Bikes Go Boom in the Valley

Biking can serve any walk of life at any stage of life — and that’s exactly what we see in the Chippewa Valley.

WORDS BY MIKE PAULUS • PHOTO BY ANDREA PAULSETH

It’s hard to nail down exactly how important a strong biking community can be to a place like the Chippewa Valley. This is because there are so many different ways to bike, so many different kinds of bicyclist, and so very many different benefits to be found when a city supports biking culture in all its forms.

From weekend enthusiasts to everyday commuters, from off-road trail blazers to on-road racers, from kids with streamers to retirees on recumbents, biking can serve any walk of life at any stage of life — and that’s exactly what we see in the Chippewa Valley.

“Biking brings people together and provides an outlet for people to connect,” says Sue McDonald, who’s active in the Chippewa Off Road Bike Association, frequenting the wooded trails in Lowes Creek and Pinehurst Parks. She’s also a coach for the Eau Claire Youth Cycling team.

“The social aspect of biking is huge — people get out and about,” she says. “I believe riders are much more apt to participate in community events when they can easily access them by bike.”

A 2015 report from the University of California — incorporating over 520 studies from 17 countries — suggests that cities whose residents ride (as well as run and walk) see increased economic growth compared to areas with more sedentary citizens. Bike-friendly communities also have higher levels of mental health and wellbeing.

Eau Claire City Council President Terry Weld believes biking can form a strong thread in the fabric of Eau Claire. He says, “An active biking community brings so many benefits, including promoting a healthier culture, broadening the reach for those without vehicles, prompting tourism dollars, and reducing our carbon footprint.”

“All of this and more,” Weld says, “makes us a stronger community. A happier community.”

Aaron Salmon became addicted to the ease of bike commuting when he lived in Chicago. Since moving to Eau Claire five years ago, he’s become the chair of the city’s Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee. An active biking advocate, he says, “Bike infrastructure tends to increase nearby property values, helps create safer streets, and helps foster a stronger sense of place for neighbors in our community.”

So, what could we go from here?

Jeremy Gragert, who represents District 3 on the Eau Claire City Council says, “We need to get more butts on bikes, particularly for environmental reasons, as the transportation sector is the largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States.”

Meanwhile, Salmon says, “I’d love to see our city council to building more streets that are safe and comfortable for all ages and abilities — only about 10% of cyclists feel comfortable riding in paint-ed bike lanes and mixing in with traffic.”

Sue McDonald is excited for the future. She says, “I think at this point in time biking is just exploding in Eau Claire. Between organized group rides, social rides, winter fat-biking, skill courses, and getting the youth involved, I think we’re on track to continue the growth we’ve already started.”

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WORDS: Lauren Fisher + Tom Giffey + Eric Christenson + Mike Paulus + Rebecca Mennecke
PHOTOS: Andrea Paulseth
DESIGN: Taylor McCumber + Eric Christenson
LISTINGS: James Johonnot
CHIPEWA VALLEY BIKE BOOM

“GETTING BETTER”

At the High Bridge over the Chippewa River to Highway 37

The High Bridge

More are slated for the near future, according to the latest comprehensive map of the city’s 116-page Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, which was approved in December. For example, over the next two years the city plans on including bike access to the Jefferds Road area as part of the reconstruction of that road. Eventually, bikers will be able to ride all the way from the city’s northwest part of town to others in the southeast part of St. Croix County and Eau Solbery, Eau Claire city engineer.

Eau Claire city engineer.

The former railroad right-of-way is 11.4 miles of bike lanes and 5.7 miles of bike rows. As of the end of 2018, there were

Eau Claire city engineer.

The High Bridge

The newly designated routes, as well as other bicycle infrastructure, make travel easier and safer for bicyclists, said Gragert, the Council member who also serves as northeast regional planner for the regional planning organization.

“All the city has planned to date, this will be a great resource for them to look at. Some routes look like the ones that have been vetted by user groups,” Gragert said.

Starting last year, signs will begin to go up to mark the routes. In the City of Eau Claire alone, there will be 400 blue-bike signs, said Pat Ivory, a senior planner with the city. Those signs will start popping up this fall, he added.

The recent completion of the project, as well as other bicycle infrastructure, make travel easier and safer for bicyclists, said Gragert, the Council member who also serves as northeast regional planner for the regional planning organization.

“If our city had a goal of trying to do all our infrastructure in a comprehensive and regional planning consistent form, this will be a great resource for them to look at. Some routes look like the ones that have been vetted by user groups,” Gragert said.

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FILLING THE GAPS

The decades-old promise of the Chippewa Valley’s bike trail network – being able to travel on a dedicated bike path all the way from Durand to Cornell – will finally become a reality in 2020. For years, all that has remained to complete the roughly 30-mile route is a 2.5-mile gap in the Old Abe Trail on the north side of the Village of Lake Hallie and the southern part of the city of Eau Claire Falls. Currently, the Old Abe Trail transitions into Eau Claire’s Phoenix Park, steps at 40th Street, and then into Menomonie. The city plans on including bike trails along Fall Creek in the east and from Pleasant Street to Dewey Street along the south side of Lake Hallie in the west to Folsom Street.

“Eau Claire has also been working to provide on street bike lanes and share

even in 2018, 31 miles of bike lanes and bike rows. As of the end of 2018, there were

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Eau Claire river crossing Galloway Street railway cross bridge.

Fall Creek in the east and from Pleasant Street to Dewey Street along the south side of Lake Hallie in the west to Folsom Street.

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A community that bikes requires a bit of infrastructure to keep traffic moving smoothly while cyclists, pedestrians, and automobiles share space. Keep an eye out for these signs and signals when you’re out on the town to ensure everyone gets where they’re going safely.

Cyclists are required to follow regular traffic laws when riding on public roadways even if they are riding within bike lanes. They must use hand signals to indicate turns and make eye contact with other road users. Marked bike lanes and bike paths are designed to provide a safe and comfortable area for cyclists to ride. They are designed to be separate from pedestrian and automobile traffic and are typically marked with specific signage and road markings.

**BIKE LANE**

WESTBOUND WATER ST. BRIDGE

There are bike lanes on both sides of the bridge where Water St. turns into Summit Ave. In preparation for the intersection of Water St. and 1st Ave., cyclists may use the bicycle lane to cross, or move into the right lane.

**ALLEPATH RIGHT TURN**

A cyclist fully extends their right arm outward from the body.

**LEFT TURN**

A cyclist fully extends their left arm outward from the body.

**SHARROW:**

This symbol is painted on roads to indicate that a lane is to be shared between cyclists and bicycles. Motorists should follow cyclists at a safe distance.

**BICYCLE ARM SIGNALS**

Motorists should follow bicycle arm signals when making a turn.

Motorists should follow bicycle arm signals when making a turn.

**STOP**

A cyclist extends their left arm outward, bending their elbow downward with their hand toward the ground. Some riders choose to make a fist.

**RIGHT TURN**

A cyclist extends their left arm outward from the body, holding their hand up with their elbow bent 90 degrees.

**TIRE OF PEDALING SOLO?**

How to get into the local biking community? Try a group ride. It’s a bunch of like-minded bike-heads working together and riding together. Say goodbye to the loneliness of an empty trail, and say hello to new friends, new routes, and lots of fun.

There’s tons of advantages to riding with a group vs. on your own. If you’re a seasoned cyclist, it’s a good chance to keep your skills fresh, and if you’re new, it will help you learn faster. If you’re getting started, group rides let you ease into it. Groups can introduce you to new routes, new trails, and secret sweet spots you might not have known about.

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**GROUP RIDES 101**

Join other passionate bikers out there on the road, but keep some of this stuff in mind.

**GROUP RIDE ETIQUETTE:**

3. Be predictable. Don’t brake abruptly or change direction, speed, or position if you don’t have to. And if you do, alert everyone in the group to avoid a crash. Keep your speed consistent.
4. Don’t blow a wheel in front of you. Any adjustments by the front of you could lead to an accident, so keep a safe distance and always ride directly behind.
5. Help others. If a mechanical problem goes down with anybody in the group, do what you can to help. Don’t just leave them in the dust.
6. Have a good attitude. Everyone’s here to have fun, and everybody likes biking. Be encouraging, be friendly, and be good to the group. That’s what group rides are all about.

**GROUP RIDE 1. ROLLING DANCE PARTY**

Aside from their weekly group rides and monthly Bike Share Dance Party, SHIFT Cycle & Coffee Bar hosts what they call a Rolling Dance Party. This takes place every 1-2 months. This after-dark bike cruise includes music from DJ’s with periodic stops along the route. The bike is locked off, shake your body, and shake your way to the next stop. That’s it. A whole lot of cardio and a ton of fun.

**GROUP RIDE 2. BIKES, BRIDGES, AND BREWS**

This group ride happens a couple of times throughout the year. During Wisconsin Bike Week in June, and in September during Chippewa Valley Restaurant Week. You and the crew take your two-wheelers across just about every bridge in Eau Claire (and there’s a, kind of, a few of them). It’s a perfect ride for a river town, like this, the views are fantastic, and the occasional stop for beer at local breweries like Lazy Monk. That’s a nice touch.

**GROUP RIDE 3. BIKING INTO HISTORY**

Once in a while every year, the Chippewa Valley Museum hosts a group ride that lets you travel back in time. From the comfort of your bike, visit historical landmarks around the Valley with actual historians who ride along and fill you in on the Valley’s past. It’s fun, educational! And it’s free!

**GROUP RIDE 4. VALLEYCAT**

So, this one isn’t necessarily a group ride: To put it generally, it tightens the line between ride and race. Depending on how seriously you take it. The Valley Cat is an alter-ego race which originated from bike messengers decades ago. Minimizing the route a bike messenger might face in a typical delivery day. Allergies and riders around a city to a series of checkpoint stops. Some grove for the Valley Cat’s, which looks bikers with mapping their courses. Extra points to checkpoints across the whole Chippewa Valley every spring. And – winners and losers aside – there’s a big party at the end.

**GROUP RIDE TIPS:**

- Wear a helmet. Easy one. Just do it.
- Keep everyone safe. Use hand signals. Alert others of obstacles. Maintain your speed, and watch out for pedestrians.
- Be predictable. Don’t brake abruptly or change direction, speed, or position if you don’t have to. And if you do, alert everyone in the group to avoid a crash. Keep your speed consistent.
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CHIPEWA VALLEY BIKE BOOM

by his bikes and wants to make one of their own, aBa said they should find lots of free knick-knacks. “If it makes you smile when you put it on your bike,” aBa said, “to make other people happy.” aBa said he lived in Minnesota. “It is so impractical,” aBa said, “for me to carry a number of interesting gizmos: skeletons, flags from other countries, colorful dreadlocks, butterflies, and license plates – everything one could put on a bike.” aBa has a Ph.D. from Iowa, for his work on biology. A tornado destroyed a local bike shop in 2012, he said, so he shut down his store and moved to Minnesota. “So, I have this opportunity now to do it however I want, and I run the shop, not just the bike shop, I run the whole organization.”

A BIKE EMBELLISHED WITH REPURPOSED MATERIALS KEEPS PEOPLE HAPPY

Eric is the Eastside Enabler of Eau Claire and works for the West-Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission in Banbury Place. Eric has been biking to work-year-round for 12 years. He loves the health benefits of biking and enjoyed being outdoors before and after work. On my commute to and from work, I cross the Eau Claire River. I have been doing the four seasons and how they change where we live. I like being outdoors biking during all four seasons.

What tips do you have for someone interested in biking to work? Regardless of your distance to travel, it is important to be very safe by vehicle. It is important to have bright colored clothing and visible light. If you are going to ride in the rain, I’d highly recommend additional layers (I learned that the hard way). If you are thinking about biking to work, but it seems a little overwhelming to do in everyday, try a once or twice a week and see how it goes. 

Eric Anderson

BIKE+BUS=BEST

John lives in the Otter Creek neighborhood of Eau Claire and works at Jund Software downtown. He commutes 5.4 miles and has been commuting year round in no time. Why do you bike to work? I was motivated to start biking to work because of the health benefits, although more mental than physical health. Biking gave me a chance to decouple from the work day and think through my day as I ride. I have found my stress levels are much less, and the physical benefits are an added bonus.

What tips do you have for someone interested in biking to work? When considering biking to work, I would advise choosing a day or two with great weather and pay attention to how you feel at the end of the work day. Consider your time commitment, your overall mood during the day, and write down how you feel at the end of the day. For almost all of us, the time difference is negligible, your day “feels” lighter with more positive interactions with others, and the unwind time at the end of the day becomes irreducible. Oh, and be careful: Riding is addictive, and you’ll find yourself commuting your round in no time.

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Josh lives in the Eastside Hill of Eau Claire and works at Satellite Six on the north side of the city. He commutes 4.5 miles and has been commuting for a few years. Why do you bike to work? I like a lot of people, I find it hard to schedule exercise and hobbies into the busy life of a city. I get into biking because I know how healthy it is to be active and engage with the real world every day. Thanks to our bikes (and a little bit of creativity) our family has been able to just have one car which saves money and keeps life simple. Love the fresh air and variety that biking to work through all four seasons negates.

What tips do you have for someone interested in biking to work? First, jump right in and give it a shot. Sure, there are a few challenges with biking to work – like arriving early, needing to pack extra clothes, or how to carry your lunch and laptop. But don’t let those challenges stop you. With a little resourcefulness and planning ahead, you can find a way to make it work. Second, start with the bike you have or your garage. Don’t worry about getting fancy gear or a super-light bike. Enjoy biking to work and see if there is something that you want to stick with before you spend a lot of money on cycling gear.

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Josh Rizzo is an independent marketing consultant at Satellite Six, a brand and digital marketing firm in Eau Claire. This article was originally published on Lincoln’s.

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The Chippewa Valley bike scene is filled with neat bikes and nifty bikers. Try your best to match each Valley resident with their preferred ride. Check your answers on the next page to see if your guesses were right!

ALAIRe BIReN
Mary Hoffman works in the Provost’s office at UW-Eau Claire as the Director of Academic Planning and on commercial energy efficiency programs. He’s also on the Marathon City Council and a member of Friends of the Chippewa River State Trail.

Emily Anderson
Emily is the City Council representative for Eau Claire’s First Ward. She works as a freelance published writer and editor as well. “The best thing about riding a bike is being able to look up while cycling. I used to teach out grade and other programs on reading. Most of the love that’s a good thing!”

MATT BIReN
Matt works at Xcel Energy during the day as a commercial energy efficiency program. He’s also in the Marathon City Council and a member of Friends of the Chippewa River State Trail.

ANNA ZOOK
Anna Zook is a reference and digital services librarian at the L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library. She raced dirt bikes as a child from ages 7-10, at which age her bicycle of choice changed from a coaster brake bike to a “flexible frame” bike. Her collection continues to include bicycles of all shapes and sizes, especially older models.

AARON ZOOK
Aaron Zook is a priest for Christ Church and St. Simeon’s Episcopal churches in Chippewa Falls. He got his sweet ride about 17 years ago, but it only comes out of storage during the odd occasion or when he moves.

ANSAwERS:

THE BIKES

This bicycle is for helping; sometimes when hauling a heavy load, it’s good to have a friend along to assist with sticky situations. When not being used for bailing out friends, this bicycle enjoys a cozy storage space in a public building.

This bike was a little too big at first, so it’s clear material around its Trex tires for my mouth. Sometimes, bike riders grow into the espacio ride. The giant tire is for larger size riders and the bike is designed for trail riding, but the “bunk bike” attachment makes it ideal for child-parent rides.

This is the nicest bike ever, and I wasn’t expecting it. One of my good friends worked at a bike shop and so my wife kind of coordinated with him to find a good one, and I was totally surprised.”

This bicycle is for helping, sometimes when hauling a heavy load; it’s good to have a friend along to assist with sticky situations. When not being used for bailing out friends, this bicycle enjoys a cozy storage space in a public building.

This bike is designed for trail riding, but the “bunk bike” attachment makes it ideal for child-parent rides.

I’d call it a recreational mountain bike, but probably the most miles I get on it is commuting for work, and that is one of the reasons why they picked this bike."

This bicycle is too big for Anna yet, and I can’t expect it. One of my great friends wanted to buy a bike and I knew of this bike and contacted him to find a good one, and I was totally surprised.”

This bike enjoys a cozy storage space in a public building.

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HERA'S LIST OF THINGS THAT JENN BAST, WHO HAS BEEN BIKING ALMOST 10 YEARS, CONSIDERS WHEN SHE GOES OUT FOR A RIDE. It’s not comprehensive, by any stretch, but it is representative.

• Is she familiar with the trail/path, it unsafe?
• Is the trail/path quiet, or is there a steady flow of traffic—there is security in numbers.
• Does the trail/path permit her to take her riding companion, a gray-spotted cattle dog named Trek along with her?
• If Trek is welcome, is she allowed to drop his leash while riding more technical portions of trail?
• When travelling for a race or ride, are there other women travelling whom she can camp with?
• Is there some form of security? Camera, trail monitors, law enforcement, park rangers?
• Are other women participating in the ride?
• What pace is the group ride moving at?
• Is the group ride cooperative and nurturing, or more of a “learn as you go,” obstructive?
• Will the group be a welcoming or comfortable place to discuss woman-specific topics related to biking?

Bast, the bike manager at Scheels, is a lifelong biker who remembers riding with her family as a child, but it wasn’t until she moved to Eau Claire about a decade ago that she discovered her love for cycling while attending UW-Eau Claire.

“I realize that the bike trails around Eau Claire are pretty,” she said. So she took off for rides on her inexpensive bicycle. Always on course for self-betterment, Bast quickly decided she wanted to complete a triathlon. Her manager at Scheels, Bast quickly decided she wanted a triathlon. Her manager at Scheels, Bast quickly decided she wanted a triathlon. Her manager at Scheels, Bast quickly decided she wanted a triathlon. Her manager at Scheels, Bast quickly decided she wanted a triathlon. Her manager at Scheels, Bast quickly decided she wanted a triathlon.

“When I go out for a ride,” Bast reflects, “I tell people, ‘I just want to ride with you...’ That’s the culture that’s going to grow the community.”

From safety to social dynamics to even clothing and equipment—women in biking have it different.

“Some people are only mountain bikers or only road bikers,” she explained. “Being female is very different in a training situation as a newcomer, but with is a growing challenge, she said. Finding other women racers to camp with is a growing challenge, she said. From this point on, she was. From this point on, she was. From this point on, she was. From this point on, she was. From this point on, she was.

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“At Firecracker to the Firehouse 50. Women can feel awkwarded out of ‘Shammy talk,’ Bast said. ‘Some people are only mountain bikers or only road bikers.’

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Bast takes on the role of a mentor, leading new riders the ropes. By her observation, women often hand off their bike repair to men for repairs or tire replacements. In her experience, women often hand off their bike repair to men for repairs or tire replacements.

“It’s not comprehensive, by any stretch, but it is representative.

Bast organizes the occasional all-woman ride or workshop, but there’s more to it. She believes more investment in trails and trail maintenance, and more information accessibility, will make biking the Cherry Valley more appealing to women, and to people in general.

“We don’t get people to come here... It’s not a destination, but it could be...” Bast said.

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While maintaining boundaries in all-female groups can be difficult—“How do you tell a man, no, this is a woman-only space?!”—Bast asks—“it’s essential to welcome more women into the biking community," she said. Having female-only spaces allows participants to speak freely about issues many women face, such as finding functional clothing, or choosing equipment that accommodates their bodies. Bast has a passion for biking. While maintaining boundaries in all-female groups can be difficult—“How do you tell a man, no, this is a woman-only space?!”—Bast asks—“it’s essential to welcome more women into the biking community," she said. Having female-only spaces allows participants to speak freely about issues many women face, such as finding functional clothing, or choosing equipment that accommodates their bodies. Bast has a passion for biking.

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Riders can register and check in from 7am-

BIKING EVENTS

- JULY 9 - 5K/10K RUN/WALK - TOWN OF FARMINGTON

- JULY 16 - LEINENKUGEL'S 100 MILE BIKE RACE

- JULY 23 - DARE TO RESIST RIDE FOR CRIPPLED CHILDREN - JIM FALLS TO CEDAR FALLS

- JULY 30 - WISCONSIN RIVER MUDFEST - CAUERVILLE

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KIPPER'S MUD RUN

JULY 9 - 2 mile, 5k and 10k run / walk. Begins at 9am at the fenced in area near the entrance to the park.

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- JULY 30 - RIDE FOR THE RED CROSS - JIM FALLS TO CEDAR FALLS

- AUGUST 6 - JIM FALLS 100 MILE BIKE RACE - JIM FALLS TO CEDAR FALLS

- AUGUST 13 - WISCONSIN RIVER MUDFEST - JIM FALLS TO CEDAR FALLS

- AUGUST 20 - LEINENKUGEL'S CHIEF WABASH BIKE RACE - JIM FALLS TO CEDAR FALLS

- AUGUST 27 - WISCONSIN RIVER MUDFEST - JIM FALLS TO CEDAR FALLS

- SEPTEMBER 3 - LIONS 10 MILE BIKE RACE - JIM FALLS TO EASTPAGES

- SEPTEMBER 10 - LEINENKUGEL'S CHIEF WABASH BIKE RACE - JIM FALLS TO CEDAR FALLS