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Bicycle rallies show 'movement in the right direction'

05/12/05

Bob Allen and Larry Perl

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A mixture of concerns about the environment, exercise, traffic and saving money on gas leads many people to bike to work.

Those concerns also led them to bike to Baltimore's Inner Harbor and Towson's Courthouse Square for rallies in honor of Bike to Work Day.

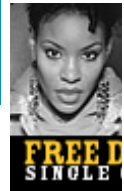
"I love the exercise. I love the fact that I'm not polluting the air. But the bottom line is, we're saving money," said Dan Pontius of Radnor-Winston, whose wife drives the family's only car.

Pontius led a convoy of bicyclists from the Eddie's market on Roland Avenue to the rally downtown. He rides his bike three to four times a week to his job as regional policy director for the Citizens' Planning and Housing Association, a Saratoga Street nonprofit that deals with housing, transportation and other quality of life issues.

Pontius is cautiously optimistic now that the city has posted a bicycle master plan on its Web site.

"It's better than what we have now, which is essentially nothing," he said.

Retired engineer Lee Fleishman, 79, of Hereford, bikes about 50 miles a week for fun on trails and back roads and is a volunteer patrolman on the North Central Railroad hiking and biking trail. He



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Which does Charles Street need most: trolleys, a bike path or two-way traffic?

Trolleys.

A bike path.

Two-way traffic.

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attended the rally in Towson and said he would like to see more commuters rely on pedal power.

And he thinks more people would make that switch if local roads were a little more bicycle-friendly.

"If there were dedicated bike paths on the major roads, more people would use them," Fleishman said. "Something like this (rally) is a little movement in the right direction."

Movement is what the Baltimore Metropolitan Council hoped for when it sponsored the sixth annual Bike to Work Day statewide.

"Even if you can get a few people to bike to work even one day a week, it means a big change in terms of exercise, calories, congestion and air quality," said Jamie Bridges, the council's Bike to Work coordinator.

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Traffic congestion and air pollution would drop by about 20 percent if all commuters in the Baltimore-Washington region rode their bikes to work or used public transportation once a week, according to Clean Air Partners, a public-private coalition that promotes volunteer efforts to reduce pollution in the region.

Like his friend Fleishman, Ron Dowell of Idlewylde said he cycles 40 to 50 miles a week on trails and back roads. Although he's biked in France, Italy, Spain and England and is taking an eight-day bike trip in the Czech Republic, Dowell confesses that he seldom bikes on congested corridors like York Road.

"You're always scared of traffic, really," Dowell said. "Some drivers are really biker friendly; some aren't."

On the other hand, Mark Counselman, 30, is a commuting warrior, and an activist when it comes to encouraging others to make the switch to cycling.

A manager at the insurance firm of Riggs, Counselman, Michaels and Downes in Towson, Counselman said he has been commuting three or four days a week for the past two years from his home in Oakenshawe.

Counselman, who often lobbies the Baltimore County government and the Towson Business Association to place more racks around Towson, said his move from Chicago to the Baltimore area two years ago was a step down.

"Chicago is a bicycle-friendly city from the mayor on down," he said. "There are bikes everywhere, even at 2 in the morning in the middle of winter and (motorists) are used to them. But here (in the Baltimore area), we aren't there yet."

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