

Dallas' Bike Momentum Is Rolling

The pandemic got us on wheels, but this city needs more off-road trails

Remember that spike in bicycle sales at the beginning of the pandemic? In June 2020, Woody Smith, owner of Richardson Bike Mart told *Bicycling* magazine that demand was “mind blowing.” Turns out, people have been pedaling those things instead of leaving them to collect dust in the garage.

That, along with some forward-thinking planning, is giving North Texas a chance to dramatically improve its bike culture. City leaders should do what they can to support this trend.

Nationwide rankings of the most bike-friendly cities regularly leave out Dallas. In 2018, *Bicycling's* top 50 list only included one Texas city: Austin. Last summer, another such study ranked Dallas 140 out of 200 cities, when considering factors like bike lanes, share of workers who bike to work, access to bike shops and clubs, air quality and weather.

But Dallas cycling activists expect that to change.

An ace we have up our sleeve: The Dallas Off-Road Bicycle Association. According to Sean Laughlin, the club's director of development and sponsorship, DORBA, founded in 1988, was one of the first such organizations in the country and remains one of the most active. Its 2,000 members help maintain more than 200 miles of bike trail.

Laughlin has been tracking the surge in ridership. In 2019, there were 969 mountain bikers for every mile of DORBA trail. In 2022 that number is 1,714 riders. That means trails are 77% more crowded even though the area has been adding new trails.

“The statistics are through the roof right now,” Philip Haitt Haigh said. He is the executive director of the Circuit Trail Conservancy, the partnership connecting segments of paved trail to create a 50-mile loop around Dallas. The Loop is an outgrowth of a 230-mile master trail plan passed by the City Council in 2008.

Haitt Haigh said his group is working with DORBA to install natural surface trails branching off the paved loop. Those trails are much less expensive to build, but more

difficult to maintain. That's why the partnership with DORBA is important. The club has trail maintenance agreements with several North Texas cities, including Dallas, as well as the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and private organizations like Texas Land Conservancy, which manages the Oak Cliff Nature Preserve. According to Laughlin, DORBA mobilizes volunteers to serve 13,000 hours every year, mostly on trail maintenance.

“That availability of soft surface trails built and maintained by a partner as reputable as DORBA is really unique. Really special to our metro area,” Haitt Haigh said. “From a trail deliverer standpoint, that's pretty incredible.”

It's not just Dallas leaders who are pro-cycling. Laughlin told us DORBA often fields questions from suburbs and private developers. A trail system is an attractive amenity for new neighborhoods, a step up from community pools and playgrounds.

In fact, only about 22 miles of mountain bike trail are part of the city of Dallas trail system, according to City Hall trail guru Jared White.

If more of those people driven into the bike saddle by the pandemic keep riding, that will be a healthy thing for them and for our city. We should keep it rolling.

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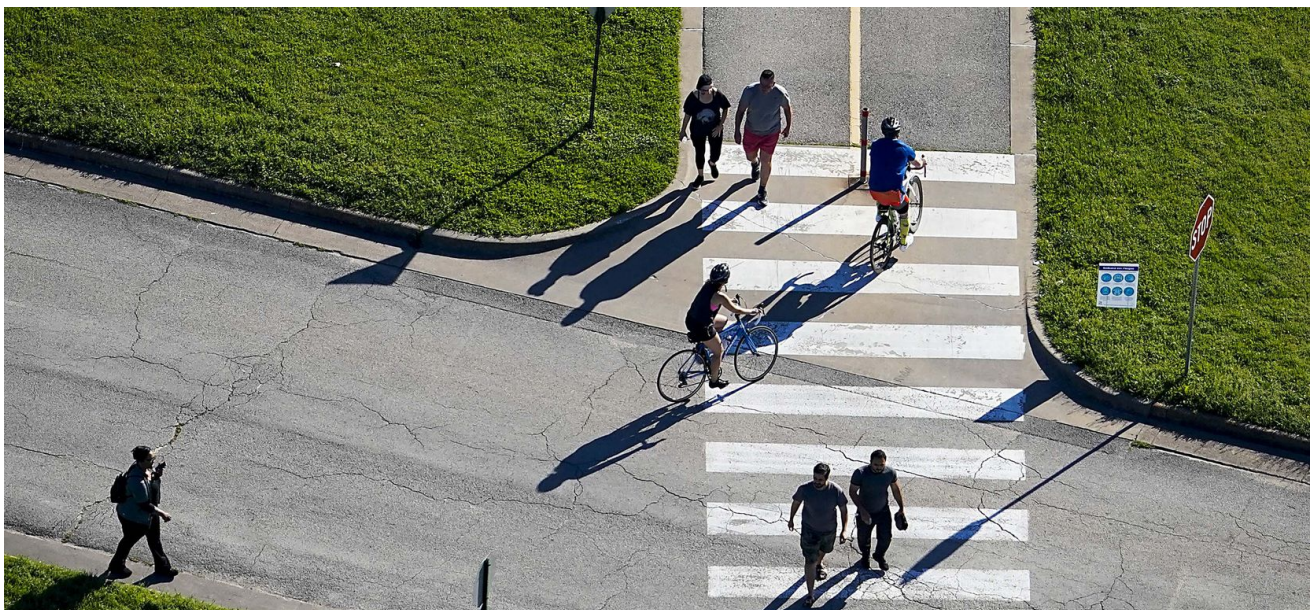
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OPINION

Letters to the Editor — Biking in Dallas, helping Ukraine, Flying Tigers, toxic waste sites

Readers suggest lifting parking minimums to help cyclists in Dallas; suggest ways to help Ukraine; reflect on the Flying Tigers; and urge that more be done to eliminate toxic waste sites.





Aerial view of people cycling, walking and jogging on a trail at White Rock Lake in Dallas on March 24, 2020.
(Smiley N. Pool / Staff Photographer)



By [Letters to the Editor](#)

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Trails alone don't help cyclists

Re: “Dallas’ bike momentum is rolling — The pandemic got us on wheels, but this city needs more off-road trails,” March 26 Editorials.

This editorial misses the mark. It notes Dallas ranks “140 out of 200 cities when considering factors like bike lanes, share of workers who bike to work, access to bike shops and clubs, air quality and weather.” The editorial then proceeds to mostly ignore these factors and talk instead about trails.

Broadly, there are two types of cyclists in Dallas, leisure and commuter. Leisure cyclists consist of two subgroups — recreational and fitness buffs. Families might ride from their home to a trail, circle around, then come home again. Fitness enthusiasts may park a car, take a bike off a roof rack, blast away some carbs, then re-attach the bike to the roof and ride home.

Dallas continues to do a commendable job in trail development. Yet for the most part, trails don't go places people need to be.

Our low survey rankings won't change until Dallas takes a comprehensive approach to remake our streets so that using a bike to commute, run errands or grab items at a convenience store becomes a realistic option for residents. This will involve not just cycling lanes, but lifting minimum parking requirements and finding ways to calm traffic by removing signals and promoting complete streets.