

opinions

A forum for readers in Dallas County

Pedal power for Dallas

Match Fort Worth's efforts to become bicycle-friendly, says

Eric Van Steenburg

Fort Worth has beaten Dallas to the punch again.

Fort Worth already has a successful arts district, a thriving downtown scene and a usable Trinity River park. Now it's starting on a six-year mission to become an official "Bicycle Friendly Community."

Last month, Fort Worth officials unveiled their ambitious plan to achieve

this prestigious designation. Dallas, meanwhile, was named the worst place to ride a bike by *Bicycling* magazine.

It's time for Dallas to wake up and smell the carbon monoxide — as if we didn't do that every morning already. Dallas Mayor Tom Leppert

needs to make a new and improved bicycle transportation plan a priority for the city.

The "Bike Fort Worth" plan would triple the amount of bicycle transportation, cut down on the number of bicycle-related accidents by a quarter, and earn the Bicycle Friendly Community designation from the League of American Bicyclists. And they

want to do it all by 2015.

Meanwhile, back in Dallas, the city's approach to cycling is roughly 30 years old. That old-school way is to "empower" cyclists by having them share the streets with motor vehicles. The theory goes that this allows the bicycle riders to learn the rules of the road while also conditioning drivers to the presence of bikes.

The problem is that cyclists don't feel safe in that approach, and drivers never accept bikes on "their" roads.

That's why Leppert must appoint a committee to lead a renewed bicycle transportation planning effort to demonstrate to all Dallasites that bicycles will be an important part of the city's transportation future. And here are three people he should convince to lead that committee:

Craig Miller — The morning radio host is an avid cyclist and has used his position on the air to tell cyclists that they must pay attention to, and follow, the rules of the road, while also cautioning drivers to be more courteous. He also delivers the 25 to 55 male audience to the effort.

David Feherty — Another avid cyclist, the golf analyst was hit while riding around White Rock Lake in 2008, landing him in the hospital. Feherty is better known for his work on the PGA tour or as the author of a column in *D Magazine* that made national news for its politics. Either way, this outspoken Dallas resident would be a good person to have on the team.

George W. Bush — Speaking of Dallas residents, one of the city's newest is also an avid cyclist, though he prefers the off-road

kind. Still, the former president brings an interest in cycling and, obviously, enough clout to help move the plan forward. Plus, the Katy Trail might connect to his library on the SMU campus some day.

The mayor could also ask City Council member Angela Hunt to join the committee. Not only is she a regular rider of the Katy Trail, but it could also be a great olive branch between the two politicians who have not seen eye to eye on many issues.

A better bicycle infrastructure will require sacrifices in some ways to make improvements in others. Parking may have to be eliminated. Roads may become one-way. But the result will be an improved city transportation system, rejuvenated economy, less gridlock and better air quality.

There will undoubtedly be detractors who claim that, among other reasons not to have a bicycle plan, the weather in Dallas is prohibitive to bicycles ever becoming more than a recreation device. Tulsa, Okla., Savannah, Ga., and Naperville, Ill., were among the 21 cities recently named Bicycle Friendly Communities. Each has a climate that can be more unforgiving than ours, for a variety of reasons.

Besides, if Fort Worth can do it, why can't Dallas?



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