

PEDAL PUSHER

Omaha's first map for bicyclists might nudge more people to seize the handlebars — and lead to more routes, too.

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Maybe it is eye-popping gas prices or that flab around your middle that has you thinking about dusting off the old 10-speed in the garage.

In either case, Omaha's first bike route map is intended to help you get where you need to go.

Activate Omaha, a nonprofit community health group, developed the map to get more people exercising and commuting by bike.

"If there are people thinking about gas prices and their health, this is a tool they can use to take that next step," said Tammie Dodge, the organization's project manager.

About 5,000 maps are to be printed and made available for free at bike shops, libraries and other locations next month.

Dodge said the map, paid for with a \$53,000 private grant, is the first step in a plan to encourage cycling in the Omaha area. The next step is developing bike lanes and additional trails.

The Omaha area, Dodge said, is not known as a good place for cycling, partly because it doesn't have enough east-west trails.

The new map — just as ski slopes are marked for their difficulty — color-codes streets based on their traffic levels, space for cyclists and other factors. For example, Dodge Street and sections of 72nd and 90th Streets are among those cyclists shouldn't consider. Neighborhood streets are the best and provide the backbone of the routes. The map also notes the Keystone Trail and other specialized, paved paths.

A category called "cautionary streets" — including Farnam and Harney in midtown — requires that a rider have more experience with heavier traffic.

A "survivable arterials" category — including sections of Leavenworth, Blondo and other streets — calls for even more caution and skill.

Marty Shukert of RDG Planning and Design, which produced the map, said it would help cyclists piece together routes for commuting, errands or other trips.

He said cyclists need to select routes based on their biking skills and physical abilities. The map notes, for example, the city's steepest hills.

Mike Johnson commutes by bike between his Field Club home in midtown and his job downtown. The 2½-mile ride along Farnam and Leavenworth Streets gives him a good workout, he said.

He hopes the city will designate more bike lanes, because riding in traffic can get tricky.

"You've just gotta be careful," he said.



Bike shopping?

If you're using a bike for commuting, look for multiple gears and a comfortable seat. Don't think you must spend a lot to start; you can find a good bike for a few hundred dollars or less.

Types of bikes



Hybrids: All-purpose bikes good for recreation and commuting. Wide, soft seats and upright handlebars are easier on backs. Price: \$300 to \$400. The higher-priced models have more durable tires.



Mountain bikes: Wider tires and deeper tread. Good for dirt trails but can be used for recreation and commuting. Price: \$300 to \$5,000. The pricey ones have stronger frames and suspension.



Road bikes: Turned-down handlebars and thin tires for speed. Intended for long rides. Can be used for commuting. Price: \$700 to \$6,000. The lightest are the most expensive.

Source: Will Engstrom of Schels All Sports.

On Omaha.com

A link to the complete map.

Where to get a map: About 5,000 free copies will be available at bike shops, libraries and other sites next month. Or to request one, e-mail info@activateomaha.org. The map also is available online at activateomaha.org/bikemap.



DEAN WEINLAUB
THE WORLD-HERALD

How the map works It color-codes streets based on traffic, cycling space and other factors:

- Specialized trails, such as the Keystone.
- Side paths, which are widened sidewalks or paths along streets.
- Bike lanes (only a few).
- Paved shoulders, usually found on roads without curbs.
- Neighborhood streets deemed "continuous" and of relatively low traffic volume.
- Busier "cautionary" streets; require more experience riding in traffic.
- "Survivable arterials"; require even more caution and skill.
- Extremely high-traffic streets; to be avoided.