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# CHICAGO'S MASTER PLAN

## DON'T DRIVE. JUST BIKE.

### City peddling new proposal for 500-mile network of paths to be finished by 2015

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Chicago is set to unveil new plans for becoming a bicyclist's haven. And this time, it means business.

The new Bike 2015 Plan wastes little time on breezy rides in the park. Instead, the city's Department of Transportation is bent on getting people to bike to work, to school, to stores and to mass transit stops, cobbling together a 500-mile network of designated routes.

Understanding that bicyclists' greatest enemies--aside from sloth--are car doors, right-lane passers and other street perils, planners looked around the world for new safety ideas.

From Geneva, Switzerland, they got the idea of raised bike lanes, a layer of pavement above street level and below the curb that would help dissuade motorists from veering into cycling territory. By 2010, the city hopes to experiment with raised lanes in a few locations.

In Copenhagen, Cambridge and other places, planners saw bicycle lanes colored a startling shade of teal green, thermoplastic markings they hope to duplicate at some Chicago intersections to try to warn right-turning cars to watch for bikes.

Like its predecessor in 1992, the new strategic plan lays out the city's vision to make bicycling an integral part of Chicagoans' daily lives.

It offers few details and specifies no costs, though it does point to federal grants and private funding.

The plan does not say where the new miles of bike lanes and improvements would be located.

But, with a strong track record of delivering for cyclists, the city is thinking big: a bike route within a half-mile of every resident; a 50-mile circuit of bike trails, with some off-road paths to be announced

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later this year; 185 miles of new bikeways altogether.

By 2015, planners hope, 5 percent of all trips shorter than 5 miles long will be made by bike.

"It's truly putting Chicago on the forefront of improving cycling across the country," said Andy Clarke, executive director of the Washington D.C.-based League of American Bicyclists, adding that unlike most cities where bike plans are shelved, they frequently are implemented in Chicago, with the backing of Mayor Richard Daley, an avid biker.

But for new bike lanes to lure new cyclists, riders say a culture change needs to take root among drivers. The biggest threat isn't animosity, they say. It's ignorance--most drivers seem not to realize cyclists are even vying for road space.

"I've been doored," said Greg Ehrendreich, 31, describing most cyclers' worst fear--a car door opening suddenly in their path. "I've been almost doored a couple of times."

"You've got to get people to think a different way," said Scott Parrish, 50, who has biked Chicago for half his life. "If the culture doesn't change when you put these bike lanes out, you could put 50 million bike lanes in and it wouldn't matter."

Of course, he said, cars are not the only deterrent: "Try to get a girl to go on a date with you on a bike."

#### Global inspiration

As the city and its consultant, Chicagoland Bicycle Federation, began researching the plan three years ago, the mayor encouraged them to seek inspiration across the globe.

Next year, planners hope to shut down a network of streets for biking on a Sunday morning, as pioneered in Bogota, Colombia, and Guadalajara, Mexico.

In Victoria, Canada, a bicycle commuter challenge among private companies--funded by them too--drew thousands of participants. Chicago would like to try its own in 2008.

When asked to describe the perfect urban biking, Chicago riders also looked abroad:

"Amsterdam," said Parrish, while stopped at the corner of Belmont Avenue and Clark Street on Friday.

"Shanghai," sighed Ehrendreich. "Whole streets are bikes only."

Closer to home, the city is currently working on a Mapquest of sorts for bikers, laying out online bike routes to a person's destination.

Millennium Park's popular bike station has inspired plans for a similar center with showers and lockers at the Ogilvie Transportation Center by 2010.

To encourage students, the city hopes to build bikeways for up to 70 schools by 2010.

They want to teach students at 500 schools all about bike safety.

The city even hired an intern to ride the streets, looking for bike lanes that need work and pavement that needs repair.

The key step to encouraging more cycling, experts and riders agree, is making riding safer.

As an opening bid, the city hopes to try the teal markings at 10 locations, including Elston Avenue and Division Street and Roosevelt Road and Damen Avenue, said Ben Gomberg, bicycle program coordinator for the Department of Transportation.

Current bike lane markings are not sufficient, said Joseph Schofer, professor of civil and environmental engineering at Northwestern University. Bright teal could catch the eyes of motorists who may not be paying attention, he said.

#### Higher ground

The city could also try raising bike lanes in two or three undetermined locations as early as 2008 to see whether that may deter speeding motorists from entering the bike lane.

But that could have drawbacks, according to Christopher Hagelin, senior research associate for the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida. Based on a description of the Chicago plan, he said the raised lanes might make it harder for bicyclists to merge into the center travel lane to turn left.

At some intersections in Oregon, bicycles line up ahead of cars in specially marked boxes. That gives them a head start when the light turns green, makes them more visible to motorists and maybe even gives them a little psychological edge over the four-wheelers.

That's an idea Chicago planners are still considering.

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