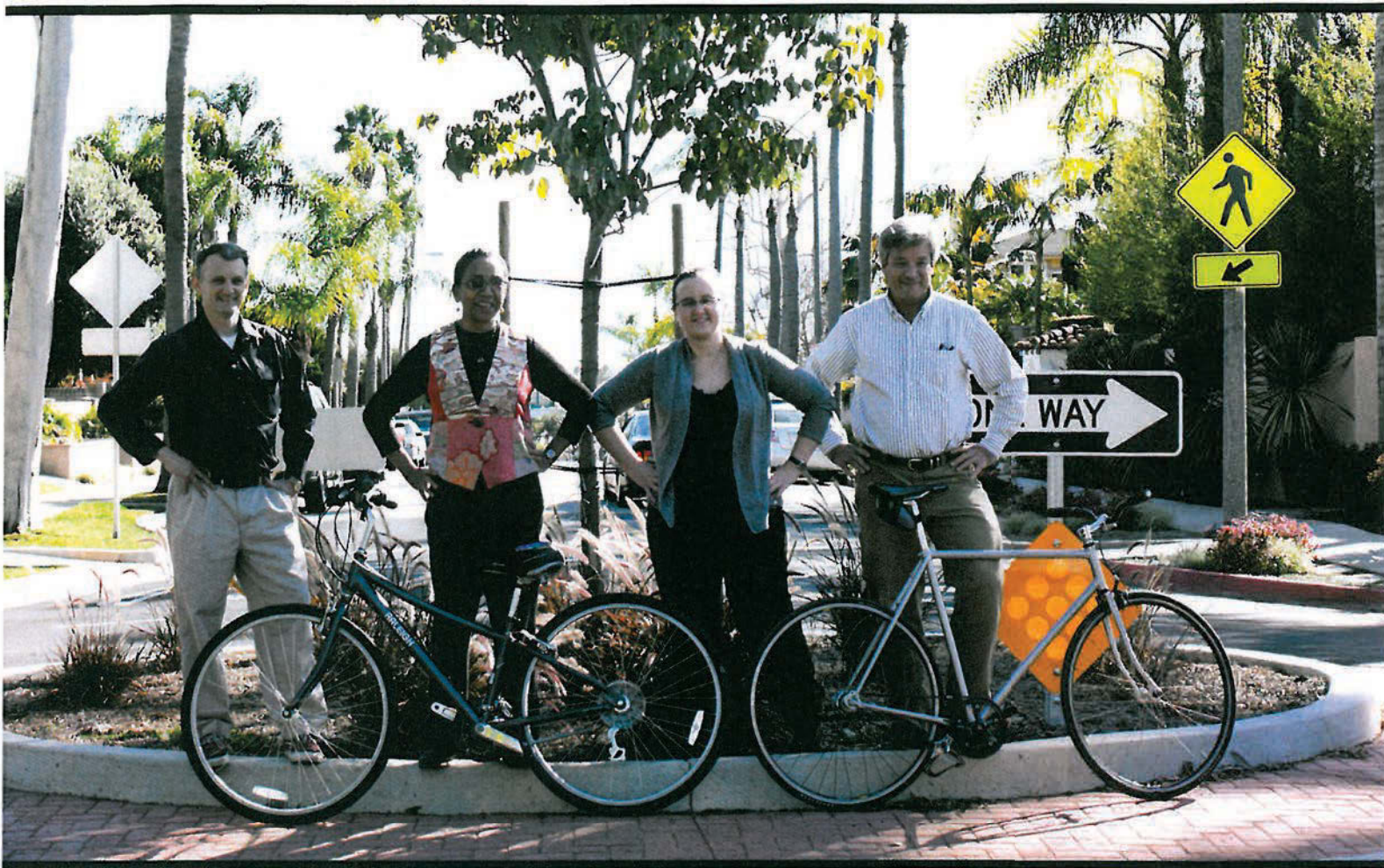




LIVE 
longbeach
COASTAL LIVING CITY STYLE

Health Fitness





Pedal Power

On any given day, you can find Emily Tanaka on her trusty green Schwinn, riding across town from her Willmore City Historic District neighborhood to Belmont Shore or Bixby Knolls. On the weekend, she might be out for some exercise on a relaxing 45-minute ride up the Los Angeles River Bikeway.

"It's 72 degrees outside and I could have been out in a car," she said. "But my goal is quality of life and to enjoy where I live."

Tanaka is one of thousands of residents for whom bicycles are an important part of a healthy lifestyle and a great way to see the City. Her neighbor, Cheryl Perry, agrees, "It's amazing what you can see when you are not in a car, you see a lot more of the beauty of your own city."

Combine great weather, flat terrain, scenic landscapes of diverse

neighborhoods, as well as a long stretch of beach, and you have the foundation for one of the City's most attainable goals – to make Long Beach the most bicycle-friendly city in the nation.

When it happens, you can credit a progressive City Council, an energized city staff, active community leaders, and the input of residents for creating a successful bicycling philosophy. It is a vision that can be found in its ten-year old Bike Master Plan, a comprehensive plan to incorporate bicycles into the civic culture, where riding your bike will always be a safe, fun and easy way to make your way around Long Beach.

"We have all of the elements that we need to have a really active and healthy community, and creating the infrastructure that would invite people to try riding their bikes is just a wonderful step," said Sumire



Charles Gandy, Courtney Aguirre, Steve Tweed, Sunrise Gant (L-R)

With great weather, a progressive Bike Master Plan, and more than 100 miles of bikepaths, Long Beach looks to become the most bicycle-friendly city in the nation.

WRITTEN BY DAWN MORI
PHOTOGRAPHED BY TAKA AND NICOLE TSUBAKI

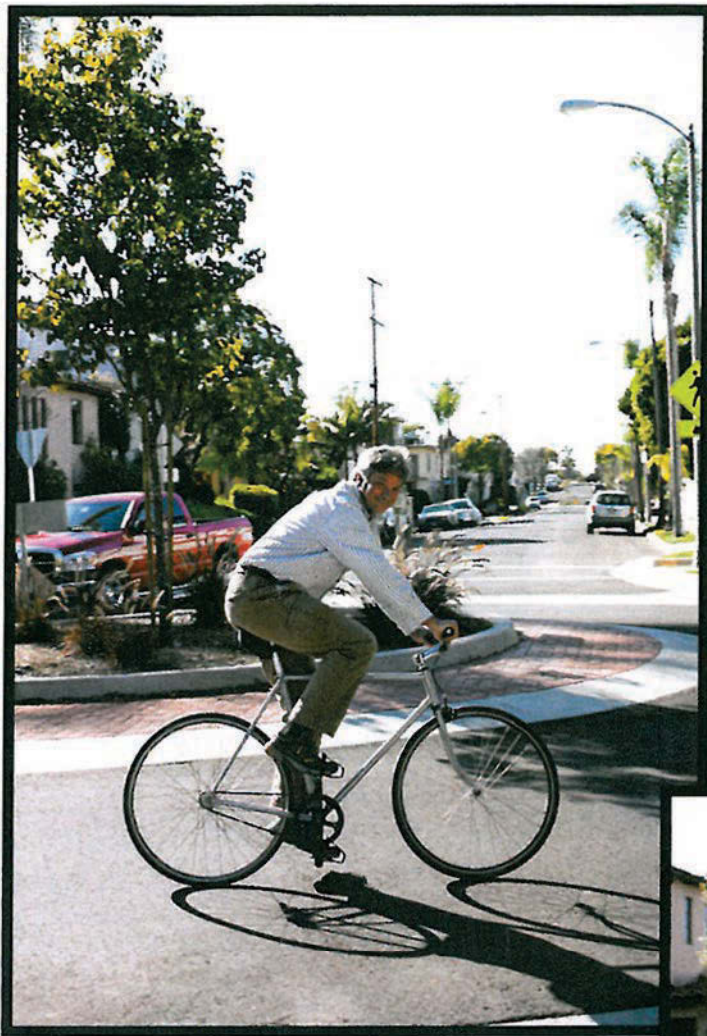
Gant, the City's long-time Transportation Programs Officer.

The original Bike Master Plan was approved by the City Council in 2001 and Gant estimated that 90% to 95% of the projects in the plan have been accomplished or are underway. Many of the projects were completed using more than \$20 million in outside funding secured by Gant to support City bicycling programs.

By the end of this year, there will be 122 miles of designated and shared bicycle lanes throughout Long Beach. These lanes include three high-profile pilot projects – the green lane "sharrows," short for 'shared lane arrows', where bicycles and cars share the right-hand lane on Second Street in Belmont Shore, the Vista Bike Boulevard in Belmont Heights, and the soon to be completed Broadway and Third Street Separated Bikeways in Downtown.

These projects, along with an active outreach program managed by Charlie Gandy, the City's Mobility Coordinator, have led to Long Beach being named one of the Top 25 Bike-Friendly Cities in America by Cycling Magazine and an official bicycle friendly community by the League of American Bicyclists. Long Beach also was the first city in the nation to have its own Bikestation, the soon to be expanded bike-transit center on Broadway and Long Beach Boulevard.

"The health and fitness angle on this is very powerful," said Gandy. "Where there are walkways, people walk to work. Where there are bike lanes, people ride to work. And the inverse is true. Where these don't exist, people don't exercise much and we're starting to recognize that we can fine-tune the built environment to encourage a more active, healthy lifestyle. That's what we're doing in Long Beach."



California. Separated Bikeways can be found in major metropolitan areas, such as New York and Paris, and create a protected bike lane, adjacent to the sidewalk, but physically separated from car traffic by a median.

The City's Separated Bikeways were inspired by a 2006 visit from Enrique Penalosa, the forward-thinking former Mayor of Bogota, Colombia. Separated Bikeways are designed to make bicycling more welcoming for people of all skill levels, especially those who live or work in Downtown. Running from Alamitos Avenue to Golden Avenue, traffic will be controlled with newly installed signals, directing both bicycles and cars with exclusive turn arrows and lights.

In the neighborhoods, a third pilot program created a beautiful bicycle and pedestrian pathway in Belmont Heights. Funded by state and county grants, the Vista Bike Boulevard opened last December as a 1.2 mile section of East Vista Street was reconfigured with two roundabouts and six traffic circles. A new traffic signal also was installed so bicyclists and pedestrians can cross Redondo Avenue safely while cars are redirected to the north. According to Gandy, this new strategy eliminates driver sightlines of a straight uninterrupted street, reduces the incentive for motorists to speed, and creates an inviting avenue where bicycles are given priority.

The best way to experience this bike-friendliness is to head toward the ocean, where two of the City's three pilot projects create bicycle lanes through some of the area's busiest business districts. The Belmont Shore green sharrows and the Broadway and Third Street Separated Bikeways provide a solution for bicyclists who may be intimidated by riding on the streets due to busy traffic and are prohibited from riding on business district sidewalks due to the Municipal Code.

In Belmont Shore, the right-hand lanes on Second Street were painted bright green with bicycle stencils and direction arrows, signifying bicycles have permission to share the lane with cars. Based on a similar program in Salt Lake City, the Second Street sharrows were constructed as a pilot study in June 2009 and recently were approved as a permanent program. The latest survey shows a 100% increase in the total number of bicyclists on Second Street and an impressive 300% increase in the number of bicyclists in the sharrows, all without an increase in bike-car conflicts.

Heading toward Downtown, the Broadway and Third Street Separated Bikeways are scheduled to open this month and will be the first separated bikeway in Southern





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– Sumire Gant, Transportation Programs Officer for the City of Long Beach.

The Vista Bike Boulevard now provides a safe route for school children on bicycles as well as pedestrians, adult bicyclists, and others who benefit from a traffic-calmed environment. Future Bike Boulevards are in the works for Sixth Street from Junipero to Bellflower, Fifteenth Street from Magnolia to Pacific Coast Highway, and the Daisy Avenue corridor from Broadway up to the northern city limits. Serving a number of elementary and secondary schools, as well as Cal State Long Beach, these Bike Boulevards will provide all residents with safe bicycle routes that run adjacent to major corridors for convenience.

While these innovative pilot programs have provided Gant and her team of Gandy, Steve Tweed, City Transportation Planner, and Courtney Aguirre, who manages the bikelongbeach.org website and the free bike rack program for businesses (see sidebar), with plenty of success to hang their bike helmets on, the City still continues to use more traditional methods to create new bike paths.

Each time Federal stimulus dollars were used to repave streets and repaint traffic lines, Tweed was out on the street, measuring each route's width and adding new bike lanes where possible. Since 2009, the City has added 35 miles of new bike lanes that now include sections of Los Coyotes Diagonal, Bixby Road, Junipero Avenue, and Wardlow Road.

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It all rolls into an exciting new infrastructure, part of a greater vision to have bicycle-friendly pathways in every neighborhood, allowing residents to travel wherever they need to go on a bike. It is part of an ongoing bicycle mindset, which has long been part of the City's history. When members of the community first encouraged the City Council to adopt the original Bike Master Plan ten years ago it was considered a cutting edge motion. Now the plan is ready for its next iteration.

"We have a really active community of people who care about riding the bike lanes but, even though they may feel safe riding their bikes, a lot of them have kids, family and friends who are not as comfortable. So they're interested in not just riding themselves but keeping Long Beach friendly for other people who may not have the skill set they have," said Gant.

Current grant-funded programs include presenting bike safety classes to every elementary and middle school during the next two years so all K-8 students will be educated on bike safety. The City also received a grant to develop four additional bike-friendly retail districts in the East Village, Fourth Street's Retro Row, Bixby Knolls, and Anaheim Street.



"What we're doing in many ways is simply communicating how we use bike lanes on the street—we're teaching kids how to ride bikes safely through the schools and our police are enforcing the law across the board," said Gandy. "We're starting to instill a bicycle culture in Long Beach as a consequence of all of this, and that is what's exciting."

With numerous community leaders, including Tony Cruz, the City's Bike Ambassador, Mark Bixby, the director of the annual Long Beach Bike Festival, and Mayor Bob Foster, whose Tour of Long Beach raised thousands of dollars for Miller Children's Hospital last year, the City continues to raise its profile as it looks to take the lead as the nation's most bike-friendly city.

One future plan may create a seamless bicycle loop, connecting the Shoreline Pedestrian Bikepath, San Gabriel River Bike Trail, Heartwell Park Bike Path, and Los Angeles River Bikeway, a favorite of long-time bicycle advocates such as Willmore City resident, Tanaka.

"We are really focused on trying to create a livable, healthy and active community for everybody, whether you haven't ridden your bike in a hundred years or if you ride every day, our goal is to create a place where anybody can go out and ride their bike—I consider each bike lane a welcome mat," said Gant. "We're focusing on the entire city because we want everybody to be able to make the choice to ride or walk and just really enjoy the city we live in." ●

BIKE MASTER PLAN COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

Residents are invited to help create the blueprint for the City's updated Bike Master Plan at one of five remaining community workshops. These workshops began in January and continue through the end of March, held once in each of the nine City Council districts.

Charlie Gandy, Mobility Coordinator for the City of Long Beach, will lead neighborhood bike rides before all Saturday community workshops to help residents explore the bicycling potential in their neighborhoods. During each community workshop, children can attend Bike Rodeos to learn important bike safety skills.

Call 562-570-6667 or email bikelongbeach@longbeach.gov for more information.

Thursday, March 3
Los Altos Library
5614 E. Britton Drive
6:00 – 8:00pm

Saturday, March 5
El Dorado Park West – Senior Center
2800 Studebaker Road

Bike Ride, 1:00pm – 2:30pm
Community Workshop, 2:30pm – 4:00pm

Saturday, March 12
Expo Center in Bixby Knolls
4321 Atlantic Avenue

Bike Ride, 10:00 – 11:30am
Community Workshop, 11:30am – 1:00pm

Saturday, March 19
Bixby Park
130 Cherry Avenue

Bike Ride, 10:00 – 11:30am
Community Workshop, 11:30am – 1:00pm

Wednesday, March 23
Mark Twain Library
1401 E. Anaheim
6:00 – 8:00pm

FREE BIKE RACKS FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

The City provides colorful and creative bicycle racks, free to any local business, through a grant from the State of California and Federal stimulus funds. More than 800 bike racks can already be seen around the City. Contact Courtney Aguirre, Transportation Programs Planner, at courtney.aguirre@longbeach.gov or 562-570-6667 for more information.