

Local Bike Summits

The League of American Bicyclists convened the first National Bike Summit in 2001 with the goal of bringing together various elements of the bicycle movement to collectively present their case for a more bicycle-friendly America to the United States Congress and Federal agencies.

In the intervening years, participation has grown from 150 people to 435; speakers have included Secretary's of Transportation, Mayor's, Members of Congress, and industry leaders; and the event has both moved forward the bicycling agenda in Washington and strengthened relationships between the bicycle movement and their elected representatives.

Another demonstration of the success of the event has been the number of state and local Summit's scheduled since the 2001 event in Washington, DC. Cities such as Louisville, Ky.; Columbia, SC,; and Portland, Ore; and the states of Oregon and Iowa have already hosted events, more are planned in Lexington, Ky.; Boulder, Colo,; and possibly the Washington DC area itself.

A local bicycle summit is an excellent opportunity to bring together leaders of the local bicycle community (advocates, retailers, clubs, and community groups) with local elected officials (Mayor, city council members, county commissioners, state legislators) with the goal of identifying

- a common community vision for bicycling
- critical policies necessary to realize that vision, and
- political leaders willing and able to champion the cause of improving conditions for bicyclists.

The event has a strong political focus, without being party political or partisan in any way. A local bicycle summit should impress upon local elected officials that bicycling is an important, valuable, and integral part of the local transportation system, business community, recreation infrastructure, and health network – therefore, the agenda and participants should reflect the breadth of these issues.

There may also be an opportunity for more technical workshops on facility design, education programs, funding opportunities, and the local planning process, as well as site visits and technical tours.

A bicycle summit may be two hours or two days long depending on local circumstances and opportunities! Political leaders, such as the mayor or a state legislator, are unlikely to be able to attend the entire event – but their participation at key points (opening, plenary session, closing) is essential.

Equally essential is a specific outcome for your local Summit. The Louisville summit in February 2005, for example, was notable for the participatory process created to develop a series of recommendations for the Mayor to consider at the end of the two-day event. You may seek a commitment for a new bike plan, or adoption of a complete streets policy; the issue may be related to a critical bridge or specific project; it may be to simply get the Mayor on record talking about bicycling if he or she has never done that before! There should always be a strong media element to the event.

Size is not an issue. If you can get the right 20 people around a table to discuss implementation of a local bicycling strategy, that's all you need! For a one or two day event, you might target a number close to the 200 people that attended the Louisville event – it may be a few years before you can challenge the 400-500 that attended the Portland summit in 2006!