordinances and laws that are often overlooked, including mandatory lighting after dusk and before dawn, required registration, and prohibited bicycling on the sidewalks in the downtown.



Enforcement

A bicycle citation diversion program will also be pursued in conjunction with community outreach and share-the road campaigns. Police officers frequently hand out warnings and occasionally citations to bicyclists who disregard certain bicycle traffic laws. Instead of these negative actions, the violator will avoid paying fines if he or she attends a safety training course that will be taught by a League-of American Bicyclist certified instructor. This program will coincide with targeted enforcement periods by the Police Department for bicycle traffic violations, but will avoid the unfortunate deterrent of citation paperwork.

The volunteer and law enforcement outreach component of the Bicycle Ambassador Program will increase adoption of the behavior change. Through personal contact, modeling the behavior and social diffusion the behavior becomes the norm. Norms develop as people interact and develop guidelines for their behavior. Community

leadership in conjunction with increased enforcement will increase the safety of motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians in State College and will encourage bicycling as a safe and fun way to commute.