placesforbikes

BETTER BICYCLING, BETTER BUSINESS

A Guide for Retailers
HOW TO GET INVOLVED

As a member of the bicycle industry, you can play a key role in efforts to accelerate local bicycling projects. This guide, part of a new PeopleForBikes program called PlacesForBikes, shows you how:

» Five easy ways to get involved in bicycling projects in your community and to help your customers engage. Tips from retailers will help you get started.

» Creative ideas to get more people riding, more often — thus building your business and growing the base of support for better bike infrastructure.

Even small steps — implementing one or two of the ideas shared here — will make a difference. The simple scorecard, which is included at the end of this guide, will help you track your involvement and effectiveness.

Your efforts will be rewarded with loyalty from customers who see that you care about your community and the quality of everyone’s bike-riding experiences.

“There’s no shortage of places to get products or get a bike, and I do think people are still interested in supporting companies that they believe in. We want to be involved, we want to be part of the community, and we feel like the community pays us back for that.”

— Scott Helvie, Chief Operating Officer, Bicycle Garage Indy in Indianapolis, IN

Better biking takes many paths

Creating and marketing safe, convenient places to ride isn’t just good for your community. It also boosts your bottom line. Retail sales increase when cities make streets, paths and trails better for people on bikes.

“Better places to ride come in all shapes and sizes. Some, like long-distance rail trails and big bike parks, are major undertakings. Other are simpler and quicker, like pop-up protected bike lanes on city streets or a new pump track on a vacant lot.

Long term, PlacesForBikes envisions communities with complete networks of better bike lanes, quiet side streets and multi-use paths that connect people to work, school and play, including great road rides and mountain biking opportunities nearby.

“If we advocate for safer places to ride, more bike lanes, better connectivity, then people will see our store as a bicycling destination,” says Scott Helvie. “That will ultimately lead to more people riding bikes, and obviously we’ll try to capture our share of that business.”
1. Speak up

As a business owner, employer and taxpayer, you have political clout. Elected leaders will pay attention when you explain how better bicycling infrastructure bolsters your business and the local economy.

CONNECT WITH LOCAL ADVOCATES

If you’re not already up to speed, find people who know about plans to build bike projects in your community. Your local bicycling advocacy group, if there is one, is a great place to start. Talk with your customers — many will already be involved in the local cycling community. PeopleForBikes can also help you connect with the right people.

SHOW UP

Ask your local bicycling champions where your voice is needed. Is there a public meeting scheduled on a proposed bike lane? Can you put in a call to your city council person? Ask for talking points and draft letters that you can customize and send to elected officials and/or local newspapers.

“It’s amazing what showing up does,” says Gil McCormick. “A few people showing up to a meeting can make a dramatic difference in the minds of cities, counties and even the state.”

— Anne Mader, owner of The Bike Lane in Reston and Springfield, VA

New bike trail boosts sales and builds support for future projects

James Moore, owner of Moore’s Bike Shop in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, says his foray into bike advocacy began accidentally in 1992 with a meeting at his store to explore converting an abandoned rail line into a biking and walking trail. At first, Moore didn’t imagine the positive impact that trail would have on his business and the broader community.

When the trail opened in 2000, Moore says, his store revenue doubled. And it has remained at that level or higher ever since.

What gives Moore the most satisfaction is seeing all the people and families on the trail when he walks it on Sundays. “Those folks would not be biking were it not for that trail,” he says.
GET TO KNOW YOUR LOCAL OFFICIALS

Reach out to your city council members and other elected officials, and to people in the city transportation, recreation and planning departments. Many may already be your customers! Ask them for a short meeting to introduce yourself. Then, when new projects or new threats come up, they will know you are interested and seek your opinion and support.

“Just set an appointment with your local government leader and say, ‘I’d like to come in and talk about my business, and ask you to support the success of my business.’”

— Hill Abell, owner of Bicycle Sport Shop in Austin, TX

Be prepared with a shorthand summary of your business that shows how it contributes to the local economy. Here is a good example from Mary’s Bike Shop on what to cover:

- Your years in operation and number of employees
- Your annual revenue
- The amounts you pay each year in local, state and federal taxes
- The value of your donations (cash, bikes and other products, mechanic support and meeting space) to local causes
- What your store does for kids

ENGAGE WITH OTHER BUSINESSES

Connect with other businesses through the Chamber of Commerce and your local business district.

Talk about how better bike access and sidewalks can improve sales for all stores in the area. Remind them that traffic congestion can hamper business. Good biking experiences can be a powerful draw for tourists and visitors. Communities that offer great places for bikes are quieter and more appealing.

“If you connect other businesses into whatever campaign you’re working on, that directs how elected officials vote and how they allocate resources,” James Moore says.

— Hill Abell, owner of Bicycle Sport Shop in Austin, TX

CONNECT BIKING AND THE LOCAL ECONOMY

» Providing safe places to ride increases ridership.
» Street improvements that increase bike and pedestrian traffic boost retail sales.
» People who shop by bike spend more over time than those who shop by car because they make more trips.
» Bicycle trails and lanes increase the value of nearby property.
» Biking is big business. For example, in Colorado more than one million people ride, and bicycling contributes $1.1 billion annually to the economy.

Mountain bike trails spur biking boom in Northwest Arkansas

Tim Robinson didn’t plan on becoming a bike store owner.

But after he helped build a new mountain bike trail in Bentonville, Arkansas, he and a riding buddy looked at each other and wondered, “How are we going to help this hobby grow?” The town had no bike shop where people could get their bikes fixed or that could be an advocate for the sport. So they decided to open their own, right on the new trail.

Phat Tire Bike Shop quickly became a champion of mountain biking in Northwest Arkansas, sponsoring events and trail improvements throughout the region. A decade later, Phat Tire has six locations, four of them on trails. And the area has developed into an internationally recognized mountain biking destination, with close to 40 miles of singletrack in Bentonville alone.

The trails have been a boon to the local economy, says Robinson, who also serves on the Bentonville City Council. People come to ride, then stay in the city’s hotels and eat at its restaurants. Property values near trails have gone up, raising tax revenue for schools. As a result, Robinson was able to convince the city to allocate funds for regular trail maintenance, instead of relying on volunteers. And Phat Tire continues to grow, recently adding two locations in Oklahoma.
2. Encourage your customers to get involved

Give your customers opportunities to contribute their voice, time and money to support biking in your community. Together, you’ll magnify your influence. And you’ll win your customers’ loyalty.

**BE THEIR EYES AND EARS**

Alert your customers when there is a local opportunity or threat to bicycling, and ask them to get involved. Use your customer list to send emails targeting people in key ZIP codes or who have indicated their interest in a particular type of riding.

Use social media, email and in-store signage to get the word out. The local bike buy-sell-trade Facebook page can be an ideal place to reach the community, says Brandee Lepak, owner of Global Bikes in Phoenix, Arizona.

Provide basic sample letters or talking points (ask your leading community bike advocate contact for these).

**MAKE IT EASY FOR CUSTOMERS TO VOLUNTEER OR DONATE TO LOCAL CYCLING CAUSES**

- Encourage customers to organize or volunteer for trailwork parties. Help pay for supplies, and maybe throw in beer and burgers. Tim Robinson, of Phat Tire Bike Shop in Arkansas, says he spends about 90 percent of his marketing budget on fun cycling events and infrastructure improvements, “because then naturally it’s going to lead to more people being out there.”

- When people come in looking for used cardboard bike boxes, charge them $10, and donate the proceeds to your local bicycling advocacy group.

- Host a fun ride or in-store event to raise money for a local bike project or cycling organization. It’s a cost-effective way to get customers through your doors.

“For us, the time we invest in advocacy is so much more valuable than putting out an ad somewhere,” says Anne Mader. “We get new customers from it, and then we also get loyalty from customers who really see us giving back to our community.”

**SPONSOR AN ADVOCACY NIGHT**

Partner with local biking groups to hold a networking evening focused on local cycling issues. Invite local officials so they can learn about the power of bicycling. Ask local restaurants, breweries or businesses to donate food and drinks.

One targeted email helps sway the debate

In Austin, Texas, a broad street considered unsafe for people walking and biking was slated for improvements that included a protected bike lane.

Hill Abell, owner of Bicycle Sport Shop, emailed people in the neighborhood, alerting them to a public meeting about the project. About 35 people showed up to support the bike lane, Abell says, and their safety message overrode a handful who complained that parking spots would be lost.

“One of the things bike shops can do is inform their customers about potential projects that are going on,” Abell says. “Our customers really appreciate that.”
3. Get new people on bikes

When new riders associate your shop with a fun first experience, they’ll keep coming back.

LEAD EASY, SHORT-DISTANCE RIDES

Get creative, but aim to keep it fun, social and unintimidating. If you’re short on staff, you can offer experienced customers a modest gift card to lead rides. Make it a rule that no one gets left behind.

Some ideas:

» "No-Lycra" rides from your store to a coffee shop, brew pub or ice cream shop and back

» Tours of the local bike networks that connect to trails, parks or museums

» Mountain bike rides for women, children and families

» Progressive beginner rides that start with 10 miles and work up to 25 miles in the course of a month

ENCOURAGE THE WHOLE FAMILY TO JOIN IN

Create family-friendly events, such as a bicycle Halloween candy hunt, and encourage customers to bring non-riding family and friends.

At Global Bikes, Brandee Lepak runs what she dubs the “Nacho Ride,” because “it’s not your average ride.”

The 4-mile ride for all ages starts late, makes frequent stops and serves plenty of snacks. “It’s a great way for them to get into mountain biking as a family, because they know there’s this non-intimidating group they can ride with,” Lepak says.

“There’s a real sense of connection that you’re able to form with these people who are just starting out. They’re trying to navigate how to become bike riders, and we are there with them on that journey. It creates a sense of loyalty.”

— Brandee Lepak, owner of Global Bikes in Phoenix, AZ

HELP KIDS GET EXCITED ABOUT RIDING

Support local or national programs that teach children safe cycling skills and get them out biking. Assist with trips and events, donate gear or help refurbish bikes, and encourage your customers to volunteer.

» Trips for Kids, with chapters around the country, takes at-risk youth mountain biking.

» NICA (National Interscholastic Cycling Association) develops youth mountain biking programs. The 19 (and growing) regional and state leagues coach interscholastic teams and sponsor races.

“We think NICA is one of the best things for this industry,” Tim Robinson says. “If you can get kids started riding earlier, not only will that potentially be a hobby they carry forward for the rest of their lives, then their siblings and parents want to do it too.”

OFFER MAINTENANCE 101 CLASSES

When your customers feel comfortable doing basic maintenance, they will continue to ride — and to shop with you.

» Host women’s maintenance nights. Wine and cheese is optional, but recommended!

» Offer basic maintenance and fitting tutorials to anyone who buys a new bike.

» Hold “lunch-and-learns” on maintenance skills and other topics.

SUPPORT EVENTS AIMED AT NEW RIDERS

Sponsor and participate in events such as bike-to-work and bike-to-school days, and open-street events geared to getting people riding.

Cultivating the next generation of riders

Every Monday for the past 10 years, The Bike Lane’s junior ride program has taken children mountain biking at two parks near the Springfield, Virginia shop. Many of the children have become bike racers, and a few have even gotten college cycling team scholarships.

Not only have these young people been loyal customers, buying many bikes over the years, but their parents have started to ride too, owner Anne Mader says. “They see their kids’ passion for this, and all of a sudden, they’re like, ‘I really need to get a bike,’” she says. “So it goes from one kid who wants to ride to the entire family wanting to ride.”
4. Help your customers ride more

They will spend more with you!

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO TRY A NEW KIND OF RIDING

» Lead a variety of beginner rides and classes to encourage people to try something new.

» For road riders interested in getting out of traffic, offer mountain bike and dirt road bike demos and classes.

» Hold mountain bike demos at trailheads to promote both your products and local trails.

» Help people get comfortable riding for transportation by leading tours of the city network and showing them how to combine biking and public transit options.

HOST WOMEN’S RIDES AND EVENTS

» Lead regular rides for women. Partner with vendors to offer discounts for ride participants. “It gets them in the store every time they do a ride from the store,” Hill Abell says.

» Hold women’s nights out, with rides followed by a social gathering. Bring in vendors, and serve drinks and snacks.

“The social aspect is the No. 1 success piece” of store-sponsored rides and events, McCormick says. “They get to connect with each other, encourage one another. It builds a camaraderie that I think we all are looking for in sports.”

OFFER INCENTIVES TO RIDE

» Create a customer riding program with incentives for miles, hours or days ridden. Data can be uploaded from free smart phone apps.

» Offer a gift, such as an insulated mug, for bicycle buyers who ride a certain number of times in the first month after purchase.

» Develop a store cycling club. Participants pay a modest membership fee and get a free jersey, special promotions and access to a VIP tent at events. They will encourage friends to ride and to shop with you.

Help customers find great places to ride

- Many towns and cities offer free print and online route maps. Stock copies in your shop.

- Check out the growing number of user-generated online resources, including: mtbproject.com blackriver.cc traillink.com

- Maintain a ride blackboard with rides of the week — both on pavement and on dirt. Update it like clockwork.

5. Join the PeopleForBikes Movement

PeopleForBikes is a national group created and directed by bike industry leaders. Our 1,000-plus retailer members play a key role in achieving our mission to make riding better for everyone. If you’re already involved, thank you. If you’re not, join us today by signing up at peopleforbikes.org/join (It’s free.)

PLACESFORBIKES SPARKS BIKE INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRESS

This guide is part of our new PlacesForBikes program to develop and connect great places to ride and encourage people to use them.

» PlacesForBikes offers a data-driven and easy-to-understand city rating system, powered by a community survey that everyone is invited to complete. Retailers can use the annual ratings to inspire city leaders to make quick and continuous improvements.

» The annual PlacesForBikes Conference brings together the best minds in the bike world to provide inspiration, tools and strategies to achieve broad community goals through biking.

» Our Big Jump Project connects 10 dynamic U.S. cities with the world’s best ideas to quickly build biking networks and measure what happens next. Follow their progress at bigjumpproject.org

PEOPLEFORBIKES HELPS YOU MAGNIFY YOUR VOICE

» Our local engagement portal alerts you and your customers to important issues or votes in your community, tapping into our 1.2 million grassroots supporters.

» Our federal lobbying efforts assure ongoing, cost-effective federal investments in bike projects in your community.

» We monitor federal and state regulations that affect bike use and the bike industry and let you know when to speak up.

» Retailers from across the country join our Executive Fly-ins to Washington, D.C. to advance pro-bike policies.

» We promote the many benefits of bike riding and inspire people to ride.
HELP US ALL IMPROVE

This guide is a starting point. We’d love to hear about what has worked well in your community. We’ll add your stories to this conversation as, together, we build better places for bikes across the country.

Visit PlacesForBikes.org or contact us at placesforbikes@peopleforbikes.org to get involved.

Chris Kegel Life Lessons

This guide is dedicated to Chris Kegel, a Wisconsin bicycle retailer and one of the foremost U.S. bicycle advocates for more than 25 years. Chris passed away in February 2017. The Chris Kegel Foundation has formed to continue his life work. Here are a few snippets of Chris’ life philosophy:

» Bring diverse people together to create unexpected synergies. For example, when different bicycling groups — roadies, mountain bikers, club riders, etc. — join with elected and business leaders, it promotes a broader agenda and base for change.

» Be persistent, and remember that good work is never wasted.

» Learn to balance your passion for cycling with the discipline needed to sustain a successful business.

» Practice being a humble leader who listens, respects others and takes responsibility.

» Don’t forget to have fun. Enthusiasm is contagious!

SCORECARD: ARE YOU MAKING BETTER PLACES TO RIDE?

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<td>Attend public meetings, call and write letters to your city mayor or council member?</td>
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<td>Meet with local and state officials about your business and bike projects?</td>
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<td>Encourage customers to get involved by keeping them posted on bike threats and opportunities?</td>
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<td>Ask your customers to get involved in advocacy efforts, when necessary?</td>
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<td>Support local advocacy groups and projects with cash or in-kind services?</td>
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<td>Welcome, cultivate, and support new riders of all types and all ages?</td>
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<td>Help customers find great PlacesForBikes through demos, rides, printed/online maps, etc.?</td>
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<td>Inspire your customers to ride more by helping them find new ways, places and motivations to ride? Reward them? Make it fun?</td>
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Thank you for all you have done — and will do — to grow bicycling! Thanks to Trek and our other sponsors for their support of PlacesForBikes.