



Cycling Fans Spoke For Themselves

By REBEKAH CHRYSLER DOUGHTY The Tampa Tribune

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8:55 a.m. - With avid cyclist Alan Snel at the lead, nine riders mount their bicycles Tuesday at the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida and head for downtown Tampa.

The ride begins the first leg of the Tampa BayCycle proclamation relay. Three groups of cyclists carry a document for each of three mayors to sign, vowing their support for cycling as a means of transportation in their city. It is Tampa BayCycle's way of kicking off National Bike Month.

"I bike this route quite a bit," says Snel, a Seminole Heights resident who frequently rides to and from Flatwoods Park from home.

He and another rider came up with the route as the safest way to get to downtown Tampa from the USF campus - few major roads and no heavy traffic. Although there are no bike lanes along the route and few roads with shoulders, the cyclists are "really counting on drivers sharing the roadways," Snel says.

9:19 a.m. - Right on schedule, the group turns left onto Rowlett Park Drive and heads south toward Sligh Avenue. Although there is some minor construction in the right of way, the group manages to garner a few cheers from nearby construction workers.

"This is a good day to publicly acknowledge the role of bicycling in the community," Snel says. "It's great that some of the biggest cities are acknowledging cycling as a practical form of transportation."

After delivering the proclamation to Mayor Pam Iorio in Tampa, two riders will continue on to St. Petersburg, where Mayor Rick Baker also will sign the proclamation. Clearwater Mayor Frank Hibbard will be the last to sign.

The ride is not the only way Tampa BayCycle, an organization created by the New North Transportation Alliance and the Tampa Downtown Partnership to promote cycling as a primary mode of transportation in the Bay area, is bringing attention to the activity. April 27, about 25 people showed up for a street skills class at CUTR to learn more about the rules of the road for cyclists.

Cyclist Nick Griffiths, who has been cycling to and from work for 15 years, attended the class. So did Rebecca Erwin, who hasn't ridden a bike in 20 years.

"I want to learn how not to get hit by a car," she says before class. "It's frightening."

Griffiths recommends mapping out a route and trying it out on a weekend day when there is not as much traffic. He also says to wear a helmet and buy a decent bike.

"A lot of people want to cycle but are afraid to cycle," says Griffiths, who joined the other eight for the proclamation ride Tuesday morning. "But the more people we get riding, the more we can push for wider roads and bike lanes."

9:40 a.m. - Still making great time and enjoying a pleasant ride, the cyclists cross Hillsborough Avenue on Central Avenue and head south. They jog west to Tampa Street and head for downtown.

Julie Bond, director of the New North Transportation Alliance and an avid cyclist, commutes three times a week to work. She says the ride is a way to make it known that the mayors are supporting cycling.

"What better way to bring awareness than to ride from Temple Terrace to Tampa to St. Pete to Clearwater?" Bond says.

9:59 a.m. - With the mayor expecting them at 10, the cyclists pull up to Lykes Gaslight Square Park at Kennedy Boulevard and Franklin Street with the Tampa Bay Lightning mascot Thunderbug in tow.

The group is greeted by Councilwoman Linda Saul-Sena, who is still in her helmet fresh from commuting to work from Davis Islands.

"It was really pleasant," says Sal-Sena of her ride. "When I was coming over the bridge, I met a guy who had just caught a mangrove snapper. I never would have had that interaction if I was in my car."

Although it's not quite as practical for the mayor to commute to work, Iorio commends the riders for their efforts.

"I think bicycle commuters are truly the wave of the future, as long as the city does our part," says Iorio, who adds that she just purchased a bike in December and enjoys riding on the weekends. "It's a great sport; there's a tremendous feeling of freedom. We must do our part in making the city more bicycle-friendly."

Tampa BayCycle's Web site is www.tampabaycycle.com.

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