

Chicago Tribune

Chicago tops NYC as most bike-friendly city in U.S., magazine finds

By Mary Wisniewski | September 19, 2016



Cyclists wait in the two-direction buffered bike lane along Dearborn Street for the light to change July 21, 2016, in downtown Chicago. (Antonio Perez / Chicago Tribune)

When it comes to cycling, the second city is now the first, according to a leading bike publication. Bicycling magazine is set to announce Monday that Chicago is now the best bike city in the United States, unseating New York City. This is good news for Rahm Emanuel, who had pledged when he became mayor to make Chicago the most bike-friendly place in the country.

Chicago came in at No. 2 in 2014 in the biennial ranking, after New York. Chicago has been climbing steadily, from 10th place in 2010 to fifth place in 2012.

Magazine editor-in-chief Bill Strickland said Chicago grabbed the top spot because it has emphasized building infrastructure that separates cyclists from motorists.



Bike advocates speak about the benefits of bicycles and the effects they're having on the communities of the South and West sides. (Antonio Perez and Chris Sweda / Chicago Tribune)

"Awareness of infrastructure, through separated bike lanes, is the next thing that needs to happen to really change cycling and what it means to live in an urban area," Strickland told the Tribune.

He also praised Chicago for expanding its Divvy bike share program into less affluent areas of the city.

The city also started the Divvy for Everyone program, which subsidizes bike-share memberships for low-income residents. Divvy has more than 34,000 members, and rides are up 16 percent this year, said Chicago Department of Transportation spokesman Mike Claffey.



New and improved bike lanes in the works downtown

San Francisco was ranked second-best bike city, followed by Portland, Ore.; New York City; and Seattle. Minneapolis; Austin, Texas; Cambridge, Mass.; Washington, D.C.; and Boulder, Colo., rounded out the top 10.

Since 2011, about 148 miles of bike lanes have been added in Chicago, including 108 miles of barrier or buffer-protected lanes, according to the Chicago Department of Transportation.

A barrier is a physical separation between bikes and cars, like a curb. A westbound protected bike lane is coming to Randolph Street downtown this year.

Bike lanes that are buffered have one or two rows of space, marked by painted stripes, that separate riders from the driving lane or parking lane or both.

The city's on-street bike network covers 245 miles, plus there are 47 miles of off-street bike trails, such as The 606.

Strickland said U.S. cities are becoming more bike-friendly every year. The ranking looks at ease of biking in 100 U.S. cities, including number of bicycle facilities, people per bike share and safety. New Midwestern cities in the top 50 this year include Columbus, Ohio; Lincoln, Neb.; and Detroit.



South Side lakefront: Work starting on separate bike, pedestrian paths

In Chicago, the number of bike commuters has increased by 157 percent over the past 10 years, Bicycling magazine reported, citing U.S. Census Bureau findings.

Cyclists here have faced challenges, though. Construction projects this summer have torn up pavement and blocked bike lanes on popular routes, increasing hazards for riders. Four people have died in bike crashes so far this year, which is about average, CDOT said.

Strickland acknowledged that there will be conflicts as the changing landscape compels cyclists, motorists and pedestrians to adjust to each other, but a shift to more bikes will eventually make things safer.

One reason New York dropped out of the top spot is that the city has had a "really rough year" enforcing good behavior from both cyclists and motorists, Strickland said. New York also needs to do more to build protected lanes, he said.

A cyclist from the North Side offered advice on how to make riding better in Chicago: more riders following the rules of the road.

"They don't follow the traffic directions, they don't stop at stop signs, they don't yield, they don't stop at red lights," East Lakeview resident Paul Lucas, 65, said in an email. "We are NOT pedestrians, we are in fact self-propelled vehicles."

Chicago has a long history of bike advocacy. One of its mayors, Carter Harrison Jr., campaigned in 1897 in his first mayoral bid as "the cyclists' champion" and had early versions of bike lanes created.

Richard M. Daley, a cyclist himself, expanded marked on-street bike lanes in his two decades as mayor.