

BMTS Article Digest September – October 2021

BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee Members:

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Wednesday, 15 September 2021

Looking for a bike? You may need to keep waiting

Tom Passmore Corning Leader USA TODAY NETWORK

Buying a bike in 2021 isn't easy. Gone are the days when you could walk into a local shop and purchase a bike off the rack for a decent amount.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought with it a need to socially distance outdoors, and for many biking was the perfect remedy. Bicycle sales in the United States climbed 65% last year, according to NPR, despite shortages at many bike shops.

"Since the COVID lockdown the demand skyrocketed and has not come down," said Taylor Crowe, owner of Wheels United in Bath. "The combo of demand and lack of availability has kept bikes in short supply since May/June of 2020."



The explanation for the shortage of bicycles comes down to their imported parts: The United States relies on China for about 90% of its bicycles, Jay Townley, who analyzes cycling industry trends at Human Powered Solutions told USA Today in June 2020.

Corning Bike Works has many kids bikes for sale. Kids bikes are easier to get than regular adult bikes according to industry experts. TOM PASSMORE/CORNING LEADER

Due to COVID-19 protocols, factories overseas shut down completely or operated at limited capacity, Townley explained. Inventory was running low even before the pandemic after tariffs were imposed on China in 2019. Warehouses in the United States were cleaned out, and they're still trying to catch up.

I want a bike. How long will it take to get one?

If you were to order a bike or certain bike components, it could take up to a year or more to get it, according to Paul Kingsbury, a 38-year veteran of the business and owner of Kingsbury's Cyclery in Elmira.

"I have bikes on backorder and I get like one bike every 10 days to two weeks," Kingsbury said. "If you ordered a bike right now for somebody that puts them at the very end of the line, and so likely it's about a year, year-and-a-half before it possibly would show up."

In some cases, experts predict, it could be even longer.

"Inventory levels have started to increase slightly in the last few months," said Steven Frothingham, editor-in-chief of Bicycle Retailer and Industry News online. "It's going to be at least 2023 before they are near normal. All the warehouses are empty—retailer warehouses, distributor/wholesaler warehouses, manufacturer warehouses. Just refilling the inventory will keep the factories busy for at least a year now even if there was little consumer demand."

Components that are currently hard to get are suspension, contact points and wheels, according to industry experts.

For Kingsbury, the light at the end of the tunnel isn't yet in sight.

"I don't really see anything, you know, from my end where it looks like it's changing," said Kingsbury.

If you're buying for your kids, however, you might be in luck.

"We have lots of kid's bikes," said Margo Underwood, owner of Corning Bike Works in Corning, explaining that bikes for children use different parts than those for adults.

How have bike shops handled the shortage?

With a lack of bikes on the floor, local shops have cut down hours and days. Some are open only by appointment or only for repairs, if they can get the parts.

"Once the new bikes were gone, repairs started getting huge and that went on for a while, but then we ran out of parts," said Underwood. Chains, shifters, derailleurs, and even tires and tubes have been hard to get in a timely fashion.

"People bring in their old bikes to get him tuned up and most of the time I can get them going, but occasionally there's a big delay."

What about big box stores?

Big box stores do have bikes, but like local shops are struggling to meet demand—in part because assembling them in mass quantity takes time, according to Frothingham. "It's often a bit harder to put a bike out on display than products that are just boxes on a shelf," said Frothingham. "So when there's a run on bikes at the local Target, it's not so easy to put out a bunch more bikes immediately."

Amazon has played a role, too, as a place where smaller retailers can put their parts and even buy some that they might need.

"It's been easy for anyone with a bit of inventory to throw it up on Amazon and get rid of it for a good price," said Frothingham. If a retailer (or even a wholesaler) needs a part to complete a bike, they might have to go to Amazon or one of the other specialty e-commerce sites.



"They might hate to do it, but if a \$50 part is keeping them from completing a \$3,000 bike, what else are they going to do?"

Due to shortages, Corning Bike Works is only carrying two adult bikes in its stores. Ordering a bike could take a year or more to get there.

TOM PASSMORE/CORNING LEADER

Meet the Baker Behind the Newest Business on the Vestal Rail Trail

Tom Passmore

Binghamton Press & Sun-Bulletin
September 17, 2021

When the Happy Squirrel bakery opened at the Coal House on Vestal's Rail Trail earlier this summer, it was a culmination of owner Niccole Nickelsen's four-year journey.

Nickelsen didn't take the traditional path of being a baker. For the past couple of years, she's been baking and selling goodies out of her own home.

But has always been artistic and loved to bake and knew she wanted to put those two things together in some way.

"I just combined the two and just started watching videos and shows and teaching myself how to do things and lots and lots of practice," Nickelsen said.



She never thought she'd have a location to call her own and continued grinding by fulfilling orders at her home. At one point she thought she had a place to call her own, but it fell through.

"It was always the end goal [to have a shop], but I was never sure if I'd make it," Nickelsen said. "Quite honestly, if it wasn't for my family members, my sister and dad and other family members really helping me out, to give me that little extra push and that head start and what I needed, I would not be here."

Nickelson finally got her chance when the Coal House Cafe shut down, and she jumped at the opportunity, having grown up in Vestal and building a customer base there.

"There's a lot of foot traffic here," said Nickelsen. "I have a lot of customers already based in Vestal. It's an easy access point from the trail."

The Coal House is in the middle of the original Rail Trail and Rail Trail West, which is a combined 3.85-mile paved path that serves walkers, runners and bicyclists.

"We were looking for something that could operate in a small place," said town supervisor John Schaffer, who said there were several applicants who wanted to open a business in the spot.



"We were looking for someone to come in and serve healthy drinks, coffee and tea, and whatever else," Schaffer said. "The hours she wanted to work fit in with what we wanted. The space that's available and what she could get out of it along with her personality and attitude, the board was very receptive."

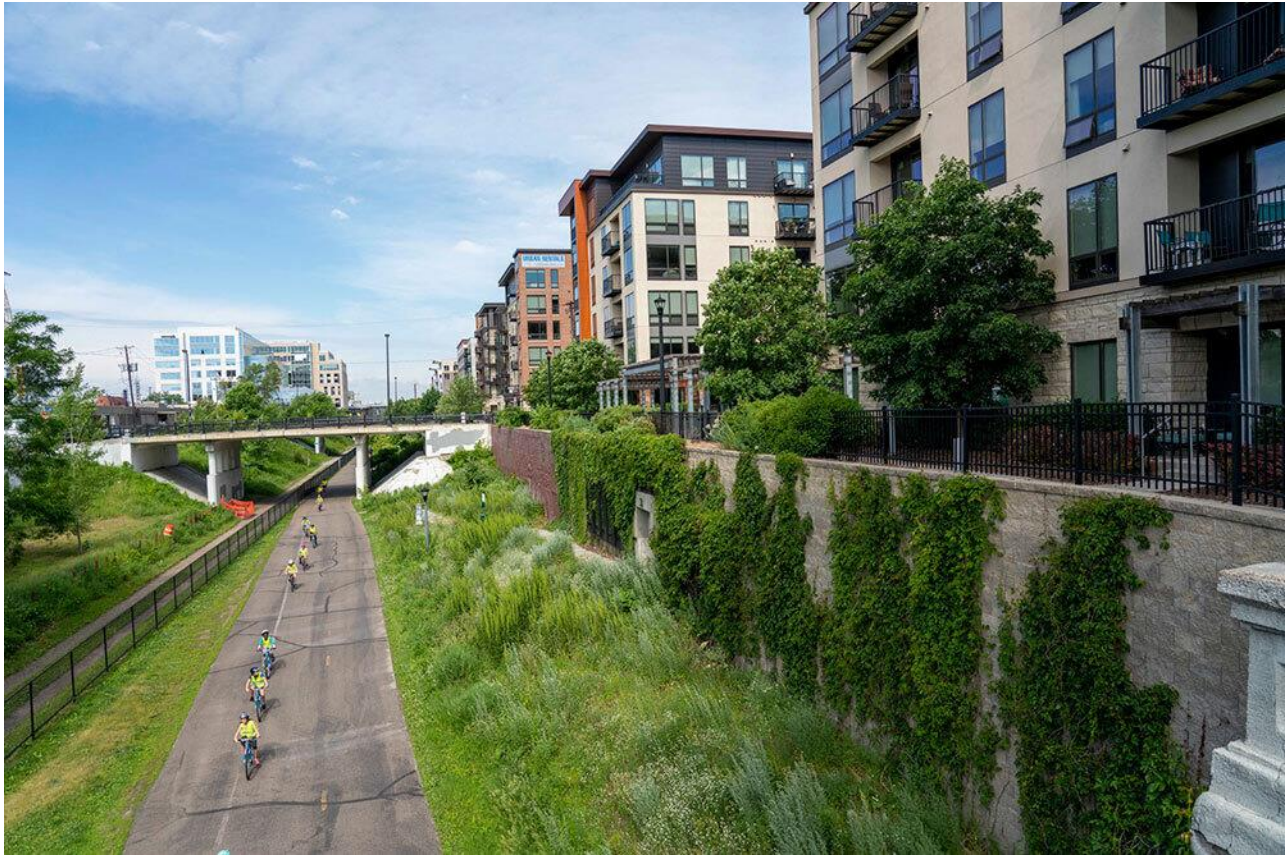
After visiting the Happy Squirrel, Schaffer heard nothing but good things from everyone he interacted with there.

"I talked to a couple of people over there what they thought and they said it was outstanding, high quality, and reasonably priced," he said.

Nickelson had used the name Happy Squirrel when she ran things from her home and just carried it over. The name stands as a reminder of where she started, in her kitchen, to a place to call her own.

She serves light breakfast and lunch, and homemade baked goods. She also takes custom orders through her [Facebook page](#).

The restaurant won't be the only new addition to that end of the Rail Trail, which features a large parking lot near Four Corners. The town also plans to move the Vestal Museum from its home next to the library on the Vestal Parkway to about 500 feet away from the Coal House in the spring.



PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK PETERSON, REDUX

NAT GEO DAILY

By **Robert Kunzig**, *ENVIRONMENT Executive Editor*

In the old days, before March 2020, I used to bike to work at National Geographic's headquarters in Washington, D.C. Taking the bike instead of my car saved me sitting in traffic, which I despise, and paying to park downtown. It saved me running for a bus that came at infrequent and unpredictable intervals. The ride was less than four miles, and on the way in it was mostly downhill, which made the decision to ride each morning a little easier. Plus, all that biking, especially the uphill slog home, allowed me to skip going to the gym and still feel entitled to my wine and chocolate.

And oh yeah, it was better for the planet too.

The pandemic shut down my commute, like that of so many others, but it has inspired millions of people around the world to jump on bikes for the first time in years, **Ilana Strauss** [writes for us this week](#). Most of that riding was recreational and probably didn't displace much carbon pollution. But cities around the world are making lasting changes to their streets to encourage biking, in what may prove to be an enduring silver lining of COVID-19.

Fear of being maimed or worse by cars is what keeps many people from commuting by bike,

surveys show. European cities don't kill nearly as many cyclists as American ones; the fatality rate is five to 10 times higher in the U.S. than in countries like Denmark and the Netherlands, urban planners Ralph Buehler and John Pucher reported last year. But in Europe too urban biking used to be much more lethal—and much less common.

"Americans have this image, 'Oh cycling is just paradise, and it's always been paradise in Europe,'" Pucher tells Strauss in this week's episode of *Overheard, the National Geographic podcast*. "Wrooong. Not true!" After World War II, European cities were overrun by cars too. It's just that since the 1970s many have made concerted efforts, spearheaded sometimes by concerned citizens, to reclaim their streets for unmotorized people.

American cities are now following that trend, a few decades behind. Minneapolis is a leader, Stephanie Pearson writes for Nat Geo; its 5.5-mile-long Midtown Greenway (*pictured above*), which follows an old railway corridor, is lit at night and plowed in winter, and it's often a quicker way across town than driving. In Minneapolis and other cities, however, the key to bikeability isn't a gorgeous greenway or two. It's a connected network of bike paths and lanes that make it possible to ride from any point A in the city to any point B, safely and easily.

New York City has added more than 60 miles of paths and lanes during the pandemic, Chicago around 30, Buehler and Pucher reported last spring. Washington hasn't seen a surge like that, but it has seen a steady expansion of its network. The percentage of commuters traveling by bike in D.C. went from 1 percent in the late 1990s to 5 percent in 2018, Strauss writes.

I noticed the change myself. On some mornings, when I entered the final straightaway to the office, there would be a whole motley peloton of us rolling down 17th Street, fanning out as if we owned the road, as if we were Tour de France riders leading our chase cars down the Champs-Élysées. As we crossed Massachusetts Avenue, some of us would stand up on the pedals, pumping furiously to make the light at Rhode Island. For this aging boomer in cargo shorts and a goofy helmet, that sprint was a little morning jolt of childhood joy. You may think you can't recapture that in your grown-up workday but think again: It's just like riding a bike.



Cyclists ride along a street in New York City on April 6, 2021. Some U.S. cities are committing to making road biking safer.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ED JONES, AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Is the U.S. becoming more bike friendly?

In many cities, the pandemic has reinforced a trend: They're building out the infrastructure needed to make cycling safe.

BYILANA STRAUSS

PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 21, 2021

If you've noticed more people biking in town over the last year or two, it's not just in your head. Biking has exploded during the pandemic, with [millions of Americans mounting bicycles](#) for the first time in years. Is it the start of a long-term trend?

There are good reasons to hope so. Transportation is the largest source of greenhouse emissions in the U.S., and [cars and light trucks account for 58 percent of transportation](#) emissions. Switching from cars to bikes [cuts emissions much faster](#) than switching to electric cars.

And motor vehicle accidents still kill more than 39,000 Americans a year—[including more than 700 cyclists](#).

Clearly the U.S. is not a bike-friendly country overall. Only one percent of all trips that Americans take—to work, to the store, on vacation—are by bike, compared with [87 percent by car or truck](#).

According to League of American Bicyclists (LAB), a nonprofit that collects data on biking in the U.S., the total number of bike rides Americans take each year had actually been falling in the years leading up to the pandemic. The number of people who ride their bikes to work fell from around 900,000 in 2014 to just over 800,000 in 2019—[about .5 percent of all commuters](#).

“Commute to work rates have been down, bike fatalities have been up,” said Ken McLeod, policy director at the LAB.

Compare that to the Netherlands, say, where [27 percent of workers commute by bike](#). But Dutch cities didn’t used to be that bike friendly, said John Pucher, a professor emeritus of urban planning at Rutgers University who specializes in biking.

“Americans have this image, ‘Oh cycling is just paradise, and it’s always been paradise in Europe,’” Pucher told me when I interviewed him for [Overheard, the National Geographic podcast](#). “Wrooong. Not true!”

If some European cities look heavenly to American cyclists today, he said, it’s because over the past few decades they’ve actively reclaimed space in the urban landscape from cars. And some American cities today have started on that same trend.

([Read about how Minneapolis is fostering a bicycling boom.](#))

Safety first

Some 70 percent of people surveyed in the 50 biggest metro regions in the U.S. say they’re interested in biking. Why don’t they bike more? It comes down to safety. Half of the people surveyed said they were, understandably, [too afraid to bike](#) on the street.

Bike safety isn’t about painting bike lanes on every street, Pucher said. It’s about creating bike networks—webs of bike paths that can take you safely from point A to point B. Good bike networks are made of things like greenways (off-road paths that often run next to rivers and lakes, or along old railway corridors), protected bike lanes with physical barriers separating riders from cars, and quiet streets.

“Cycling has to become boring to become really successful,” said Ralph Buehler, chair of urban affairs and planning at Virginia Tech. “Putting a painted biking lane on a 40-mph road is not going to appeal” to the potential cyclist afraid of a close encounter with a car.

The good news is that bike networks were expanding in the U.S. even before the pandemic. Between 1991 and 2021, there was a six-fold increase in paved, off-road trails, from 5,904 miles to 39,329 miles, Pucher said. Washington D.C., Minneapolis, Chicago, and Los

Angeles more than doubled their city bike lanes from 2000 to 2017, while New York and Seattle more than tripled theirs.

And the increase in *protected* bike lanes is even more dramatic: Their total length, nationwide, went from only 34 miles in 2006 to 425 miles in 2018. With the surge of activity in the pandemic, Pucher estimates that number is now well over 600 miles.

New York City alone already has [200 miles of protected bike lanes](#) and plans to keep adding more at the rate of 50 miles a year. “They’re really pushing,” Buehler said.

In fact, most American cities are building more bike lanes. Cities in the West and East are leading the pack, but the trend is nationwide.

“It’s in the plan of every single city I’m aware of,” Pucher said. “I see this happening in Raleigh. Raleigh! If even North Carolina cities are gung-ho ... I just see, in the coming years, a big expansion.”

City versus country

The national statistics showing a decline in bike ridership are a bit misleading, McLeod said. Biking infrastructure and ridership are indeed down in rural and suburban areas—but cities tell a different story, especially cities that have invested in their bike networks.

In Santa Cruz, California, about 9 percent of workers bike to work; in Boulder, Colorado, it’s just over 10 percent. In Davis, California, it’s 19 percent—an almost European level.

Bigger cities have seen big increases in ridership too. “D.C. has really had a dramatic change,” McLeod said.

In the late 1990s, only 1 percent of D.C. commuters traveled by bike. The city started building protected bike lanes in the early 2000s—and by 2018, the number of bike commuters had jumped to 5 percent.

By comparison, in the German city of Frankfurt in the late 1990s, 6 percent of workers were commuting by bike. That city too installed a bunch of bike infrastructure, and by 2018, its bike-commuter rate had reached 20 percent. Buehler, who [worked on a study comparing the two cities](#), said that if D.C. stays the course, it’ll look like Frankfurt in another decade or two.

Other cities are evolving similarly, including Seattle (from 4,179 bike commuters in 1990 to 17,092 now), Chicago (3,307 to 20,268), San Francisco (3,634 to 20,268), and Portland (2,453 to 21,315).

The pandemic may have sped things up, [according to an analysis done by Buehler and Pucher](#).

“In every single city we looked at, there has been an increase in cycling,” Pucher said.

During lockdowns, some cities installed temporary lanes as trial runs. Boston threw together a bike lane made of orange traffic cones on Boylston Street, a major thoroughfare. The city has since made the change permanent, trading the cones for bollards.

“That’s happened in New York, that’s happened in Seattle, it’s happened in Oakland,” Pucher said. “COVID demonstrated how many things can be done in even a very short period of time.”

Nation's First 'Zero-Driving Community' Takes Shape in Tempe

Slated to open in 2022, Culdesac Tempe contractually forbids personal vehicles from parking within a quarter-mile radius of the project site.

September 19, 2021, 9:00 AM PDT

By [Diana Ionescu](#) [@aworkoffiction](#)



Opticos Design / [Rendering of Culdesac Tempe development](#)

"[B]illed as the [first and only zero-driving community](#) built from scratch in the U.S.," [Culdesac Tempe](#) encourages its future residents to "rely on other modes, including a bundle of discounted [mobility](#) services provided for in their monthly rent, according to project leaders."

According to Laura Bliss, "[t]he \$170 million residential development will feature a plaza with scooter docks, car-share parking, and ride-hail pickup zones, with a light rail station across the

street." Tenant benefits will include "complimentary access to a Lyft Pink subscription, preferred pricing for a fleet of Bird [scooters](#), an Envoy car share membership, and free unlimited passes on the [Valley Metro](#) transit system."

Lavanya Sunder, general manager at [Culdesac Tempe](#), "said this marks one of the first times a U.S. real estate developer has included paid transportation options as part of the monthly rent, which starts at \$1,090 for a studio and \$1,250 for a one-bedroom." In addition to 761 apartments, [the complex](#) will house "a grocery store, restaurant, cafe and co-working space, carving out a pocket of walkable, car-free living into a corner of one of America's most [autocentric metropolises](#)."

The project promises to be an instructive experiment in "retrofitting suburban [sprawl](#) for a post-car era" as critics question "if its residents will struggle to access the larger Phoenix area without their own cars."

After Biking Boom, Some Cities Beef Up Infrastructure

From bridges to boulevards, Chicago, New York City and Washington, D.C., are among the major cities spending on protected bike lanes.

Published Oct. 4, 2021

By [Jason Plautz](#), Contributor



Mario Tama via Getty Images

In mid-September, bicycle advocates and members of the Bill de Blasio administration gathered on the Brooklyn Bridge to celebrate the [first reconfiguration](#) of the landmark in more than 70 years. In an event de Blasio called "a symbol of New York City fully embracing a sustainable future and striking a blow against car culture," the city unveiled a protected bike lane replacing a lane of traffic long given over to cars.

Now bicyclists will be able to ride in a dedicated lane and won't have to battle with pedestrians and picture-taking tourists to cross the East River between Brooklyn and lower Manhattan, a crucial step to the city's promise of a fully connected, five-borough bike network.

"Without bike-friendly infrastructure on bridges, commuting across boroughs just isn't possible," said Juan Restrepo, senior organizer at New York-based Transportation Alternatives. "We're working on a citywide network that mimics the highway system for the U.S. Connectivity is key."

The redesigned Brooklyn Bridge is part of an estimated 30 miles of bike lane New York City planned to add in 2021, the most by the city in a single year (the previous record was 2020's 28.6 miles.) While car buying boomed during the COVID-19 pandemic, bicycling has as well. That's prompted cities to take a harder look at turning piecemeal bike infrastructure into robust networks, with support from the Biden administration.

Caron Whitaker, deputy executive director of the League of American Bicyclists, said the administration's push for climate-friendly transportation and public interest in biking have helped made bike infrastructure an easier sell — after decades of it being relegated to a novelty with just a small percentage of transportation funding.

"Cities see the benefit of biking and are looking for more ways to accommodate it, especially after COVID," said Whitaker. "Certainly we're seeing a lot of interest from the administration in terms of promoting complete streets and improving safety and equity."

The de Blasio administration's blitz to turn over some roadway space to bikers and pedestrians includes establishing "Bike Boulevards" with slow vehicular speeds and limited volumes across all five boroughs. Putting bike lanes on bridges, however, is more difficult. Some bridges are controlled by the city, while others by the state-owned Metropolitan Transportation Authority. As a heavily trafficked hub and tourist attraction that accommodated more than 116,000 vehicles, 30,000 pedestrians and 3,000 cyclists each day before the pandemic, closing off the city-controlled Brooklyn Bridge for construction was a challenge.

The new path cordons off the previous car lane with additional fencing and new barrier segments. The promenade that bikes and pedestrians previously shared now can handle more people without bikes sharing the same space.

"Some of the conversations we see in other cities are focused on [adding] additional lanes or parts to the bridge, which is much more expensive than working with existing infrastructure," Restrepo said. "This new path is not just an incredible accomplishment in reallocating road space, but also a template for what could be done across other bridges in the city and in the US."

Some other cities are similarly using the renewed interest in biking to boost their existing networks. Chicago officials, for example, announced in September the city plans to spend \$17 million to add 100 miles of new bike lanes by the end of 2022, bringing the total mileage of bike lanes in the city to nearly 400. Seattle built 45 miles of bike lanes from 2016 through 2020 as part of a master plan to create a 100-mile network across the city.

In Washington, D.C., the September opening of the \$480 million Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge across the Anacostia River also represented a leap forward for bike connectivity. The new bridge, the District's largest public infrastructure project to date, replaces an outdated bridge with a larger structure that includes a multiuse path for pedestrians and bikers.

The planning process to replace the original Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge, which the district declared functionally obsolete, began over a decade ago. Bike advocates quickly embraced the project as an opportunity to create a safe crossing between two largely disconnected neighborhoods, said Colin Browne, director of communications for the Washington Area Bicyclist Association. Now, he says, the bridge “closes a big gap” in the National Capital Trail Network, a plan for a 1,400-mile network of off-street trails in D.C., Maryland and Virginia adopted last year by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' Transportation Planning Board.

Browne said the project also represents a step forward in management in a region where projects typically require working across city, county, state and federal governments.

“Usually as a bike-ped organization, you're talking to planners who are a small part of the decision-making apparatus,” he said. “In this project, they had it figured out from the beginning. We're seeing that the transportation agency has incorporated the climate and safety goals related to bicycle and pedestrian planning more broadly.”

Advocates said the budget reconciliation and bipartisan infrastructure bill that Congress is weighing could offer another funding boost.

The budget bill language passed by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee contains \$4 billion for community climate incentive grants, with \$3 billion reserved for city and regional governments. That, combined with a greenhouse gas performance metric program, could offer a valuable funding source for projects that promote biking and walking over driving. Reports say the overall budget bill could shrink, meaning the transportation provisions could be reduced.

In addition, the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill increases funding for the Transportation Department's program funding non-driving infrastructure by 60% over five years for a total of \$7.2 billion in that time. Under another provision in the bill, states that have higher road fatality rates would have to invest more in safer alternatives. Even a \$12.5 billion bridge repair program has a requirement that projects applying for federal funding consider nonvehicle use of bridges, except when cost-prohibitive.

“The fact that we're seeing more money being pushed to the city and local level is exciting,” said the League of American Bicyclists' Whitaker. “We tend to see a lot more innovation at the local level, so we want the government to encourage and leverage that.”

More infrastructure can, in turn, lead to more biking: A study published in April in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences that examined European cities found that cycling increased up to 48% more in cities, on average, where new bike infrastructure was added compared with cities without new lanes.

As Transportation Alternatives' Restrepo eyes the future, he says New York City has plenty of potential for more bike infrastructure. De Blasio has said he'll add bike lanes to the 1.4-mile Queensboro bridge. Eric Adams, the Democratic nominee for mayor, who is heavily favored to win in November, is an avid cyclist and pledged to build 300 new miles of protected bike lanes.

"For us, every single bridge should be accessible by bike and foot and part of a wider network," Restrepo said. "We want to see our city moving towards a more sustainable future that really highlights bicycling."



A man was hospitalized in a hospital intensive care unit after he was hit by a vehicle while riding a bicycle in the town of Vestal.

Police on Tuesday afternoon released information about the collision, which occurred around 2:45 p.m. Friday.

According to a news release, a 63-year-old Vestal man sustained a severe head injury when he was struck by a car on Vestal Road at the Route 201 on-ramp.

The bicyclist, who was not wearing a helmet, was traveling eastbound on the shoulder of the road when he turned north into traffic and was hit by the eastbound vehicle.

Police said the man sustained a serious head injury when he landed on the pavement. He was reported in critical condition Tuesday at Wilson Medical Center in Johnson City.

Investigators said there were no other injuries. The area around the scene was closed for just over two hours after the crash.

Police did not release the name of the bicyclist or of the woman who was driving the car that struck him.
