



◆ 827 North Main ◆ Cottonwood, AZ ◆ 86326
Phone: 928-634-4112 ◆ E-mail: djoens@cottonwoodaz.gov

Diane Joens

Office of the Mayor of Cottonwood

Media Release

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Contacts: Nikki Arbeiter, narbeiter@cottonwoodaz.gov

Gareth Braxton, gbraxton@cottonwoodaz.gov

Mike Sanders, MSanders@azdot.gov

City and State Officials Meet with Bike Enthusiasts to Promote Community Bicycling

Cottonwood city and state officials met with Walmart Manager Jason Ferris to talk about the Roll Model bicycle program. From left, Cottonwood Police Department Sgt. Gareth Braxton, Bicycle Advisory Committee Chair Nikki Arbeiter, Arizona Department of Transportation's Bicycle and Pedestrian Program Coordinator Mike Sanders, Walmart's bike builder Neil McNamara, Cottonwood Mayor Diane Joens, Cottonwood Walmart Manager Jason Ferris, and longtime bicycle advocate Randy Victory discussed



Walmart's participation in Arizona's Roll Model program. Ferris pledged 100 percent support of the program, going as far making the Cottonwood store a model of bicycle education for other Walmarts.

COTTONWOOD, Ariz.—Cottonwood was recognized as a Bicycle Friendly Community at the Bronze Level by the League of American Bicyclists in May. This means that Cottonwood is a pretty nice place to ride a bike—especially compared to a decade ago. But there's always room for improvement, and that's what Thursday, Aug. 9 was all about. The city has always set its sights high, and being a Bike Friendly Community is no different. Having made Bronze, Cottonwood is going for Silver!

The Bicycle Friendly Community program focuses on five areas which make a community a great place to ride a bike, often referred as the Five Es. These are Engineering, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, and Evaluation and Planning.

Engineering addresses the accommodation of cyclists on public roads, and the existence of both well-designed bike lanes and multi-use paths in the community.

Education addresses the amount of education available for both cyclists and motorists, including teaching cyclists of all ages how to ride safely as well as teaching motorists how to share the road safely with cyclists.

Encouragement concentrates on how the community promotes bicycling. Good promotional measures are Bike Month and Bike to Work Week events as well as community bike maps, route finding signage, community bike rides, commuter incentive programs, and having a Safe Routes to School program.

The enforcement category contains questions that measure the connections between the cycling and law enforcement communities. Questions address whether the law enforcement community has a liaison with the cycling community, if there are bicycle divisions of the law enforcement or public safety communities, if the community uses targeted enforcement to encourage cyclists and motorists to share the road safely.

Evaluation and Planning measures the amount of cycling taking place in the community, the crash and fatality rates, and ways that the community works to reduce these numbers.

Important events Aug. 9 included a meeting with Walmart Manager Jason Ferris and Walmart's bike builder Neil McNamara. In a meeting with Cottonwood Mayor Diane Joens, Bicycle Advisory Committee Chair Nikki Arbeiter, longtime bicycle advocate Randy Victory, Cottonwood Police Department spokesman and bicycle liaison Gareth Braxton, and Arizona Department of Transportation's Bicycle and Pedestrian Program Coordinator Mike Sanders, Walmart renewed its commitment to Arizona's "Roll Model" program—an educational program funded by the Governor's Office of Highway Safety. The Verde Valley was selected as the first test community. Manager Ferris pledged 100 percent support of the program, going as far as making the store a model of bicycle education for other Walmarts in northern Arizona, pointing the way for all big box stores in the state—and maybe even the nation. Hopefully Cottonwood's Walmart will be recognized and rewarded for their effort to stay ahead of the curve.

Afterwards, Sanders, Victory and Sgt. Braxton took off from Walmart up Highway 260 and on to State Route 89A through Cottonwood. The trio was there to evaluate one of the stretches of roadway that is a challenge for riders.

"Based on our analysis of bicycle-motor vehicle crashes on the State Highway System, this segment between Walmart and Walgreens has been identified as a high-priority crash location," said Michael Sanders, Bicycle and Pedestrian Program Coordinator for the Arizona Department of Transportation. "We found that the leading crash types were motorists pulling out of driveways and motorists turning right. Probable contributing causes included failure to yield, bicyclists riding facing traffic, and too many driveways. Potential countermeasures might include bike lanes, signage and pavement markings with directional arrows, and access management."

Later the Bicycle Advisory Committee met, giving bicycling planners and advocates a chance to evaluate the situation in Cottonwood and plan strategies for improvement. Many suggestions were made—suggestions that will make Cottonwood even more bike-friendly. The second half of the BAC meeting was a rare treat for committee members. Sanders from Phoenix attended, spending time getting to know Cottonwood. The day culminated in a meeting with the city's Bicycle Advisory Committee. Sanders listened to members' concerns and suggestions, offered input, spent time getting to know the members and explained ADOT's structure and policies. Ultimately, BAC members had a better understanding of ADOT—knowledge that will prove invaluable when working with the agency that has major roadways such as SR260 and SR89A that go through Cottonwood.

Important to the BAC and community is the leading role the Cottonwood Police Department is taking. In Bicycle Friendly Communities nationwide, even Gold and Platinum ones like Tucson or Davis, Calif., law enforcement is always the sticking point. Andy Clarke, Executive Director of the League of American Bicyclists acknowledged, "This is always the weakest link."

The Cottonwood Police Department has recently re-instituted its bicycle patrol program. After a six-year hiatus, the program has been brought back with four officers participating. The bicycle patrols augment and supplement what the officers already do. The primary focus is to work during some of the city's signature events such as Rhythm and Ribs and the Brian Mickelsen Memorial Run/Walk.

The officers will also conduct bicycle patrols during their normal patrol duties. While doing so, they conduct proactive education and enforcement activities focusing on a variety of areas. Some of this includes much-needed bicycle enforcement. This coincides with the city's efforts to become more bicycle-friendly. Bicycle advocate and founder of the Verde Valley Cyclists Coalition, Randy Victory, has repeatedly noted, "Bicyclists are often their own worst enemies." Sgt. Braxton said, "We firmly believe we can set an example both for the cyclists and motorists that encourages and fosters safe and responsible travel for all of those in our community. The more motorists see bicyclists on the road, the more comfortable they will be with them, and vice versa. The more cyclists become used to riding on the roads, the better traffic flows."

As part of the bicycle patrol duties, bike patrol officers actively participate in community policing. Data suggests they are often more approachable to the public. According to a study published by the International Police Mountain Bicycle Association, officers on bicycles have twice as much contact with the public than fellow officers in cars. Sgt. Braxton said, "This is a tremendous benefit not only to our community, but to our department as well."

"We have an ideal community for cycling," Sgt. Braxton, added, "full of flat-grade, uphill with desert and mountain terrain, all within a relatively short distance. What's not to love about cycling here?" Sgt. Braxton advocates that bicycle patrols have a tremendous health and fitness benefit for the officers involved. "It fosters our commitment to fitness," he stated.

Residents who ride bikes may wonder whether anything is being done to make Cottonwood a more enjoyable, safer place to ride. Motorists wonder if cyclists will ever learn to be responsible roadway users. The answer is, "Solutions are in the works."

“Citizens and public servants who believe in a healthier, more vibrant, and closer-knit community are hard at work fine-tuning one of many pieces of the puzzle that will make Cottonwood the best place to live in Northern Arizona,” said Mayor Diane Joens.

Randy Victory, Verde Valley Cyclists, and Gareth Braxton, Cottonwood Police Department, contributed to this article.