

BIKES BELONG MOVING AMERICA FORWARD

written by

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ABSTRACT: BIKES BELONG—MOVING AMERICA FORWARD

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Bikes Belong is the U.S. coalition of bicycle suppliers and retailers working together to put more people on bicycles more often. By working with members of Congress, awarding grassroots grants, communicating with national media, and creating partnerships, Bikes Belong works to make bicycling in the United States safe, convenient, and fun.

The Bikes Belong board of directors includes leaders from the top bicycle companies in the U.S. Their collective experience and knowledge of the bike business guide our organization, and their personal connections with business and government leaders are helping to create an influential force in America. Our 400+ members promote bicycling and support bicycle advocacy in their hometowns as well, working to make their communities bicycle friendly. Their membership dues comprise our \$1.3 million budget.

Bikes Belong was formed in 1998 in an effort to secure federal funding for bicycling in the transportation bill. Bikes Belong members have invested \$1 million in America Bikes, a coordinated lobbying effort of national and grassroots groups that helped increase federal spending on bicycle funding from \$7 million in 1990 to nearly \$1 billion annually, beginning this fiscal year.

Bikes Belong protected this investment by starting a grassroots grants program in 1999, which leverages federal funding for bike paths and trails in communities across the country. The grants program ensures that the federal money set aside for bicycling is used in the best possible way. Since its inception, the Bikes Belong grants program has awarded 116 grants totaling nearly \$1 million and leveraging \$450 million in federal, state, and private funding.

Bikes Belong also works to promote bicycling in the U.S. We continue to sponsor annual events such as the National Bike Summit and the Bicycle Leadership Conference, and we invest in important national programs such as the Bicycle Friendly Communities and the Safe Routes to School National Partnership. We publicize the benefits of bicycling through the national media and seek partnerships with major corporations and health organizations that strive to support healthy, active lifestyles for Americans.

The Bikes Belong model is unique, but it is replicable. Bicycling can be a driving force in a nation's or region's economy, and the leaders of the bicycling movement—be they retailers, suppliers, advocates, or riders—can form strong, influential partnerships that gain federal support and affect social change. Bicycling is moving America forward, and its positive benefits to communities, health, children, and the environment are becoming more important to our country—and our world—every day.

BIKES BELONG MOVING AMERICA FORWARD

I. WHO, WHAT, AND WHY

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

Bikes Belong was founded in 1998 by leaders of the U.S. bicycle industry to leverage government funding for bicycling in TEA-21, the six-year federal transportation bill approved that year. This committed group of bicycle suppliers and retailers recognized that to grow the bicycling business—so that everyone’s sales and profits increased—they needed to represent the U.S. bicycle industry with a strong and unified voice.

But Bikes Belong is much more than profit margins and bottom lines. These industry leaders are also motivated and committed to *putting more people on bicycles more often* because bicycling is good for America. The health benefits, energy savings, improved air quality, and connectivity bicycling brings to a community are many. Indeed, bicycling is a solution to many of the problems our country—and the world—faces today.

NUTS AND BOLTS

Bikes Belong was not an instant success. It took the commitment, vision, and influence of the U.S. bike industry’s top CEOs to develop initial funding and convince other companies to enlist in the effort.

Now, Bikes Belong’s 400+ members include most of the top U.S. bicycle suppliers and hundreds of successful retailers throughout the country. Bikes Belong members understand that their membership dollars are an investment in the future of bicycling in America, and they are proud to inspire the social change necessary to increase ridership in this country.

Member dues are determined as a percentage of annual sales. Suppliers pay \$750 per \$1 million (or .00075) of domestic bicycle-related revenue, and retailers pay according the following scale:

Annual Retail Revenue	Annual Dues
Less than \$300,000	\$100
\$300,000–\$500,000	\$200
\$500,000–\$1 million	\$500
Each additional \$1 million	\$500

These contributions from our members, roughly \$1.3 million annually, directly fund important national advocacy efforts, provide grassroots grants

in communities across the country, and promote bicycling as a safe, healthy, and fun activity for all Americans.

The Bikes Belong full-time staff is composed of an Executive Director and directors of Marketing & Communications, Grants & Research, and Membership & Development. These four people work together with part-time finance and program staff to fulfill Bikes Belong's mission of *putting more people on bicycles more often*. The top executives at Trek, Specialized, Giant, Raleigh, Shimano, SRAM, and other leading bike suppliers, as well as retailers, serve on Bikes Belong's volunteer board of directors and help guide the organization.

WHY BIKES BELONG?

The U.S. faces many challenges. Sedentary lifestyles; overweight, obesity, and related diseases; high health-care costs; sprawling and disconnected communities; road congestion; poor air quality; reduced family time; and stress afflict Americans in varying degrees every day.

Bicycling can help combat all of these problems. Riding a bicycle is a simple solution, and it's one that nearly every citizen—young or old, wealthy or disadvantaged—can utilize. Bikes Belong was formed to enable and encourage more people to ride bicycles by working to make communities in the U.S. more friendly to cyclists. We believe that bicycling is good for Americans and good for America, and we're helping to move our country forward on two wheels.

II. NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

FUNDING FOR BICYCLING IN U.S. TRANSPORTATION LAW

Bikes Belong's first big initiative was to lobby for increased funds for bicycle facilities and programs in the federal transportation bill, TEA-21 (Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century). Before this bill was signed into law in 1998, less than \$2 million was spent annually on bicycle and pedestrian projects in the U.S. However, when the bike industry came together with bike- and trail-advocacy groups—including the Adventure Cycling Association, Association of Pedestrian and Bicycling Professionals, International Mountain Bicycling Association, League of American Bicyclists, National Center for Bicycling and Walking, Rails to Trails Conservancy, and Thunderhead Alliance—to spearhead a lobbying effort, called **America Bikes** (americabikes.org), Congress listened. The bill was signed with \$400 million per year allocated for bicycling and pedestrian projects.

America Bikes—primarily funded by Bikes Belong—was poised to lobby again when the bill expired. Bikes Belong supplier and retailer members from across the country came to Capitol Hill in March of 2004 and again in 2005

and talked to their state Senators and Representatives about the benefits of bicycling. They encouraged these members of Congress to include funding for important bicycling programs and projects in the next bill.

The results of this effort were impressive. In August, 2005, President Bush signed SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act—a Legacy for Users), making available close to \$1 billion dollars per year for bicycle and pedestrian projects through 2009.

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL—INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2/3 of school children in the U.S. walked or biked to school 30 years ago. Now, less than 13% of our children get to school on foot or by bike. Public health officials in the U.S. agree that, in addition to the 30 minutes per day of physical activity adults need in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle, children need another 20 minutes of activity several days per week. Yet 78% of American boys and girls fall short of this goal (saferoutestoschool.org). Not surprisingly, one in four children in the U.S. is clinically obese (CDC).

To make matters worse, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) reports that roughly 25% of morning traffic is caused by parents driving their kids to school. This percentage escalates to as much as 85% in some communities, and congestion and poor air quality escalate with it.

As a result, America Bikes lobbied for a national Safe Routes to School program to be funded as part of SAFETEA-LU. This program would develop and promote facilities and programs that enable children to walk and bicycle to and from school safely. On the day the President signed SAFETEA-LU, Bikes Belong formed the Safe Routes to School National Partnership to be sure that the \$612 million allocated for the national Safe Routes program—not less than \$1 million for each state per year, over five years—would be put to the best possible use in all 50 states.

This important initiative will enable and encourage more children (and their parents) to ride bicycles to school, to parks and recreation areas, and within their communities. The funding will go toward building bike lanes, bike paths, and safe crossings near schools. It will also help to implement crossing guard programs, “bike trains” and “walking school busses,” and other education and encouragement programs that make bicycling a safe, efficient, and fun mode of transportation for children.

Bikes Belong sees a variety of benefits in putting more *kids* on bicycles more often. More than 40% of those who started biking between the ages of 5 and 18 spend an average of 29 years participating in the sport, compared to only 9% of those who start at ages older than 18 (Outdoor Industry Association). In order to change social behavior and get American adults out of their cars and onto their bikes, we need to start with the kids!

COMPLETE STREETS—ROADS FOR ALL USERS

One of the primary reasons Americans don't ride their bikes for transportation—and even for recreation—is that they don't feel they have safe places to ride. In fact, a recent opinion poll showed that 52% of Americans would ride their bikes more if they could access paths, trails, or lanes designed for cycling (completethestreets.org).

Unfortunately, many of the roads and streets in the U.S. are designed for one mode of transportation, and one mode only: the motor vehicle. One result is that a disproportionate number of pedestrians and bicyclists are killed in traffic accidents. While 10% of trips are made on foot or by bicycle (National Household Travel Survey, 2000), 13% of traffic deaths are pedestrians or bicyclists (Fatality Analysis Reporting System).

Yet few federal transportation safety dollars have been spent to make it safer for people to walk and bicycle. On average, states are spending less than 2% of their federal safety funds on projects to improve bicycle and pedestrian safety. In fact, 22 states have spent none of their designated safety money on bicycle or pedestrian projects, despite fatality rates in those states that range from 5% to 28% (Federal Highway Administration).

Bikes Belong has invested in the new **National Complete Streets Campaign** to ensure that as we move forward, streets and roads in America are designed to accommodate bicyclists. We're also ready to lobby for the **Fair Share for Safety** initiative when the transportation bill comes up for re-evaluation in 2009, to insure that safety money is spent proportionally on facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians.

BICYCLE FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

Bikes Belong also provides key funding support to the League of American Bicyclist's **Bicycle Friendly Communities** program. This initiative encourages communities throughout the U.S. to become more bicycle friendly by creating a bicycle master plan; hiring a bicycle coordinator; building bicycle infrastructure like paths, lanes, routes, and trails; and promoting bicycling through encouragement programs like "bike to work day" and similar events. This program has awarded bronze, silver, gold, and platinum designations to 52 communities nationwide, and it inspires cities to stay on track and reach their bicycle-friendly goals.

III. GRASSROOTS GRANTS—PROTECTING OUR INVESTMENT

BIKES BELONG GRANTS PROGRAM

In 1999, Bikes Belong established a grants program designed to leverage the funding allocated to bike projects in TEA-21, along with other funding. This effort would help insure that federal transportation dollars were spent on important bike facilities and programs.

Since the grants program began, Bikes Belong has given 116 grants to grassroots bicycling groups, trail-advocacy organizations, and municipalities across the country. We've funded projects in 37 states and the District of Columbia, totaling close to \$1 million and leveraging nearly \$450 million in federal, state, and private funds.

FACILITIES GRANTS

The facilities grant awards have helped both rural and urban communities build bike paths, lanes, routes, and trails. In just seven years, funding from the grants program has helped build more than 1,300 miles of trail, connecting nearly 5,500 trail facilities nationwide.

EDUCATION GRANTS

Education grants have helped to launch unique initiatives like the Underground Railroad Bicycling Route, a scenic and historic cycling route that will trace the path slaves followed to freedom in the 1800s; the Northern California High School Mountain Bike League, which is establishing mountain biking as a school-sanctioned sport in a growing number of public schools in California and beyond; and various bike-safety programs that are helping to get more people riding bikes *safely* in communities across the country.

ADVOCACY GRANTS

Through the grants program, Bikes Belong is also able to support grassroots bike-advocacy groups as they work to make bicycling safe, convenient, and fun at the local level.

One of the key components of Bikes Belong's grant application is support from the local bicycle industry—usually area bike shops and sporting-goods stores, and sometimes area suppliers. Applicants must submit letters of support from their local bike shops, and the more thorough the letters, the better the proposal's chances of receiving Bikes Belong funding. The Grants Committee believes that if bicyclists are committed to a project, it will succeed. Trails will be well used, education programs will affect change, and advocacy groups will be sustainable if the bicycle community is excited about and invested in them.

The Grants Program is one of Bikes Belong's most tangibly successful initiatives. It's a way for the bicycle industry to invest directly in communities and to insure a bright future for bicycling by helping to build safe places to ride, educate people about how to ride safely, and promote the benefits of bicycling through grassroots groups. It's also a way for Bikes Belong to reinvest member dollars on a local level, by supporting bicycling projects that will benefit our retail members and their neighborhoods.

IV. PROMOTION & PARTNERSHIPS

RESEARCH—MAKING A CASE FOR BICYCLING

One of Bikes Belong's biggest challenges is quantifying the impact of the U.S. bike industry—and of bicycling as an activity—on the economy, on health, and on the environment. We know that bicycling is good for America, but we need the numbers to prove it.

We need to make a compelling case for:

- The economic impact of bicycling on the U.S. economy
- The economic impact of bike paths and trails on adjacent communities
- The economic impact of bicycling events on local economies
- The health benefits of bicycling and particularly bike commuting
- The healthcare costs saved when more people ride bicycles
- Improved air quality due to bicycling
- The amount of oil saved when people make short trips by bike rather than by car

In order to produce relevant numbers that quantify bicycling in America, Bikes Belong is placing a greater focus on research. The facts and statistics collected through research projects we are funding will help us promote bicycling to local and state governments as well as members of the U.S. Congress. These numbers will help us increase the funding for bicycling in the next transportation bill and help generate publicity for bicycling as a safe, efficient, healthy, and *fun* mode of transportation in the U.S.

These numbers will also help us as we promote bicycling through the national media. Bikes Belong receives calls on a daily basis from members of the media—from small-town papers to well-known periodicals like the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* and from staff writers at the *Associated Press*. We need to be able to provide reporters with accurate figures that show bicycling's positive impact on our society, our economy, and our world.

BROAD-BASED PARTNERSHIPS

Bikes Belong has a solid base of bike industry support through our members. However, in order to move forward, we need to garner support from beyond the bicycle industry. By forging bonds with non-endemic partners that want

to align themselves with bicycling because is good for the health of our communities and our country, we'll expand Bikes Belong's influence in America. Potential partners include:

- Medical, Health, and Wellness Organizations
- Youth Organizations
- Developers, Landscape Architects, and Urban Planners
- Businesses and Corporations
- Government Agencies
- Foundations

These partnerships will enable Bikes Belong to develop an even stronger presence on Capitol Hill, to give more grant awards to communities and grassroots groups, and to strengthen and enhance our promotion efforts. They will also help us to broaden our scope and to come up with new and exciting ways to put more people on bicycles more often.

V. MOVING FORWARD—THE BRIGHT FUTURE OF BICYCLING

As we move forward, Bikes Belong is committed to reaching clear goals that will inspire social change and help to solve some of America's biggest challenges. We plan to continue to:

- Increase the number of bicyclists in America by 10 million by 2010 while decreasing the traffic accidents involving bicyclists.
- Reduce our dependence on foreign oil and improve air quality by promoting bicycling as a safe and effective mode of transportation.
- Encourage more children to ride their bikes to school and in their communities, giving them a sense of independence and inspiring them to be bike enthusiasts as adults.
- Curb obesity and inactivity in the U.S.—and related diseases and health care costs—by enabling and encouraging more people to ride bicycles more often.

We'll do this by:

- Strengthening bicycling's presence on Capitol Hill and in the national media.
- Helping to create safe places for people of all ages to ride their bikes, effectively *putting more people on bicycles more often*.

- Growing our organization and influence through our members and partnerships with other industries, businesses, and organizations.

The Bikes Belong model and the goals we've set to move America forward can be adopted by any country that wants to promote and enhance opportunities for bicycling. The key ingredient for success is a committed group of bicycle industry professionals with a desire to affect social change.

While we have a long way to go toward making the United States a bicycle friendly country, we've come a long way, too. Bikes *do* belong, on every continent, in every country, and in every city, town, and village on our earth. Organizations like Bikes Belong—and the strong groups that are working to promote bicycling across the globe—will make our world a bicycle friendly community.

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