

InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

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Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA

Andy Clarke

Cycling Momentum

Portland has done a great job and been a great kind of standard for years, the really great news about this story is that that is now being repeated in places like Minneapolis and Chicago and New York City. And perhaps in even more surprising cities like Omaha, Nebraska and Salt Lake City and Bentonville, Arkansas, and a host of other places that are really realizing that cycling isn't just something that a bunch of lycra-clad enthusiasts are interested in promoting, but is something that's a good indicator of the quality of life that cities, that mayors, and elected officials and the business community really want for their community. There is unquestionably a new momentum in cities across the country, in communities across the country, to kind of encourage and welcome people to get out and ride, something we've seen most pointedly since the 2008 spike in gas prices.

Sharing the Infra

Survey, after survey, after survey, of cyclists and non-cyclists alike reveals that people don't like sharing the roads with cars going by them really fast and really close and it's intimidating. And particularly on bigger roads, the role that infrastructure can play in making people feel safe and welcome and invited onto the roadway, and the way infrastructure can make sure you don't feel like you're in people's way the whole time, is really critical. And that too—the realization that that is such an important factor is really beginning to reach people on a more mainstream level. And that's not to say we shouldn't still be educating people and encouraging people and providing incentives, but honestly the impact of infrastructure is really, really, critical. People have got to feel safe if they're going to get out and ride and the built environment is a key part of that.

Sharing the Road

There's not one solution that fits all. There are a lot of different tools in the toolbox to use for cycling and on a lot of roads, you know a lot of local, neighborhood streets you really don't need to do a whole lot. But on bigger streets, on the key corridors, the arterial streets in a lot of communities, that physical separation is really a critical factor in whether people will choose to ride or not. And if you look at all the successful biking communities around the country, around the world, they've all got a great network of infrastructure, a

bicycling network where people feel comfortable and feel safe and which also makes cycling very convenient and easy. And you know it's not rocket science to figure out what it takes to do that. Politically it can be difficult; financially there are always tough choices to make; putting in infrastructure like that begins to impinge on the space that is currently devoted to parking or to travel lanes or to some other part of the streetscape. And so I wouldn't say it's easy to do, but it's not easy to figure out what it will take to get more people riding.

Cycling: The International Infra Model

You look at our economic competitors, you look to European countries that are doing the best in the current economic climate, it's places where they've invested in their infrastructure and that includes their transportation environment. We always cast people's minds over to the Netherlands, for example, to look at their infrastructure for cycling. And one of the reasons they have such a great infrastructure for cycling is their preeminence as a port for the whole of Europe. And the critical nature of getting trucks and freight traveling from the North Sea to the whole of Europe, meant that in the 50s and 60s and particularly in the 70s and 80s, the Dutch realized that their infrastructure had to encourage people to ride bikes and walk and take transit because otherwise their streets and highways would never be able to cope with the critical role that freight plays in their economy. So the economics of encouraging and enabling people to ride bikes isn't just kind of a 'gimmick' or benefit for cyclists. It's something that actually makes our cities work much more efficiently, actually makes really good use of the investment in infrastructure that's so critical. And it's—yeah it's a shame that our communities, our nation is lagging behind in that investment. And it's not just an investment in the quantity or the scope or scale. It's the quality of that infrastructure too. When we spend, as we should, large amounts of money on great infrastructure projects, they need to be multipurpose and in the transportation sector, multimodal, to really be an effective use of public money. So yes, we see our push for a better cycling environment to be part of a bigger push for good urban infrastructure and good communities. We're all about building good communities.

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