

Our Streets Minneapolis: Bringing Protected Bikeways to Everyone

Summary of Work Completed Through the Active Living for All initiative

In 2013, Our Streets Minneapolis (formerly Minneapolis Bicycle Coalition; referred to as Our Streets) was one of nine projects to receive funding from the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota (the Center) through the Active Living for All (ALfA) initiative. All ALfA-funded organizations aimed to increase opportunities for physical activity in their community through policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes.

Our Streets' expanded focus on equity in walking, rolling (i.e., wheelchair access), and bicycling demonstrates how its advocacy work has shifted over the course of the five-year ALfA initiative. This summary describes the accomplishments and challenges Our Streets experienced in its Bikeways for Everyone campaign and the actions they took to advance equity during the five-year ALfA initiative.

Deep community engagement was a consistent aspect of Our Streets' work throughout the ALfA initiatives. Each year, Our Streets engaged community members in advocating for protected bikeways to be incorporated into specific street redesign efforts and informing other local policies to make bicycling more accessible and safe. Tracking the number miles of protected bikeways built in various areas of the city, was one way they held policymakers accountable for implementing plans.

Our Streets adopted a more explicit focus on equity in transportation projects during their last two years of ALfA funding. One notable effort was a partnership with Cycles for Change to host a discussion about equity priorities for Nice Ride Minnesota in their transition to dockless bike share. Another was Our Streets' role in influencing the City of Minneapolis to incorporate equity into its Vision Zero plan.

Key accomplishments

Bikeways for Everyone

The Bikeways for Everyone campaign originated with the goal of increasing the number of bicyclists in Minneapolis. The broad goal was to double the number of bicyclists in Minneapolis by 2020, with particular attention to adding infrastructure in disadvantaged areas of the city and increasing bicycling among communities of color and women. A more specific goal was to have a network of 30 miles of new protected bikeways in Minneapolis by 2020. Our Streets focused on this work primarily through a systems approach, addressing infrastructure needs to increase the number of connected, safe, and comfortable bikeways in the city.

Basing their plan on prior research findings that the majority of Minneapolis residents do not feel safe riding bicycles on major city streets and on recommendations about how to create structures that are and feel safe for bicycling, Our Streets set out to expand the network of protected bike lanes in Minneapolis. These include greenways (a separate piece of land that connects developed urban areas, often providing trails for hiking and biking), protected bike lanes (bike lanes separated from motor vehicles by buffers such as planters, strategic placement of car parking, or delineator posts), and raised bikeways (bikeways along busy roads that are physically elevated from auto traffic).

Community involvement contributed to the success of the Bikeways for everyone campaign. Our Streets used multiple community engagement approaches to increase awareness of protected bikeways among Minneapolis residents, and then to ask supportive residents to call policymakers or sign postcards in support of protected bikeways. These strategies influenced City Council members to repeatedly allocate funds to design and implement protected bikeways in Minneapolis over the five-year ALfA initiative. As described in this summary, there have been significant changes in the number of protected bikeways in Minneapolis during the initiative, and there are plans to continue infrastructure improvements in the future.

2013 – 2016

During the first two years of ALfA funding, Our Streets' community engagement and advocacy efforts led to policy and environmental changes. Protected bikeways were installed in two Minneapolis neighborhoods (36th Street W, Broadway Street. NE), and plans were established for protected bikeways in downtown Minneapolis (on 7th Street N from Plymouth Ave. to 2nd Street N) and separated bicycle lanes in Uptown (along Lyndale and Hennepin Avenues).

In addition, Our Streets was involved in encouraging Hennepin County to incorporate plans for protected bikeways into its bicycle plan, shaping plans for street and bikeway improvements in Uptown, and supporting the City of Minneapolis' work to evaluate and select routes for 43 miles

of new protected bike lanes. Our Streets' advocacy efforts also contributed to \$1.5 million of city funding being dedicated to the development of protected bike lines in 2015 and to the development of a proposed greenway in North Minneapolis (the Northside Greenway). Much of this was done with the involvement of community members. Our Streets increased awareness of and support for protected bikeways at Open Streets events held throughout the city; more than 3,000 people rode through protected bikeway demonstration projects at those events.

Through their community outreach and engagement efforts, Our Streets gathered more than 1,800 pledges in support of Bikeways for Everyone and 1,200 pledges in support of the Hennepin-Lyndale project. Our Streets also encouraged more than 2,000 constituents to contact their elected officials in support of protected bikeways.

Our Streets influenced the design and implementation of additional protected bikeways, which were installed in 2015 and helped to set the stage for long-term city investment in protected bike lanes. They provided input into seven infrastructure projects related to protected bike lanes. Protected bikeways were implemented in different areas of the city, including South Minneapolis (26th Street and 28th Street, 36th Avenue W), Northeast Minneapolis (Plymouth Avenue/8th Street NE bike lane) and downtown (buffered bike lanes on Washington Avenue N). Our Streets also continued to influence the planning of future protected bike lane projects, including the Northside Greenway demonstration project. Additionally, by being part of an advisory committee, Our Streets contributed to the city adding an update to the City of Minneapolis' 2040 Master Bicycle Plan. This update called for 48 miles of additional protected bikeways, including routes prioritized by the organization. Our Streets also advocated for increased, multi-year investment in protected bikeways. In 2015, the city decided to allocate \$750,000 for the implementation of protected bikeways in 2015 and \$7 million dollars for additional protected bikeways over the next five years.

As implementation of new protected bikeways continued, Our Streets worked to integrate protected bikeways into county-level plans. In nine infrastructure projects, Our Streets continued to engage community members and work with policymakers to design projects across the city, including protected bikeways near the University of Minnesota (the Dinkytown Greenway, Oak Street SE), in Northeast Minneapolis (Plymouth Avenue Bridge), Uptown (Franklin Avenue, Blaisdell Avenue S), and South Minneapolis (46th, 36th, 26th and 28th Streets), as well as along the Intercity Regional Trail, which connects the cities of Minneapolis, Bloomington, and Richfield. Importantly, protected bikeways were included in the planning process for redesigning Hennepin Avenue in downtown Minneapolis.

Our Streets was also involved with several other notable changes in 2016. Both the City of Minneapolis and Hennepin County adopted Complete Streets policies, and the county made changes to increase the level of community input included in its community engagement process for planning projects. In addition, both the city and county allocated funding to create future protected bikeways (\$1.5 million and \$500,000, respectively).

2017 - 2018

During the final two years of the ALfA initiative, an additional 4.5 miles of protected bikeways and 7.4 miles of unprotected bike lanes were designed and implemented across the city. During this time, as the City of Minneapolis completed its Pedestrian and Bicycle Winter Maintenance Study, Our Streets advocated for safe streets for walking and biking and the identification of priority winter bikeways that the city would maintain to support year-round bicycling. The city allocated over \$6.5 million in funding for protected bikeways during these two years. In addition, the city allocated more than \$1.5 million for Safe Routes to Schools, a pedestrian crossing safety program, and sidewalk improvements.



Vision Zero

Vision Zero, simply defined, is a strategy used by cities internationally to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all. Vision Zero considers any traffic fatality as preventable with improved street design and focuses on engineering and environmental changes as a key strategy to make streets safer.

Our Streets became involved in 2017, as the City of Minneapolis announced its plans to become a Vision Zero city. In other cities, implementation of Vision Zero action plans have unintentionally contributed to racial inequities. For example, while enforcement of traffic laws has been a key strategy for reducing traffic collisions, the practice has led to more police contacts, citations, and arrests for people of color and low-income residents in some cities. Our Streets addressed this concern proactively by facilitating several convenings of local bicycling and racial justice advocates to discuss ways to incorporate an equity lens into the Minneapolis Vision Zero plan.

Specifically, these convenings focused on using a mobility justice framework, which focuses on undoing harms to communities of color and low-income communities imposed by historical planning efforts. After learning about these convenings, the City of Minneapolis invited Our Streets to participate in the development of the Vision Zero action plan and increase community engagement

in the planning process. Our Streets will continue to be closely tied to the city's Vision Zero work. As ALfA funding came to an end, Our Streets' executive director became the Vision Zero coordinator for Minneapolis.

Nice Ride

Our Streets was also involved in shaping the future of Minneapolis' bike share program. Working in partnership with Cycles for Change, Our Streets hosted a series of community convenings to discuss the transition of Nice Ride Minnesota, a local bike-sharing organization, from nonprofit to for-profit status and from docked to dockless bicycles.

Participants in the convenings helped identify ways to ensure the organization that would ultimately become the bike share contractor would center equity and accessibility for all residents, rather than focusing exclusively on profits and access in more affluent Minneapolis neighborhoods. As a result, specific language about equity, including performance targets, accountabilities, and processes for addressing concerns was added to the contract now held by Motivate in Minneapolis.

Organizational transformation

In 2017, partly as a result of feedback from board members, Minneapolis Bicycle Coalition rebranded themselves as Our Streets Minneapolis and updated their mission to include two additional forms of mobility: walking and rolling (i.e., wheelchair accessibility). Their mission now states: "Our Streets Minneapolis works for a city where biking, walking, and rolling are easy and comfortable for everyone." The organization's equity statement (www.ourstreetsmpls.org/equity_statement) identifies the concrete steps that Our Streets is taking to transform its organizational culture and enhance its advocacy efforts and programs. Some examples of these changes include:

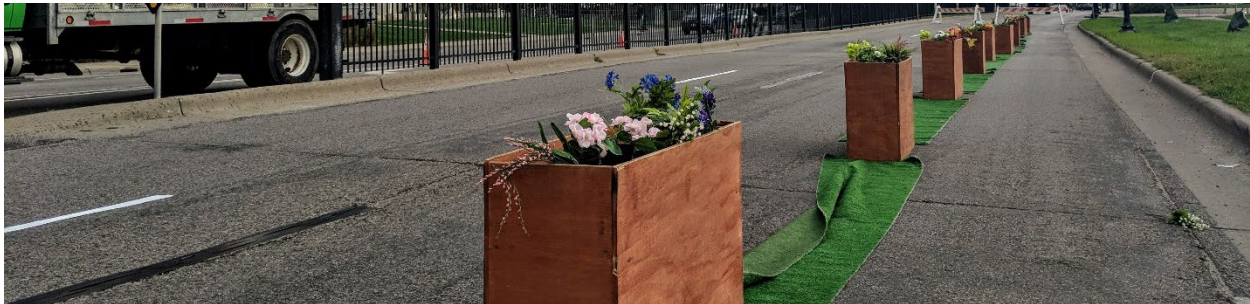
- Training board, staff, and volunteers on equity and safer spaces
- Moving to an accessible office space
- Reflecting Minneapolis' diverse communities in its board and staff
- Partnering with other organizations also committed to advancing equity
- Conveying an understanding of how bike and walk equity issues intersect with other issues of livability, including racial profiling and other enforcement issues

Ongoing activities

Community engagement

Building community awareness of and support for protected bikeways was a critical factor in the Bikeways for Everyone campaign’s success. A specific tactic for this involved collecting postcards from Minneapolis residents who support protected bikeways and other improvements in street design. Each year, Our Streets collected thousands of postcards in support of protected bikeways that were then hand-delivered by constituents from each city ward to City Council members.

Our Streets also used email and social media outlets to lead targeted advocacy efforts. Our Streets used these types of communication to inform residents about key policies under consideration by the City Council and the impact that the decisions might have had in their ward. Many of these email or social media blasts included language community members could use when contacting their City Council member.



Our Streets also used op-eds and letters to the editors in local newspapers to raise awareness of and support for protected bikeways and other key policies. These pieces were often timed with the City Council voting on specific policies. While it is not clear whether these pieces in the media had any direct influence on the final City Council votes, it did help Our Streets reach a broader audience and potentially garner greater community support for protected bikeways and key policies.

Data helped Our Streets strengthen compelling narratives to influence policies, funding decisions, and the design of streets. For example, the organization used available data to conduct a study about equity in policing, collaborated with Wilder Research to create a Bike Equity map to identify disparities in access, and drew information from studies completed by the city, such as the City of Minneapolis’ winter maintenance report, to refine or further support their advocacy positions. Our Streets volunteers also conducted a study of racial disparities of bicycle traffic citations, finding substantial disparities, including that male and black residents were given a disproportionate number of citations. This report and Our Streets’ recommendations for policies and data collection practices have influenced local bicycle advocacy organizations.

Challenges and lessons learned

Our Streets was intentional in how it engaged community members and policy makers to maintain momentum during unanticipated delays in bikeway implementation.

Implementation of several protected bikeways were delayed, often due to city planning processes or changes in the city's most immediate priorities. Our Streets also found that work at the county-level tended to take longer than more local city-level planning. This impacted the timing of Our Streets' advocacy and community engagement efforts. Our Streets addressed this challenge by building strong relationships with city and county officials and continuing to demonstrate community support for the improvements in streets and bikeways.

Rather than responding directly to opinion pieces written by people who opposed bikeway expansion, Our Streets focused on maintaining its own media presence focusing on how protected bikeways are an asset to Minneapolis residents. Over the five-year initiative, several opinion pieces were written in newspapers from residents who were opposed to sharing roadways with bicyclists or who felt city funds should not be invested as heavily into protected bike ways and other infrastructure. In addition, some newspapers framed campaigns like Bikeways for Everyone as being in opposition to cars and other motorized transportation. One of the most important ways Our Streets addressed this challenge was by continuing to post blog posts and write letters to the editor in local news media.

Moving forward

Although the ALfA initiative has ended, Our Streets' Bikeways for Everyone campaign is still underway. Minneapolis will continue to add protected bikeways, using the plans that Our Streets helped to inform. While Our Streets will continue to have a citywide vantage point, in the future it plans to focus on advocating for protected bikeways and other improvements in Northeast Minneapolis. This neighborhood is a strategic focus, as much of Northeast Minneapolis has less access to active transportation than other parts of the city. They plan to create a workgroup to gather community input and address concerns about proposed changes, including the impact of adding a planned protected bikeway on Marshall Avenue on street parking and reducing the number of traffic lanes on a major thoroughfare in this part of the city.

In alignment with their mission, Our Streets plans to continue its centering of equity and holding the City accountable for incorporating an equity lens into projects and committees. Our Streets also plans to continue working on garnering support for other projects, such as the Northside Greenway, and policies such as 20 mile per hour speed limits and incorporating planters into protected bike lanes. Without ALfA as a funding source, the scope of work Our Streets can undertake may change. However, the organization will continue to move forward with its expanded mission and vision.



Wilder Research®

Information. Insight. Impact.

451 Lexington Parkway North
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
651-280-2700
www.wilderresearch.org

For more information

For more information about the ALfA evaluation, contact
Dylan Galos at Wilder Research, 651-280-2763.

Author: Dylan Galos

March 2019