

Bicycle Program Annual Progress Report

June 30, 2016

Since receiving funding from the Knight Foundation to develop a bicycle program, Sustain Charlotte has made great strides towards establishing a voice and hub organization for bicycling in Greater Charlotte. With an overarching goal of greater civic engagement, educational and economic opportunities and cultural vibrancy, Sustain Charlotte has successfully blended a bicycle program into an effective organization focused on long-term economic prosperity, environmental health, and social equity in our community.

We have seen a significant surge in membership (174 new donors since 8/10/2015) and interest in the work that we are doing over the past year, thanks greatly to the generous grant made by the Knight Foundation. More than ever the conversation around cycling is clearly focused on a desperate need in our city for the deliberate design of a protected, connected, clearly-marked and safe network for people on bicycles.

We have identified many areas of our city that need transportation choices and are connecting people to the bicycle as a solution. Additionally, we have brought these needs to leaders and key influencers in our city, from elected officials and public staff, to private businesses, and the media.

The bicycle program this grant has enabled has provided the public an organization that is advocating for better cycling conditions as well as allowed Charlotte's leaders the opportunities to engage the public and get their feedback beyond the confines of the government center. A highlight of this success was having Mayor Roberts deliver the opening remarks at an event titled "The Future of Transportation is You" during which we launched our current #ibikeCLT campaign. Since that time, we have been able to demonstrate broad public support for a comprehensive, safe, and connected bicycle network that serves residents of all ages and abilities.

Over the past year Charlotte has seen many "firsts" due to this funding, and these are truly indicators of progress for our city's future:

- **The first manual bicycle/pedestrian count, September 10th, 2015.** Over 65 volunteers showed up at 6am to cordon off I-277 ("the great bike barrier") and gain metrics on how many people used certain entrance/exit points to the city on foot and by bike.
- **The first Biketoberfest, October 17th, 2015.** Over 350 people participated in this first of its kind event, which was also our launch event for our new bicycle program. We

partnered with over 25 local businesses and organizations to create “Charlotte’s largest qualitative data gathering event.” In order for participants to earn passports stamps at each stop they had to answer questions pertaining to their vision for what makes a great community and public space, a concept that was not only well received during the event but reported to be one of the most popular aspects of the event itself in the follow up surveys we conducted. People of all ages and backgrounds, skill levels and walks of life came out to discover how great using a bicycle in Charlotte can be.

- **The first “Open Street Demonstration” event as a part of Biketoberfest, October 17th, 2015.** We partnered with Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation, Charlotte Department of Transportation, (CDOT), and Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD), and BB&T Ballpark to block off the 300 block of S. Mint Street to motor vehicles. Participants were able to help prove the concept of Open Streets in Charlotte by enjoying games and activities while simultaneously viewing hundreds of photos of Open Streets events from around the world being projected on the large digital display screen on the side of BB&T Ballpark.
- **The first protected bike lane demonstration, May 1, 2016.** We successfully designed and installed a temporary protected bicycle lane as a part of the larger Open Streets 704 route. By serving on the route planning team we were able to gain permission from Charlotte DOT (CDOT) to do this, which gave us the public their first opportunity to experience the benefits of a protected bicycle lane. We took it a step further, however, and designed this temporary lane so that it doubled as a large public street mural. When viewed from above, our functional bike lane took the shape of a person [we named Ike](#). We photographed this visually stunning installment via drone, which allowed us to highlight the metaphor, “Protected bike lanes speak up for people.” An estimated 10,000 people participated in this first large-scale Open Street event, several of whom were elected officials and key decision-makers on transportation issues. We anticipate partnering with CDOT, Stewart Engineering, and Park and Rec again this year to highlight a portion of the Uptown Trails Connectivity Study via another protected bike lane demonstration.

Objectives: People Served, Progress, and Impact

The following section details the goals we set for this program as well as corresponding metrics we are using to measure our success. This grant has allowed us to make an even greater impact than we envisioned. We have uncovered widespread support from throughout our community and often hear that people have long desired this work to be a part of Charlotte’s leadership landscape.

Increase the number of residents who are informed about cycling issues and opportunities. Effectively communicating local cycling news and opportunities offered by Sustain Charlotte and other organizations will be a priority of the new initiative funded by this

grant. Charlotte's cycling community is currently fragmented among numerous clubs and organizations that lack a strong, consistent central leadership organization. In addition to collecting contact information during our own events and tabling opportunities, we will work with current leaders of group rides, clubs, cycling-related businesses, nonprofits, and government departments to build an outreach database for social media and e-mail. We will provide relevant and engaging content and opportunities to both cyclists and non-cyclists through social media, e-mail, website, and events. As the hub organization for cycling, we will also promote local events organized by other organizations and track participation.

(1) Spoke or tabled during at least 25 community and cycling events.

- Engaged in over 50 events thus far including: advocacy at local bicycle shops, attending and participating in multiple learn to ride events in partnership with the Health Dept. and Park and Rec, Discovery Place, Leadership Charlotte, community input meetings, multiple festivals and cycling related events.

(2) Created a Twitter handle for the initiative and generated a Twitter following of at least 500.

- Currently, the handle @SustainCLT_Bike has 79 followers and @Sustain_CLT has 2,261 followers.

(3) Created a Facebook page for the initiative and generated a following of at least 1,000.

- Our Facebook account currently has 4,065 followers.

(4) Built a database of at least 500 e-mail addresses of people interested in cycling.

- Our #bikeclt campaign has successfully collected over 2,500 signatures and email addresses, all from people who support a protected bike lane through Uptown connecting our two greenways.
- A list of over 65 people who volunteered for Charlotte's first manual bicycle count has received email updates informing them of the results of their work, community input sessions they need to be aware of and opportunities to be involved in multiple cycling initiatives.
- [A petition](#) led by us to support a road diet on Parkwood Ave resulted in over 654 online signatures and several hundred more in paper petitions. We sent regular email updates tracking the progress to approximately 25 core neighborhood leaders. We encouraged several of the neighborhood leaders to speak to City Council, resulting in them publicly asking them for safer road conditions along Parkwood Ave during a Council meeting. In turn, Parkwood Avenue was included in a series of Arterial Corridor Studies and walking tours that the Department of Transportation conducted this spring. We are awaiting CDOT's recommendations for this corridor.

(5) Created a visible website presence for the cycling initiative.

- We [published 5 films](#) for the #bikeclt campaign website that highlight individuals who currently use their bicycle for transportation in Charlotte.

- We created a page on our website that serves to inform users about our bicycle program.
- We have also partnered with WeeklyRides.com and Ann Groninger (a local bike law attorney) to build and promote a [website](#) that will allow North Carolina residents to see survey responses from candidates for state office reflecting their views on bicycle related issues.

(6) Sent at least 20 emails focused on cycling to email list.

- In each of our weekly e-newsletters (50+ over the past year), we have informed more than 3,500 followers about cycling updates and events.

(7) Wrote and shared at least 20 blog posts about cycling.

- We have written and shared 12 blog posts about cycling.

(8) Posted at least 3 times per week to social media.

- We post at least 3 times per week to our Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts. Our Instagram following has increased to 1,681 followers.

(9) Promoted events submitted by other cycling-related organizations and tracked number of participants.

- We have promoted and participated in multiple community oriented events including learn to ride, bike camps, group rides, scavenger hunts, bike in movie nights and Open Streets.

Increasing participation in bicycling and building public support for the necessary investments in Charlotte will require the cooperation and collaborative efforts of existing nonprofit organizations, public-private partnerships, businesses, individual bicyclists, and government staff. Sustain Charlotte focuses on finding solutions rather than dwelling on problems. By maintaining open communications with staff and elected officials in city, county, and state government departments, we have become trusted as an honest and knowledgeable community partner working in the public's interest. Throughout the process of planning, launching, and building the TCA, we have identified many people and organizations that are committed to making Charlotte a bike-friendly city. The problem is that these efforts are largely uncoordinated and often inconsistent over time. By becoming the hub organization for bicycling, Sustain Charlotte will provide full-time institutional stability to not only the events and ongoing programs that we implement, but also provide a steady foundation for Charlotte's bicycling community to share information, strategies, and workload.

(1) Formed a Cycling Advisory Group (CAG) composed of both cyclists and non-cyclists, including individuals from Charlotte's cycling community, bike-related businesses and nonprofits, and government transportation and planning staff as well as Parks and Recreation, CMS and CMPD.

(2) Held 12 bi-monthly meetings of the Cycling Advisory Group.

- The group has met twice as a full committee and 10 times partially, having determined

after the initial meeting that sub groups will work together on specific actions items and report back to the full group. Between formal meetings the group regularly communicates via email and phone calls.

(3) Identified a list of action steps to be taken by members in support of the goal of making Charlotte a more bikeable city. Followed up with members to ensure progress was being made and determined what support was needed.

- We have identified the following initiatives as workable action steps:

Leadership on Two Wheels, Greenways on Streets, Pilot projects to show success, Involve Knights, Panthers, Hornets, and individual team members who would join this effort.

Web site infrastructure:

1. Database of supportive research articles.
2. Database of cities and towns that successfully increasing cycling participation rates.
3. Database of key local supporters - both individuals and organizations.
4. Database of key local initiatives under way now.
5. List of current best practices and principles.

Collaborate with national support such as Knight Foundation, Transit Center, Numina, People for Bikes, 8-80 Cities.

Continue to build a following of engaged supporters (both conceptual and financial); Promote a compelling business case and articulate a compelling economic opportunity case for cycling to both the public and business leaders.

(4) Held 8 quarterly meetings with other organizations that offer cycling programs and events to facilitate collaboration and information sharing.

- We typically attend at least 15 meetings a month with other cycling related organizations, including regular meetings with B-Cycles, Trips for Kids, 12 area bike shop owners, Charlotte Bike Camp, Charlotte Department of Transportation, Park and Rec, businesses who support cycling, urban planners and designers, academics and so on.

(5) Attended local government meetings when policies and plans affecting cycling were on the agenda and shared this information with the public.

- We have attended every monthly Bicycle Advisory Committee meeting and have helped to promote the open position of Bicycle Program Manager at CDOT, attended multiple Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization (CRTPO) bicycle/pedestrian work group meetings, attended every Charlotte City Council Transportation and Planning meeting and reported back with blog posts.

(6) Completed a gap analysis of existing cycling programs and needs. Determined whether Sustain Charlotte or another organization is best suited to meet those needs.

- In the first year of the bicycle program we have met with many members of the local

cycling community, our local transportation and city leadership, as well as groups who work on a national level to achieve bike-friendliness in large American cities.

- We have determined that there is a great need in Charlotte for more consideration to be placed on the bicycle as a viable form of transportation throughout our community. Many of our local groups focused on cycling either see themselves as an outlet for recreation or a “club” that simply promotes riding as an activity. We have identified and formed relationships with these groups and actively work to involve them in the work we are doing, inform them of the opportunities that exist to get involved at the government level, and offer support for their collective programs.
- Additionally, our Department of Transportation has implemented a “low-hanging-fruit” strategy over the past 13 years (since the hiring of the first Bicycle Program Manager internally) that has resulted in a large increase in the number of white-stripe bike lanes. Unfortunately, these facilities offer no real network for people to safely connect across Charlotte. Our city has supported bicycles at a minimal level and is recognized by national organizations as struggling to implement the appropriate type of infrastructure and support cycling as a true transportation choice. However, we are facing new opportunities with the city as they have begun the process of hiring a new Bicycle Program Manager. As well, an impending update of our city’s Bicycle Plan should allow us to create a vision that includes infrastructure and facilities that have proven to be effective in getting more people on their bicycles.

(7) Developed a plan to meet identified needs in coordination with other cycling organizations.

- We plan on continuing to develop our partnership with our Department of Transportation and elected officials in order to bring the voice of the Charlotte cycling community to life. We are currently in the middle of a campaign to win the approval of a protected bicycle lane that would connect the Little Sugar Creek Greenway to the Irwin Creek Greenway via Uptown. Along with ample public support for this effort, we have gained an opportunity to partner with our City on a larger, network-oriented plan that is being developed to incorporate all of Uptown. We have remained true to the argument that the implementation of this plan will not only serve individuals who would like to use their bicycles as transportation to and from work in the Uptown area, but it will also be a true indication of our city dealing with a larger economic and social mobility issue that we face.

Evaluation: Current Status, Future Funding, Replication

We feel strongly that the program has made a significant impact on the Charlotte community so far. Daily we hear that bicycles are the “hot item” right now, both from the community at large and within the context of our cities leadership. We feel that our program has served to create this buzz around the the bicycle. Our campaign to connect two major greenways (one of which is the crux of the Cross Charlotte Trail) has been well received and supported by thousands of residents. In fact, this campaign has given us the unique opportunity to begin partnering with

the Charlotte Department of Transportation to create large-scale public demonstrations of protected bike lanes; a critical step in gaining true public input into the process.

Many groups around the country that we regularly talk to have supported our forecasted financial solution to the bicycle program. We feel strongly that getting the mission into local businesses and “training” them to support and evangelize on behalf of our mission will guarantee that we are culturally relevant. We have begun this process by forming partnerships with businesses to support bicycling. Biketoberfest, our annual event, has become much anticipated and celebrated. We have been able to form relationships with BBQ joints to breweries to major arts and cultural institutions as well as noted local developers. We want to generate income by tying our mission directly to the businesses in our community that make Charlotte such a great place to live.

Our program should serve as a model for other cities. We work on three fronts: internal advocacy within our city’s leadership and government, relevant and exciting public engagement, and communication and understanding of what is working in our region and around our country. We feel very strongly that by this time next year we will have been able to have made significant, easily recognizable changes in our cities landscape that will benefit all bicycle users. Our approach of tying the bicycle to social and economic justice, cultural vibrancy and civic engagement make “Let’s Bike” a program that any city could use regardless of whether or not a bicycle-led movement was afoot there or not. We would be thrilled and honored to share what we have learned with other organizations around the country who are working to make their communities safer for bicycling.