

Building the *Velorution*:

Bike Culture, Community, and Politics in Los Angeles

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Dedication

To all the cyclists in LA's bike community that served to inform and inspire this work. And to my dad, for sharing with me his love for cycling.

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Prologue

Bikes have always been an important part of my life and although my relationship with them has definitely evolved over the years, the pure and simple thrill of riding a bike has never become trite or banal. My first memory of bikes was before I was even able to ride one, or even able walk for that matter. My father has always been an avid cyclist and so even as a baby toddler he used to take me on bicycle rides with him around the lake, or around the neighborhood to run errands. He would put me in a small yellow carriage that connected to the back of his bike and pull me behind him on long weekend rides. Sometimes my mom would come too and we'd make a day out of it; one big happy family. When I was old enough, my parents bought me my own bike: a pink Huffy with streamers on the handlebars. I remember riding it around the neighborhood on hot, summer days in Texas and feeling free from the heat with the wind against my face and in my hair. I could go anywhere on that bike.

My dad also made a living off bikes in the first years of my life, selling cozies with Velcro that he invented to attach to bikes and keep water bottles cold. He called it the Nsulater and we traveled to bike expos and races to market his product. We hit all the big ones: the Hotter Than Hell 100 in Wichita Falls, Texas, the Tyler Rose Ride in Tyler, and the Italy 100 in Italy, Texas; all in the heat of the summer, since that's when cyclists were most interested in buying cozies to keep their drinks cold. Although miserable for my parents, I never minded going to these races and always found it entertaining to watch grown men prance around in brightly colored spandex in 100 degree heat. My parents would set me up at the booth with a big tall glass of lemonade, put a racing hat on me and hope to attract some buyers with my cuteness. The Nsulater days didn't last long after the business went sour in the early '90's, but these memories mark my first exposure to bike culture.

It wasn't until many years later though, during the summer after my freshman year at college that I was re-introduced to bike culture in Austin, Texas where everyone rode bikes for transportation. That summer I rode everywhere by bike; to work, to meet up with friends, to go to a show and to take a dip at Barton Springs. I rode because my friends were doing it and because it seemed like a fun way to explore the city without having to pay for gas. When I returned to LA at the end of the summer, I realized that riding a bike had become such a part of my lifestyle that I didn't want to drive anymore. It just didn't make sense to drive in a city as flat and sunny as LA

and it certainly wasn't enjoyable in all the traffic. So I began commuting by bike to my internship downtown and I quickly realized how different this experience was from Austin. The streets were bumpier, the drivers were faster, the city more vast, and the danger more imminent. But I got used to it and I even began to like it. LA's streets were thrilling and exhilarating.

Then, in the spring of my sophomore year I became good friends with a cyclist named Jamal Navarro who took me on long rides to the beach and eventually invited me to my first Midnight Ridazz ride. This was in the early days of Midnight Ridazz when the original organizers were still in charge and the meeting place was always the same: Pioneer Chicken in Echo Park. It was the Heavy Metal ride, so cyclists were dressed up in cut off shorts, Iron Maiden shirts, long wigs, chains, and high tops. People were running in and out of the liquor store to grab last minute tall boys for the road while others head banded in the parking lot to metal blaring from someone's makeshift stereo bike trailer. This was certainly very different from the cycling culture I had been exposed to as a child. It was informal, non-competitive, all-inclusive and a lot of fun. It was on this ride that I really began to experience the city in a new way and I fell in love with it. There was a tangible spark of energy in the air and I was inspired by it, hooked on it even. For me, Midnight Ridazz was like the gateway drug into the cycling culture and community of LA, and from this point on cycling became a huge part of my life.

As an activist by nature and Urban and Environmental Policy major at Occidental College, I began to view this growing bike community as a powerful political force with great potential to change LA's car culture environment. Bike culture had already done a lot to get more people on bikes, but I still couldn't help but wonder why this group had not been mobilized to demand better facilities, roadways and policies in favor of bikes. Although these rides and events were typically apolitical in nature, the very act of riding a bike in the city of cars had always been, in my opinion a political act in and of itself. Therefore, my decision to focus on the bike culture, community and politics in Los Angeles for my comps was quite natural. I was interested in how this vibrant culture could be catalyzed and transformed into a political movement. It was my hope that through my research, I would discover a political will within the cycling community that would turn this social phenomenon into a Velorution.

I. Introduction

Los Angeles is a vast and sprawling
Landscape of concrete
Panorama of parking
King of cars
Maelstrom of steel
25 freeways
5 hour commutes
10 million people
Isolated landfill
Pollutant capital
Fragmented chaos
Manic journey
Dystopian nightmare
on the verge of collapse
Los Angeles is a city built for cars

Los Angeles is all of these things, but it is also a vibrant cycling culture that seeks to challenge all of these preconceived notions and stereotypes. LA's citizens are tired of the long commutes, the isolation of cars, the stress of road rage and the immobility that plagues their every day life. In response to this, they are getting on bikes and taking back the streets in big numbers. On nearly every night of the week now, one can find an organized bicycle ride somewhere in the county of Los Angeles. These rides are entertaining, social in nature, usually themed, and attract Angelinos from all over the county. They get people out of their cars and force them into direct contact with each other and the exposed city that surrounds them. They take people to neighborhoods they've never seen and open their eyes to things they've never seen before. They remind people that riding a bike can be fun, easy and even exotic in the city defined by cars. These rides have made cycling cool and popular in Los Angeles and have played an important role in building this unique cycling culture.

Helping to build this culture is a community of bicycle groups and organizations that advocate for bikes, offer services and create an environment for this culture to grow. Some maintain a political agenda to change policy in favor of bikes, but most do not. The more successful ones focus on building culture instead of organizing a unified political base. Organizations that seek to effect change from within the political system or appear to maintain any form of institutionalized dogma are typically shunned and deemed ineffective. Volunteer-based organizations that build community from the grass roots level and work to effect real, on the ground change are more respected and typically more effective. Within the bike community, there is very little confidence in the ability of government to make things better for cyclists, and this is reflected in the community's do-it-yourself ideology. The logic is that 'we can do it ourselves,' without the help of government. As long as cycling is made fun and entertaining through organized events and rides, more people will choose to ride bikes and thus bikes will become an important mode of transportation.

But in order for cycling to ever truly become a significant form of transportation in LA, there need to be specific policies in place to protect cyclists. Los Angeles can be a pretty scary place to ride a bike, especially for new urban cyclists and the elderly. Cars are so dominant on the streets of LA that most drivers do not expect to see cyclists. So they must deal with oblivious drivers, angry motorists, and dangerous road conditions that fail to accommodate bikes. Safety modifications such as bike lanes, separated bike paths, fewer on-street parking spots and traffic laws that protect cyclists in the event of an accident would help to make riding a bike in Los Angeles safer and more realistic. If these bike groups and organizations are really committed to making cycling a viable form of transportation in Los Angeles, they must work to make it a safe and universal practice for all. But organizations can only do so much on their own to ensure safer roadways. They cannot however, reshape the roads, build the facilities or pass laws; for this, they must depend on the policy makers. Therefore, they must convince them that cyclists' needs are important and that implementing bikes into the transportation system will be worth their vote.

This is not, however, an easy task in Los Angeles city government. In a city where cars rule, and have ruled for more than half a century, all other forms of transportation are seen as secondary to the car. For this reason, motorists have lot of political influence over policy makers and the laws that get passed. This mentality that cars own the right to the road is so entrenched in the way that planners, engineers, and policy makers view Los Angeles that building the city in any

other way seems difficult to imagine. But the city's infrastructure is on the verge of collapse and it will no longer be able to maintain this kind of car-dependent transportation planning in the future. LA's population is expected to grow by 2 million people by 2020 and freeway traffic speeds are expected to slow by an average of 14mph by 2030 (Los Angeles County Metropolitan Agency). As the nation's congestion and air pollutant capital, this does not fair well for Los Angeles. It is clear that Los Angeles needs a new transportation model in order to manage its many challenges in the future. With the help of the bike community, bicycles have the opportunity to be a part of this change.

LA's bike movement is at a critical point in its evolution in which many elements have come together to create a great potential for political change. Cyclists are enthused about bike culture, socially well connected, furious about road conditions, and their numbers are greater than ever before. The many grassroots, volunteer-based bike organizations that have emerged in this evolution have served to cultivate and grow this energy. City officials have been irresponsive to bike advocates in the past, but must now listen. The sheer mass of this cycling movement and its confrontational tactics have finally motivated the city to overhaul the long outdated Bicycle Master Plan, a document that serves as a policy guide for bike planning. This decision to update the Bike Master Plan puts LA's urban cyclists in a unique position to affect both the political and physical landscape of their city. As described by Robert Hurst in his book, *The Art of Urban Cycling*, "the dedicated urban cyclist is a new kind of pioneer," and as a pioneer she has an obligation to show the way (Hurst, 36). But LA's cyclists must first realize their potential as activists in the growing bike movement. LA's bike activists face many challenges in organizing this cultural phenomenon into a political force, but it is essential that they do so in order to ensure the sustainability of the vibrant cycling community and place for urban cyclists in LA's future transportation plans.

In the chapters that follow, I will evaluate the political will of today's urban cycling movement to seize this moment of opportunity for change. First I will discuss the history of LA's urban form to give context to the environment in which LA cyclists live today. Then I will examine the history of LA's bike advocacy and how it has served to inspire the bike movement of today. Next I will describe today's bike culture by looking at the different types of rides, events, and cyclists that serve to characterize it while also identifying some key bike groups and organizations that have helped to build this bike movement. Then I will outline the process of bike transportation planning in Los Angeles, give some background on the Bike Master Plan (BMP) and finally

describe my experience as an observatory participant during Phase 1 of the BMP's public outreach process. In the last chapter I will analyze my findings from this research and end with some policy recommendations for a more strategic bike movement.

II. Methods

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the history of LA's cycling movement, its current bike culture and community, and the political context in which activists and organizations must orient themselves today, I employed several different kinds of methods to ensure the most objective and insightful analysis. Beginning in the fall of 2007, I conducted some preliminary interviews with activists and cyclists in the community in order to obtain some basic background knowledge and to define a specific research question. Then in the spring semester, starting in January of 2008, I conducted the bulk of my research by doing interviews, reading articles and reports, analyzing 2000 census data and attending public outreach meetings for the Bicycle Master Plan.

I conducted 12 formal interviews with bike activists, city officials in both the LA Department of Transportation and the Department of City Planning, and the head planner of the Bicycle Master Plan who works for Alta Planning. I also conducted many more informal interviews with cyclists on rides, at events, and in social contexts. In addition, I also used the software program Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to create thematic maps for the spatial analysis of LA's bike culture. But a large part of my research and analysis also came from my living experience as a cyclist and activist in this community. The conversations and experiences I had during this process are reflected in both the language I use and the stories I tell. Much of the information I have presented in this paper reflects common knowledge or consensus among cyclists, at which point I've probably written it in the voice of the community. In doing so, I have attempted to maintain a voice of objectivity throughout.

III. Historical Background

History of LA's Urban Form

Before there was the bike, there was the electric streetcar that served as the main form of transportation for most Americans in late 1800's and through the turn of the century. However, this was especially true in Los Angeles where, during their peak years of operation there were 6,000 operating street cars and more than 115 routes covering between 530 and 700 miles of LA's fast-expanding landscape (Gottlieb, 178). In fact, Los Angeles was once a model of city of transportation planning before the invention of the car and home to one the most extensive streetcar networks in the United States. Their lines extended from the downtown center to the some of the first suburbs in the nation. Influential urban entrepreneurs and land-use planners such as Henry Huntington helped to extend the service of these streetcars by linking them to some of his new sub divisions in Pasadena, Santa Anna and Orange and the San Fernando Valley. The creation of these "streetcar suburbs" greatly influenced the physical shape of Los Angeles and many other cities around the US, creating a framework and setting a precedence for the future sprawl of car suburbs.

However, after the invention of the safety bicycle (the model we are all familiar with today) by John Kemp Starely and the pneumatic tire by Dunlap in the early 1890's, a national "bicycle craze" exploded across the nation, changing the way we would think about mobility forever. At the height of the craze, it is estimated that there were as many as 4 million cyclists riding the streets of the US (Hurst, 11). The bicycle soon became a preferred alternative to the horse drawn carriages because of its efficiency and speed, and to the electric streetcar as well since the bicycle allowed for more flexibility and freedom in mobility. On a bicycle, one was no longer restricted by the direction of the rails because she could go anywhere that the roads went. Americans quickly fell in love with this individualized mode of transportation as it spoke to many of the basic ideas upon which this country was founded: freedom, self-reliance and common sense, just to name a few. The bicycle was especially important in cultivating the American spirit of individuality and creating "an awareness of the flexibility and convenience of travel by road" which would later transfer to our love for the car the car.

The bicycle was especially popular in Los Angeles where, as one newspaper described in 1897, “there is no part of the world where cycling is in greater favor than in Southern California, and nowhere on the American continent are conditions so favorable the year round for wheeling” (Gottlieb, 209). It’s hard to believe but Los Angeles had one of the most modern and progressive transportation inventions in the nation at the turn of the 20th century. According to the same newspaper article, around 30,000 cyclists inhabited the streets of Los Angeles before the overtaking of the car. Although this is in part reflective of the national “bicycle explosion” of the 1890’s, it also reflects the regional and local enthusiasm for bikes as a viable form of transportation at the time. As described by *Good Roads Magazine* in 1901, “That in Pasadena, Queen of the Cities, and in Los Angeles, her metropolis, there will be 100,000 cyclists and 10,000 motor-cyclists in a few years, is a moderate computation” (Denham).

Horace Dobbins, a local millionaire and entrepreneur, was especially optimistic about the future possibilities of the safety bicycle and invested his life inheritance building an elevated cycleway in 1900 reserved specifically for bikes (Gottlieb, 218). His plan for this elevated bike route made of pine and steel was to connect Los Angeles and Pasadena “with a smooth surface of wood, running for nine miles through beautiful country, flanked by green hills, and affording views at every point of the snow-clad Sierras” along the Arroyo Seco corridor (Denham). In addition to scenery, the cycleway also had bathhouses at the beginning and end of the cycleway for businessmen and women who might get sweaty on their daily commute. Dobbins even envisioned refreshment stops along the way for cyclists who might get thirsty. To ride along the cycleway, elevated above the trees and hills of the beautiful Arroyo Seco must have truly been a sensory and even “poetic” experience.

But the grade separation was probably the most attractive aspect of the roadway to cyclists because it provided a cleaner, faster, and more efficient way for them to travel across the already sprawling landscape of Los Angeles. At the time, the only roads available to cyclists were the unpaved dirt ones that they had to share with horse-and-carriages. Because the horses were often spooked by fast traveling cyclists, they were required by law to maintain slower speeds so as to avoid scaring them. The dirt roads were also problematic since their surface was uneven (making for an all-around unpleasant ride), they left cyclists dirty, and they were often littered with horse dung, rocks, and other debris causing frequent flat tires. So when Dobbins envisioned his cycleway, one of his main goals was to provide a route that would enable cyclists to travel faster

and more efficiently. He saw this freedom of personal mobility as the key to progress in the burgeoning city of Los Angeles and hoped to one day extend it all the way to the sea. The grade separation of the cycleway from other roads or railways was one of the first of its kind and stood as a model for future roadways to come.

But the cycleway was never completed because of lack of funds and a conflict with another local wealthy entrepreneur, Henry Huntington, who didn't like the idea of the cycleway blocking the growth of his railways. So in 1911 Dobbins eventually sold the cycleway's right of way to Huntington's Southern Pacific. Although his dreams were never fully realized, Dobbins' cycleway set a precedent by creating a "free" way for cyclists to travel uninterrupted over a longer distance and at higher. In fact, the word "freeway" was actually coined by Dobbins when designing the cycleway in the late 1800's. Although the cycleway was well designed and aesthetic was certainly taken into consideration, its main purpose was to provide a faster and more efficient way for cyclists to travel from Pasadena to Los Angeles. Even after the short route of the cycleway was torn down, the idea of building a scenic, grade-separated roadway was still in the minds of many for the future.

In this sense, many regarded the cycleway as a precursor to the parkway, a concept that originated on the east coast after the introduction of the automobile in the 1910's and made its way to the west coast as car ownership began to increase. The idea of the parkway was to create a scenic roadway that would connect different parts of the city more efficiently but that would also provide better access to a city's green space and allow for "pleasure driving." Recalling the old cycleway path that ran from North to South through the many parks of the Arroyo Seco corridor, urban planners and engineers looked to this area to implement the new parkway design. Aesthetic, landscape and connection to place were all very important parts of the urban parkway design making a route along the Arroyo Seco an ideal location for its construction.

As the plan for the Arroyo Seco Parkway continued to evolve through the early 1930's, it seemed as though it was going to be "a kind of hybrid roadway" (Gottlieb, 219). Planners and engineers talked of incorporating railways, bikeways, and pedestrian ways along the Arroyo to diversify its usage and create a more multi-modal system of transportation. However, it came to be assumed that the parkway's main function would be "to move large numbers of cars at a continuous speed" and that "the physical and historic landscape of the region could be displayed- and experienced- through the windshield" (Gottlieb, 219-220). The name change of the Arroyo

Seco Parkway to the Pasadena freeway in 1954 by the California Highway Commission is reflective of the federal, state and local change in policy toward the transportation system in Los Angeles at the time. This decision to dedicate the parkway to car use only became an ominous foretelling of the future policy decisions that would dictate the function of roadways across Los Angeles through the 21st century.

As the priority of policy makers, planners and engineers shifted away from the aesthetic of roadways and toward maximum speed and efficiency, parkways became a thing of the past and freeways a symbol of the future. When in 1939 the Los Angeles City Planning Department adopted a transportation plan calling for 612 freeway miles to cover the region over a fifteen-year period, this reality became very clear. The construction of the Hollywood freeway was seen as a first step towards the construction of this massive system but could not be started until funds were secured. In realizing that neither the city nor the county had the kinds of funds to support such an endeavor they made a deal with the state of California who promised to help, but only if they were given control over the project's funds. This meant that the State of California now had control over city decisions about the plan including design, route, location, and land-use. A few years later, California would further assume control of local highway building when the state Division of Highways decided that all freeway-development decisions within urban areas would fall under their control (Gottlieb, 191). This switch in the 1940's from city to state control over funding of freeway projects greatly influenced the critical land use of Los Angeles and ensured that the freeway become the defining feature of city's landscape.

The Federal Highway Act of 1956, the gasoline tax, and a confluence of private groups and interests (namely the Automobile Club and General Motors) were also crucial national elements in ensuring the dominance of the highway in Los Angeles. All over the nation the United States government began doling out transportation funds for the construction of freeways through the Federal Highway Act of 1956. This highway trust fund was created through the national collection of taxes on gasoline and tires which contributed to about \$31.5 billion over thirteen years to construct the largest national roadways program in history: the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways. This single-modal transportation system was to connect the streets of states and cities across the nation, establishing an efficient infrastructure for the movement of goods and people in the growing market economy. Anything that stood in the way of this fast moving vehicle

of change, whether it be homes, trees, green space or communities, was to be eliminated or torn down in the name of progress.

In the urban context, this meant elevated highways and ringed beltways that often cut right through the bowels of urban centers, disjoining communities and disrupting important social networks. Such is the modern landscape faced by many great urban centers in the US today such as Chicago and New York. However Los Angeles suffers from the disjoining effects of freeways in a different way because this city was born *out of* the highway. With the introduction of the freeway Los Angeles flourished and grew as its fingers bloomed outward to consume more and more land. The highway was no obstacle for Los Angeles, but an open gateway to its future. Los Angeles, the new city, symbolized the great American dream of the 1950's in which the car represented opportunity and freedom; all you needed was an open road to get you there. However, just as nature abhors a vacuum, a crowded city abhors an empty highway and as the nation quickly caught on to the greatness of Southern California, the once open road became congested.

This landscape of sprawling freeways, congested streets, angry drivers, and deteriorating infrastructure is the environment through which the LA urban cyclist must navigate today. Although Los Angeles was once a model city of multi-modal transportation, a confluence of local and national forces combined to create the postmodern, dystopian model that we know today. Deemed by many to be the best example of how *not* to build a city, it is hard to believe that Los Angeles was once home to the nation's most extensive networks of interurban street cars, a futuristic cycleway and picturesque parkway that favored aesthetic over speed. But cyclists and transportation advocates alike remember the once utopian city that was Los Angeles, and often harkens back to these glory days when invoking a vision of the future. Although Los Angeles will never be able to go back and change the mistakes it once made, it can always look back to inform the policy that is made tomorrow. As we enter into the 21st century it is clear that Los Angeles needs a new model of transportation and it may be useful to remember what once worked for a city that seems stuck in the old ways of modernity.

History of LA's Bike Advocacy

Cyclists have always been a feisty bunch and their history as activists can be traced back to the League of American Wheelman (LAW) that grew out of the "bike boom" in the late 1800's. In fact, the reason we have paved roads for cars today is because of these cyclists.

Formed by Colonel Pope in 1896, the League of American Wheelman (LAW) was (and still is) a bicycle group that advocated for the rights of cyclists and better cycling conditions, including smoother roads (Hurst,11) . Since bikes were still expensive for most Americans at this time, the majority of the LAW was made up of affluent urbanites. This did not exclude their founder, Pope, who at the time owned a popular bicycle company. Seeing the connectedness between the conditions of the nation's roads and his growing business, he helped organize the LAW to fight for better road conditions. By using their power and affluence, the LAW was able to convince the politicians of their importance, and thus the importance of their campaign. As described by a surveyor of the California State Bureau of highways in 1895, "this agitation for better roads is due more directly to the efforts of the wheelmen than to any other one cause" (Brilliant, 15, from Hurst 235). Shortly after this campaign, a significant road improvements project was begun. These improvements helped to encourage the use of bicycles by making it more pleasurable for cyclists to ride, but they also changed the American landscape forever by literally paving the way for automobiles to follow.

Although less affluent than their predecessors, cyclists today have maintained a passion for political agitation. This can be exemplified by the actions of LA cyclists in the 1990's who used political action to grow the bike culture into what it is today. As recounted by some of the most active and long-standing members of the bike community, LA's current bike movement began with the coming together of a small group of bike advocates at LA's Critical Mass rides. A concept that originated in San Francisco in 1992, Critical Mass is a way for cyclists to assert their right to the road. The act is a direct political action with no real lead organizer in which cyclists use the tactic of riding *en masse* to protest the dominance of cars on the roads (Garofoli). By 1997, the idea of Critical Mass had made its way down to LA and begun attracting people interested in political and social change. This ride was important because it brought together a diverse group of activists from different backgrounds and got them talking about similar issues of sustainability as related to bikes.

Two of these activists, Ron Milam and Joe Linton met on a Critical Mass ride this same year and decided, along with a small group of other cyclists to start the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition (LACBC). Shortly before this ride, Ron had attended the Bike Advocacy Summit where he met Christ Morphis, a member of California's Bike Coalition, who asked him if he knew of anyone who might be interested in starting a Coalition in Los Angeles. Although Ron was only in

his early 20's at the time and knew very little about running an organization, he volunteered himself. After proposing the idea to Joe on the Critical Mass ride, the two decided to organize all the known LA bike advocates in one room for a public meeting. "There were a lot of 'lone wolf' bike people at this time pushing for the creation of bike organizations," explained Linton, "but the group of bike advocates was still really small" (Linton, 1/25/08). Despite their small numbers, they began talking about campaign strategies to get funding for more bike facilities. Shortly thereafter, they had their first official LACBC meeting in September of 1998 where they elected a board of directors and began to plan specific campaigns.

Although their numbers were small, the LACBC accomplished much in its early years because of effective grassroots organizing and its commitment to a volunteer-based organization. Their first campaigns were focused on getting bike lanes and preserving existing ones on specific roads such as Santa Monica Blvd., Silver Lake Blvd. and the Venice beach bike path. "We successfully canvassed and organized a coalition of community members to put bike lanes back on the road after the street was re-paved" explained Milam in describing the Silver Lake Blvd. campaign (Milam, 1/28/08). LACBC utilized volunteers to make fliers, talk to community members and mail out newsletters. After only six months of hard work, they were able to gain status as an official non-profit organization and hire on staff to run the organization full time. But this did not change the dynamic or the mission of the organization. As explained by Milam, "We were able to pay volunteers and hire them on, but the membership was still very volunteer based" (Milam, 1/28/08). By maintaining this commitment to a volunteer-based organization, they were able to continue recruiting members and winning victories.

In 2003 however, Ron decided to leave LACBC as its director to pursue a career as an activists in New York City. A new director, named Kelsley was hired on and the direction of the organization began to shift away from its volunteer based, grassroots mission and move more towards a staff-oriented group focused on policy. "They ended up focusing more on planning and less on advocacy," as described by Milam (Milam, 1/28/08). As a highly staffed organization they now have to spend more of their time applying for grants and recruiting new membership and less of their time on actual organizing. In addition, their dependence on maintaining funding also means a less radicalized agenda. "Since Ron left, we haven't had the same kind of action-oriented campaigns," as Linton explained (1/25/08). Because of this, many in the cycling community consider the current LACBC to be ineffective and unrepresentative of their constituency.

Although the LACBC may not be as radicalized or effective as it used to be, this has created an opportunity for other bike organizations to emerge. Many of these new organizations are very different from the LACBC in that they have focused less on the political advocacy of biking and more on creating a bike culture to encourage people to ride. By organizing fun rides and events, and teaching DIY mechanics of bicycles, the hope is that more people will naturally be attracted to biking, realize how easy it is, and then find ways to incorporate it into their daily routine. For Somerset Waters, an organizer of one of these new groups, fun is a major selling point “In the political scene, it’s easy to take ourselves too seriously and that’s not going to change any minds. Seeing people riding with smiles, having fun...that’s the kind of diplomacy we’re going for.” (Hauther). Although the general intent of these new groups is much less serious, formal and political than the group that first served to organize the LA bike community, the effectiveness of their strategy is evidenced in the growing number of cyclists.

The idea of organizing cyclists around fun and social interaction rather than a specific political cause was created by a group of 6 cyclists and 2 skateboarders called the Midnight Ridazz. This group of non-conformists and creative types planned their first ride in February of 2004 as a way “to challenge both the dominant means of transportation and the prevailing mode of entertainment in Los Angeles, a city largely designed around the private automobile and one in which weekend entertainment is widely assumed to involve some kind of commercial transaction” (*MidnightRidazz.com*, About section). Instead of going to a bar or restaurant, these friends organized a late-night group bicycle ride to all the fountains in downtown Los Angeles. The idea was to experience the city in a social way inaccessible by car: in open air, with friends, high on endorphins, and the cityscape unobstructed for viewing. But the Ridazz did not attest to be activists, and they did not consider their rides to be a political act in the way that Critical Mass is, except that they believe the act of riding a bike in this country to be a political act in and of itself. As described on their website, “the atmosphere revolves around party culture and fun rather than political demonstration.”

Because of its growing popularity, the original Ridazz decided to continue planning the themed rides and their idea of a “party on wheels” soon spread fast by word of mouth. In addition, they also used e-mails from a list serve to announce the theme and route of rides. Before their first year anniversary they had more than 500 cyclists congregating at the Pioneer Chicken in Eco Park for their monthly ride. But by the summer of 2006, it had become “an unmanageable mob,”

explained one of the founding members, Monica Howe (Gowing). More than 1,400 riders showed up for the “mural ride” that July and chaos broke out. “There were wrecks, altercations with drivers, and police helicopters following the ride,” my friend Jamal explained during a phone conversation I had with him from Texas that summer (Navarro). Things began to get a bit scary for the founding 8 since “people started to suggest that some [stuff] was going to go down” explained Howe, “... and that if anybody needed to be held responsible it was going to be the people organizing” (Gowing).

Although the original Ridazz had not expected such a large turn-out, nor had they intended for so many things to go wrong, they had designed the ride and announced it via e-mail therefore leaving no one else to blame. This resulted in threats by the police and possibilities of lawsuits, leaving the original Ridazz no choice but to step down from the position of organizers. They could have ended it all here but instead decided to allow the responsibility of the rides to devolve to the participants. The group decided that there would be no more e-mails or fliers to promote the second-Friday-of-the-month ride, but an interactive, wiki-style website on which any member of the community could post his or her own ride theme and itinerary. Created by Roadblock¹, one of the founding 8 members, MidnightRidazz.com encouraged anyone and everyone to organize smaller and more frequent rides specific to their region and post them on the website. This method worked remarkably well because now anyone can be an organizer and the rides have become much more manageable in size.

The LA bike community has grown from a small group of political activists to a much larger, collective group of social activists from all over the county. Midnight Ridazz marked the beginning of a new kind of cycling movement because it’s effectively turned cycling into a form of entertainment. No longer is bike activism reserved for the politically righteous few interested in using cycling as a political vehicle for change. Now anyone looking to simply have a good time may engage in bike activism by attending a social ride or organizing their own on the open-membership website. The inclusive and communal nature of MidnightRidazz.com has allowed cyclists the kind of creative freedom to mold the movement into whatever they want. It’s turned bike activism into a real community project and attracted hundreds of new people to cycling. Although the tactics of these new bike activists may be different from their predecessors, their ultimate goal is the same: to get more people on bikes and to make Los Angeles a more bike-friendly place to live. In doing

¹ This founding member refuses to reveal his real name. “Roadblock” is his forum name on the website and the name by which everyone in the community knows him.

so, they have built a vibrant culture and growing community in one of the most unexpected cities in the nation: Los Angeles, the king of cars.

IV. Research

Today's Bike Culture and Community in Los Angeles

Organized Rides

Since Midnight Ridazz became a community effort, many different organized rides have evolved that have come to define the bike culture of Los Angeles today. Some of these new rides are still posted under the Midnight Ridazz title, but many have broken away completely and stand as independent rides only inspired by the Midnight Ridazz model. Since there are no defined rules of organizing a ride (apart from designating a meeting point) cyclists can be as creative as they want. These rides vary in theme, time of day, and location and cater to nearly every kind of cyclist out there. They attract people from all over the county, average about 15 miles in distance, and ride to nearly every region in the county. Although these rides are difficult to categorize by type, they may generally be described as social or party rides, training, recreational, educational or informative and political rides.

An incomplete list of the most popular and frequent of these different types of rides are: Sins n' Sprockets, Los Angelopes, Midnight Ridazz and Crank Mob (social or party rides); Wolf Pack, Cub Camp, and Goga (fast-paced training rides); Mountaineerz, Over the Bars Mountain Bike Club and LA wheelmen (recreational rides); ArcRide, Spoke n' Art, and the International Alliance of Armed Librarians (IAAL/MAF) (educational or informative); Storm the Bastille and all of the Critical Mass rides that can be found in nearly every city of the County (political rides) (*Midnight Ridazz.com*). Although these "types" assigned to each of these rides explains their general purpose, these definitions are not exact and may overlap into other categories. For example, the Spoke n' Art Ride may be educational and informative, but it might also be social and even training for some depending on what one's level of fitness may be.

Because these rides travel to nearly every corner and pocket of LA, it is quite possible to explore the entire county of Los Angeles by bike. Although most people attend the rides that meet in their area or neighborhood, most rides travel between 5 and 10 miles from their starting points, taking most riders outside of their normal stomping grounds. This is important because it takes

people to places they've never been before or maybe never experienced outside the isolation of their cars. In a city so divided by class, race and space, these rides provide a unique opportunity for Angelenos to visit parts of the city they might never have ventured to. As described by Alex Amerri, organizer and founder of RideArc, "Part of these rides is to get people to engage in their community, to have a better understanding of their space, and to allow people to see things they don't normally see" (Amerri, 2/29/08). Attending these rides allows people to experience the physical and social form of Los Angeles in very sensory and conscious way, opening their eyes to things they might have before been blind to in their cars.

These bike rides also help to build a much-needed sense of community and belonging in Los Angeles. Because of their inclusive and informal nature, these social rides allow for people of different areas, backgrounds, and ethnicities to interact and connect. The group dynamic of the ride means that people almost always end up sharing. Although people may initially feel that they don't have much in common, talking about bikes and the experience in which they are both engaging provides a neutral starting point for conversation. As described by Alex Amerri, "Anyone can connect and relate talking about bikes. It's a great and easy way to start a connection because it has nothing to do with personal issues" (Amerri, 2/29/08). These rides therefore help to mitigate the sense of isolation that many people feel in this city and create an opening point for further and deeper connections. Traveling through the streets of Los Angeles in this way therefore encourages a sense of community and belonging, both to the group of cyclists with whom you're riding and the city in which you live.

LA's Cyclists: the Varying Types and Demographics

The growth of so many different rides reflects the diverse nature of LA cyclists. Because not everyone rides for the same reason, different types of cyclists have evolved that may be described by one of the many normalized terms derived by the cycling community. These cyclists may include, but are not limited to, the roadie, the fixie, the commuter, and the weekender. The roadie may be described as a spandex-clan cyclist who invests in expensive gear and specialized road racing bikes because they enjoy the precision of cycling and the competitiveness of racing. The fixie is a cyclist who rides a fixed gear bike² and whose style of riding and fashion sense are

² A fixed gear is a type of bicycle with only one gear and typically no breaks. These bikes can only be stopped by resisting the forward turning motion of the pedals with the strength of one's legs.

inspired by urban bike messengers³. The fixie culture is very popular in Los Angeles and is often associated with “hipsters”⁴ because of its trendy nature. The commuter rides for more utilitarian purposes like getting to work or running errands and can typically be spotted by their brightly colored safety vests and efficient hybrid or city bikes. The weekender may be explained by its name: a rider who typically only rides on the weekend for exercise, recreation, or social purposes. As with the rides, these terms are not exact and are not intended to place any individual in one specific box; more than one of these types may be used to describe a specific cyclist, and some may feel that they do not belong to any of these “types.”

In fact, many of these terms do not describe the majority of riders in Los Angeles. In a survey done by the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) in 2006, it was found that the majority of cyclists in Los Angeles are young, Latino males who typically ride ill-equipped bikes and lack the funds to purchase the necessary equipment to ride bikes safely and efficiently (Los Angeles County Bike Coalition). These cyclists log more miles a day than the average rider and are greater in number. However, they are the least visible in the growing cycling community. This is because majority of these people who use bikes as their main form of transportation don’t have time for social rides and advocacy. They ride a bike because they have to commute to their two jobs and riding a bike is cheaper than taking the bus and faster than walking. As described by Matt Benjamin, co-writer of the MTA’s low-income bike outreach survey, “these are some of the most difficult riders to organize but it is important that we include them in our advocacy to make sure their needs are met” (Benjamin, 3/21/08).

One of the reason these riders may not be adequately represented in this growing bike culture is because they don’t have access to many of the rides and events that have done so much to attract people to the cycling community. Majority of the cycling culture takes place in West LA, where the population is mostly white and higher income. But majority of the low-income Latino population, those identified as being some of the most active cyclists, lives in South Central and

³ Bike messengers are unique to urban areas and serve as deliverers for courier companies. They ride fast and skillfully on their fixed gears through the dangerous urban streets to deliver they’re packages on time and in doing so, have developed a new style of urban riding. They are often considered to be some of the toughest and most skilled cyclists out there.

⁴ Hipsters are typically unique to urban environments and may be described as young, well-educated urban middle class and upper class adults with leftist or liberal social and political views and interests in a non-mainstream fashion and cultural aesthetic (*LAist*). This aesthetic typically translates to the brand and design of their bike.

East Los Angeles. For the entire month of March, 2008 there were over 80 organized rides posted on MidnightRidazz.com of which only 4 were hosted in South LA and none of which met in East LA⁵. Although cyclists could potentially ride or take mass transit to other rides outside their neighborhoods, most of the rides meet so far away from where they live it would take far too much effort to travel to and from them. Although many argue that lack of time or interest is the true barrier to organizing these cyclists, inaccessibility is clearly making it more difficult for these riders to join the growing cycling community.

These organized rides are very important to LA's cycling culture and have served to popularize cycling by making it fun and entertaining. The many and varied rides that have been inspired by Midnight Ridazz now travel to nearly every region in Los Angeles on every night of the week. They expose people to things and places they've never before seen and engage people in their communities in a new and sensory way. They force people into direct contact with each other and allow for new connections through the shared experience of riding a bike. Their varied themes appeal to nearly every type of cyclist from the casual weekender to the hardcore roadie. However, none of their meeting locations are located in East or South Central LA, making them inaccessible to low-income Latino riders, one of the largest and most active groups of cyclists in Los Angeles. These rides have been very successful at getting more people on bikes and building community but face a challenge in the future to incorporate these cyclists into the movement.

Bicycle Groups and Organizations

Also important to the bike culture are the many different groups and organizations that work to encourage community, provide services, and advocate for bikes in this car-dominant city. These groups advise politicians, write reports, educate citizens, write articles, organize cyclists and ultimately seek to integrate cyclists into LA's transportation system. They include a governmental entity, two non-profits, several different grassroots based DIY bike repair shops, and a growing online community that helps to shape the dialogue about bike politics and bike culture in LA. Although these groups may have different means of effecting change, they are all working to build a strong movement of cyclists.

The Bicycle Advisory Committee is a government entity that advises the Los Angeles Department of Transportation and Planning Department on issues of transportation as related to

⁵ See maps of March rides in appendix.

biking and helps to ensure the implementation of the city's Bicycle Master Plan (*LADOT Bikeways Services*). The BAC is comprised of volunteers appointed by each of the Council members and the Mayor, equaling 19 members total, 15 of which represent each district in the city. There is a committee chair named Alex Baum, who helped to create the BAC in 1972, plus an advisor from LADOT's Bikeways, named Michelle Mowery who provides technical information during meetings when members get stuck.

In the most recent years, there has been some tension between many of the old advocates who have been on the committee since its start and the new, more recent activists. As described by Mowery, "It's gotten a bit hostile with the public lately" (Mowery, 3/18/08). Many of the new bike activists who have attempted to engage in bike politics through the BAC see them as an ineffective group whose values are outdated and who have little to no relationship to their councilperson. In a critical blog posted by activist Josef Bray-Ali after a frustrating BAC meeting in April, "The LABAC has a long and established record of screwing over anyone interested in helping to make bicycling safer and easier in L.A." (Ubrayj02, 4/2/08). This is probably because bike activists today are pushing to include bikes in LA's transportation system, a concept that is not understood by many of the old recreational BAC members. "The BAC grew out of the recreational and racing community," explained Mowery. "Some were there because they were politically interested in getting more for bikes as transportation, but that was rare" (Mowery, 3/18/08).

Although less institutionalized than the BAC, the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition (LACBC) is certainly committed to working within the political system. As described earlier in this paper, the LACBC was one of the founding groups of LA's current bike movement but has experienced some structural changes since its start as a volunteer-based, grass roots organization. Today, the LACBC finds itself in yet another transition as one of its most important staff members, Monica Howe resigned in March of this year and budget matters continue to put a strain on the scope and effectiveness of their work. Monica was first hired on to bridge the gap between the anti-establishment bike community and the LACBC, but frustration with ineffective board members and a decision to make some personal lifestyle changes led to her eventual resignation. As described by Alex Amerri, "there were board members who really did not care too much about giving time to the coalition, and basically acted like bad parents: putting in little time or effort, or 'duct-tape' fixes to problems without giving any care to the growth, development, or needs of the LACBC" (Amerri, 4/27/08). Many of these board members have been replaced since

Monica left, leaving some hope for the future. But problems with funding continue to plague the organization making it difficult for them to stabilize and focus on changing transportation policy.

Another well-recognized organization in LA's bike advocacy world is the Eagle Rock based non-profit Cyclists Inciting Change Through Live Exchange (C.I.C.L.E.). Started by two women, Shay Sanchez and Liz Elliott in 2002, C.I.C.L.E. is a volunteer-run organization that encourages the use of bicycles as alternative transportation by "utilizing a multi-faceted approach which incorporates web-based outreach, social and recreational bicycle rides, festivals and events, and bicycle safety workshops" (*C.I.C.L.E.org*, About page). They've organized events like the Car Free day at new Chinatown State Park and hosted workshops such as Launched, that teaches cyclists how to ride in an urban environment and how to incorporate bikes into their daily routines. They also run a webpage that features interesting news stories related to bicycles in the news, informative blogs, and up to date postings of events and social rides in the LA area. This diverse and modern approach to organizing has been very effective in educating people about bikes, keeping people informed, and setting the agenda for bike activism in LA.

Also important to the bicycle community are the many DIY bicycle repair shops that have popped up around LA over the past couple of years. These include the Bike Kitchen, located in North Hollywood, the Bikerowave in West Hollywood, and the Bike Oven in Highland Park. These places serve an important need for basic bicycle maintenance by providing cyclists with do-it-yourself skills, repair services, and bike parts at a very low cost. Cyclists are typically asked to donate what money they can to use tools and stands, and in return receive free knowledge about bicycle mechanics. This knowledge is empowering because over time it teaches cyclists how to be more self-sufficient. The benefits of this cooperative and reciprocal relationship are two fold: the cyclist feels like she's gaining a new set of skills while her donation to the organization ultimately helps to fund its continued existence. Both individuals get something out of the transaction while also collectively helping to build a more sustainable movement. The services provided by these repair shops may not be considered direct activism but they are equally important to building the movement because they get more people on bikes which, in the end, fulfills the ultimate goal of building a more bike-friendly society.

These DIY repair shops have also created an important, shared social space where cyclists can meet and interact freely. Although most of them started out as places to merely fix bikes, they soon became social spaces to meet like-minded people and hang out, even after the

bikes were fixed. This was especially true for the Bicycle Kitchen that started off as a one-room repair shop at the Eco Village and has now turned into the bike cultural hub of Los Angeles. This one block area at Melrose and Heliotrope consists of the Bike Kitchen as well as several bike-friendly businesses: Orange 20, a bike and bike accessory shop, Scoops, a vegan-friendly ice cream parlor, and Pure Luck, a vegan restaurant recently opened by two members of the bike community. Catering almost entirely to the bike community, this area has attracted so many cyclists that it was dubbed the “Bike District” of Los Angeles in summer of 2007 (Fixpert Inc.)⁶. As described by Ron Milam, “The Kitchen has done a lot for advocacy. It’s a place where people build strong relationships with each other” (Milam, 1/28/08).” These repair shops are no longer just providers of a service but builders of a unique culture and community in LA.

The use of the Internet to inform and educate people about bike culture and politics has also been extremely important as an organizing tool and community builder. Through online websites such as Midnight Ridazz and Bike Boom, rides, events, and blogs are posted to ensure social connectedness throughout the county. Cyclists can also post photos from rides and events, creating a visual archive of the bike community that contributes to a unified visual identity among cyclists. These websites represent a kind of database of bike culture for those already in the community and those interested in becoming a part of it. This is extremely important for organizers trying to build the community because they can simply direct interested members to this website for nearly complete information on how to get involved. This digital bike world also represents a non-spatial meeting point for cyclists to engage and dialogue about all things related to bike culture and politics. The digital community is therefore very important to the development of the bike movement as it provides easy access to information and represents a new kind of social space for cyclists independent from physical place.

Another group important to the growing Internet community of cyclists is the Bike Writers Collective, a coalition of 12 bike activists from all different backgrounds and occupations that use writing as a political tool to shape the discourse on LA transportation issues as they relate to bikes. Most all of them have their own blogs that vary in themes but all include issues of sustainability, alternative transportation, and community to some extent. “The idea behind the BWC was to bring together all the most recognized LA bloggers writing about bikes and transportation issues to create an integrated network of information,” as described by Stephen Box, the group’s founder

⁶ See map of Bicycle District in Appendix

(Box, 3/3/08). Their blogs are often more informative than other more traditional forms of media because they report more thoroughly on issues that are important to cyclists and they are not restrained by the bias of corporate publications like the LA Times. In fact, it is not uncommon for newspaper reporters to read their blogs to help inform their stories (Box, 3/3/08). Cyclists may also respond to and discuss BWC articles by posting comments on their blog forums. This helps to shape the political discourse and build community by allowing users from all over the net to interact through discussion. The BWC is important because they serve as both a way to inform and educate cyclists, and influence the media on transportation issues as they relate to bikes.

The BWC has also used their writing skills to engage in activism outside the realm of the Internet. As part of their mission to advocate for bikes, they've written the Cyclists Bill of Rights which articulates the cyclist's equal right to the road as articulated in the California Vehicle Code⁷. It describes why cyclists are important citizens to society and therefore, why they deserve the same rights as cars such as "the right to travel safely and free of fear...the right to the full support of educated law enforcement...(and) the right to urban and roadway planning, development and design that enable and support safe cycling" (Bike Writers Collective). This document is important because it represents an official document, written in legal language that can be used by all bike organizations to advocate for cyclists around the world. The BWC has successfully used it to endorse and advocate for the rights of cyclists at city hall meetings, neighborhood council meetings, and even at the Bicycle Master Plan meetings this spring. In March of 2008, the BWC were able to get the East Hollywood Neighborhood Council to formally support cyclists in their community by adopting the Cyclists' Bill of Rights (Box, 3/3/08). This represents an important victory for the cycling community and sets a precedence for further alliances with Neighborhood Councils across LA. By using the Cyclists' Bill of Rights as a universal document to advocate for bikes, cyclists will continue to build their political force.

While all of these organizations are needed to build a strong bike movement, the volunteer-based, grass roots organizations seem to be having more success than the others. The BAC is ineffective because it is paralyzed by the ideology of its members and their disconnected relationships with city council members. The LACBC, once a very effective grass roots organization, is stuck in transition and struggling with financial dilemmas, making it difficult to really focus on what's important. None the less, the bike community continues to grow under the

⁷ See BWC Cyclists Bill of Rights in attached PDF file, 'Cyclists Bill of Rights.'

direction of the many grass roots organizations that have sprung up in reaction to their ineffectiveness. As the BAC and LACBC struggle with institutionalization and bureaucracy, groups like C.I.C.L.E., the DIY repair shops, and the online Internet community have built a vibrant cycling culture that only continues to grow into a bike movement. These other groups have the ability to really advance the movement, as they've already established important relationships with city officials and policy makers, but they must first undergo some structural changes in order to truly be effective. Although these grass roots organizations are very important to the growth of the movement, their work would be much more effective with the help of the other two. In order to achieve the kind of drastic, institutional changes needed to make Los Angeles a more bikable city, these two sectors must work together as a unified front.

Bike Transportation Planning in L.A.

Understanding the political process of getting a bikeway striped and on the map can be very confusing and overwhelming at times, especially in Los Angeles. Although it is understood that the transportation problems in Los Angeles are extremely broad and complex, it is important for an activist or organization to understand the complex system that governs these problems. As with any bureaucratic process in the United States government, a basic flow chart of hierarchy can be drawn to describe the process of bike transportation planning in Los Angeles. Although funding and management of bike projects may be governed at the federal, state, county and city levels, I will focus on the power of the city entities since they are the ones responsible for the *implementation* of bike policy and projects.

In the City of Los Angeles there are three different departments with individual sections and divisions responsible for the oversight of bike transportation issues. The first is the Los Angeles Department of City Planning (DOCP). The second is the Los Angeles Department of Public Works (DOPW) that includes the Bureau of Engineering, the Bureau of Street Lighting and the Bureau of Street Services. Within the Bureau of Street Services' Engineering Division is a section called Bikeways and Grants Management that "prepares plans, specifications, and manages construction of bikeway projects in the City of Los Angeles" (Bray-Ali). The third is the Department of Transportation (DOT) that includes the Office of Transportation Development that has a special division called Project Grants, Bikeways and Enhancement that deals with bicycle

project planning, design, funding and construction. This division is further subdivided into a Bikeways Section that includes a team of engineers and a Senior Project Coordinator.

These entities have had difficulty incorporating bikes into LA's transportation system because bike projects are typically under funded. As described by James Rojas in DOCP, most of LA's transportation money goes to the construction of big highway projects; not to smaller bikeway or pedestrian ones (Rojas, 2/20/08). This is mostly because the only way to obtain large federal grants is through highways, forcing grant writers to seek out these funds. In addition, most of the money that comes in for these highway projects ends up going to the engineers and not to planners, making it harder to plan sustainable communities. This is because engineers plan how to fit as many cars as possible in the least amount of space with the least amount of political conflict. This is important to elected officials because they don't have to make any politically compromising decisions that might upset their constituents. As long as government continues to prioritize the funding of highways and "number crunching" by engineers, there will be no real incentive for transportation planners to change the way they have been doing things for so many years.

Because engineers receive most of the money from the prioritized funding of highway projects, this has given them a lot of power in determining how LA's transportation system is designed. As described by Mowery, designs may come over from the DOCP, but they have to go through the head engineer before it is signed into approval (Mowery, 3/18/08). This means that all designs proposed by the DOCP, or smaller engineers within the DOT for that matter, may be rejected or compromised by the head engineer if he feels that they will negatively affect the current and/or future transportation system. Because the current transportation system gives priority to cars over all other modes, any plan that conflicts with this superiority is typically shot down. For example, "If Bikeways wants to put a bike lane in where there's a peak hour lane, but the district engineer wants to keep it a peak hour lane because he may need it somewhere down the line to deal with congestion, then he can kill it," as described by Mowery (Mowery, 3/18/08). This reflects the general mentality of most engineers at the DOT: bikes are seen as obstacles in the way of a free-flowing system of cars. This outlook has thus made it difficult to incorporate bikes into transportation plans. They do not consider bikes to be an important mode of transportation and their position of power allows them to continue building roadways under this mentality.

This power has also led to a kind of arrogance among the DOT's engineers that has inhibited them from building a cooperative relationship with the planners in DOCP. They believe

that planners have no real power because they have no “technical design skills.” As described by Mowery, “[planners] have a more generalized understanding of planning, zoning and land use issues but don’t have a good understanding of transportation issues” (Mowery, 3/18/08). But this merely reflects a difference in mentality between engineers and planners: engineers plan for cars while planners plan for people (Rojas, 2/20/08). Just because planners don’t crunch numbers or manage congestion doesn’t mean that they know any less about transportation planning than engineers; they just look at different aspects of the same problem to find a solution. But both types of planning are necessary and essential in creating a successful transportation system. Until this is realized and a better relationship is formed between the two departments, the city’s mode of transportation planning will remain incomplete.

More importantly, the implementation of bikeways is contingent upon the political support of elected officials in City Hall. As described by Mowery, “Unless the elected officials hear from the community we’re not going to get direction to do things that are positive for bikes” (Mowery, 3/18/08). This is because the decision to implement bikeways is an inherently political one. For example, if a traffic lane or row of parking needs to be removed in order to stripe a bike lane, this decision could affect a lot of people. Business owners might get upset because of the reduced parking and automobile commuters could end up spending more time in traffic due to fewer travel lanes. Because this is a human issue, elected officials have the ultimate say in whether or not road space is compromised for the use of bikes. This can be a difficult decision for officials to make, especially if they don’t have support from the residents and the business community in their district. . “Automobile commuters are seen as a big political force in LA,” explained Matt Benjamin, planner for Alta Planning (Benjamin, 3/21/08). “If during your administration the traffic jams get worse you’re worried that you’re going to get voted out of office.” Therefore, the DOT and the DOCP have very little power when it comes to implementing bikeways. Elected officials have the final say and if cyclists don’t focus their political pressure on them nothing is going to get done.

A Case Study of the 2008 Bicycle Master Plan

Background on the BMP: 1996 to the Present

In 1996 the city council adopted a Bicycle Master Plan (BMP) as part of the Transportation element of the General Plan of the City of Los Angeles. This plan was meant to replace and supercede the previous plan that had not been updated since 1977. The plan was created to serve

as a reference and guide for the City Council, Mayor, City Planning Commission and Board of Public Works on various City development matters and on the allocation of funds for bicycle related projects (City of Los Angeles, Introduction Section). The plan outlines policy to encourage both utilitarian and recreational bicycle usage, seeks to improve the connectivity of LA's bike network by including bike maps with color coded routes of suggestion, and even contains an implementation program broken down into different sections with specific duties assigned to the different areas of government (LADOT, MTA, Planning, Mayor's Office, etc.). Finally, there is a section on Monitoring and Evaluation that serves to ensure that the implementation of the BMP is carried out. With the implementation of this plan its goal was to "create a transportation system which is accessible, safe, and convenient for bicycle travel, with an accompanying increase in bicycle mode split both in daily trips overall and home-to-work trips. The target level of bicycling shall be 5% of all daily trips and 5% of home-to-work trips by year 2015" (City of Los Angeles, Monitor and Evaluate Section)

Evaluating the success of this document has been difficult since its plans for implementation and evaluation were never really carried out. As stated in the 1996 document, the progress of the Bicycle Master Plan was to be evaluated by creating detailed progress reports on implementation and by performing regular bike counts to gage the increase in cyclists (City of Los Angeles, Monitor and Evaluate Section.). But this was never done since DOT didn't have the money to carry it out and the Department of Planning was understaffed (Mowery, 3/18/08). However, another way to determine the success of the 1996 BMP is to look at the number of bikeways that have been built in LA since its adoption. Over the past 12 years, the city has only built 60 miles of bike lanes and paths (City of Los Angeles & Alta Planning)⁸. This means only 5 miles of bike lanes and paths per year since 1996. Although about a third of these bikeways were added over the past three years, this is still a far cry from progress when considering the sprawling, concrete landscape of Los Angeles that consists of nearly 6,500 miles of streets. From this perspective, we see that bike lanes and paths only make up about 3% of LA's total streets, not including highways. When looking at these numbers, it is clear that the 1996 Bicycle Master Plan has done very little to incorporate bike facilities into LA's transportation system over the past 12 years.

⁸ This number was derived at by subtracting the number of bike lanes and paths in 1996 as stated in the 1996 BMP from the number of bike lanes in paths in 2008 as stated in Alta's Power Point presentation in March of 2008.

Probably one of the most significant reasons the 1996 BMP was ineffective is because it was out of date for so long. As stated in the Monitor and Evaluate section of the plan, it was supposed to be reviewed every 5 years. Although there was a motion to review it in 2002, LADOT could not get the proper support needed from the Planning Department or the City Council to fund a full evaluation (Mowery 3/18). So instead, the document was only readopted by the City Council with a few insignificant changes to ensure its continued eligibility for funding through the Bicycle Transportation Account. Therefore, the city has been operating from a plan that is based almost entirely on the 1996 version for the past 12 years. The outdated nature of this plan has most certainly prevented the incorporation of bicycles in the city's development plans and thus kept Los Angeles from modernizing its overall transportation system.

Now in 2008, after 12 years of nearly stagnant bicycle planning, the city of LA has finally decided that the 1996 BMP needs an overhaul. As described by Mowery, "it's become clear that a lot has changed with reference to bike planning and design in the last 12 years and a comprehensive update of the document is long overdue" (Mowery, 3/18/08). Most of the bikeways were designed in the 1980's and transportation patterns in LA have changed significantly since then. Mowery believes that she had a lot to do with the city's decision to review the plan since she has been pushing for an update since 2001 when the plan was up for renewal. However, she also admits that the ultimate decision to update the BMP was not all her doing and that it could not have been done without pressure from the growing cyclist community. Although the 1996 BMP was clearly out of date, it did not have to be reevaluated; it could have simply been readopted by City Council again. However, continued pressure from Michelle Mowery and the cycling community have finally coalesced to demand funding for an update.

In 2006, Grants and Bikeways (located in the Office of Transportation Development within the LADOT) prepared a Request for Proposals (RFP) to fund the update of the Bicycle Master Plan. The request was then approved by the LADOT, and Bikeways (a division of the Office of Transportation Development) was granted half a million dollars of the department's own funds to hire the Portland based consulting company, Alta Planning to update the Bicycle Master Plan. With funding secured, LADOT would be the lead on the technical issues of the plan while the Department of City Planning would represent the head lead since the BMP is part of the City's General Plan. As stated in LADOT's 2006 annual budget report, "The bicycle plan is required in order for the City to remain eligible for State Bicycle Transportation Funds" (Jeffe, 11). Therefore,

the main objective of updating the BMP is to ensure that LADOT remain eligible for the funding of bike projects.

However many argue that \$450,000 is a lot to pay for an updated Master Plan that neither guarantees funding through the BTA or even contributes a significant amount of money to Bikeways. The Bicycle Transportation Account, administered by CalTrans' Division of Local Assistance, is a general pool of funding for the entire state of California that only allocates \$7.2 million a year for bicycle projects (Los Angeles Department of Transportation, 2). This is not a lot of money when it costs around \$1 million to build a mile of bike lane in Los Angeles. Therefore, even if granted the entire grant of \$7.1 million dollars (which would be both improbable) LADOT would only be able to build about 7 miles of bikeway alone. Paying half a million dollars to update the master plan seems even more useless and redundant when much of the work required to update the master plan had already been done in a previous study called The Enhanced Public Outreach Plan for MTA's Bicycle Transportation Strategic Plan (EPOP) released by the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) in 2006.

This report was a result of a project conducted by the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition from 2003-2005 to help inform the MTA's Bicycle Transportation Strategic Plan (BTSP). The BTSP is a regional planning document whose main purpose was to improve the connectivity of LA's bicycle route network to transit hubs (such a metro and bus stops) and to improve bicycle facilities on and around public transportation to make bicycling a more viable form of transportation in LA (Alta Planning and Design, Inc., Section 1: Introduction and Plan Purpose). But the BTSP had no significant public involvement section so LACBC took this opportunity to "significantly increase the level of public participation in the development of Metro's BTSP, by gaining a better understanding of the needs of bicyclists in low-income communities with high levels of transit-use" (Los Angeles County Bike Coalition, 1). LACBC was granted \$191,980 by the MTA to conduct a series of in depth surveys in the field at 25-30 specific outreach locations where cyclists were known to congregate⁹ and through mail-in and online surveys. By using these two different modes to collect survey information, they were able to successfully reach a more diverse group of cyclists, including a large number of low-income, bicycle dependent riders who often remain invisible in bike surveys such as these.

⁹ See EPOP's fact sheet for list of sites in attached PDF file, 'EPOP.'

Through this survey method of outreach, the LACBC team was able to collect some important information about who rides and Los Angeles, why they ride, where they ride, what roads they use most, and their priorities regarding bikeway and facilities improvement to make cycling in Los Angeles more enjoyable¹⁰. The EPOP was intended to create a set of data and provide policy recommendations to make it easier for local cities to write their own grant proposals to apply for BTA funds. Furthermore, it was designed to save cities the time of asking their cyclists the same basic questions over and over again. As described by Josef Bray Ali in his blog Brayj Against the Machine, “With the EPOP in the bag, there is no need for L.A. to ask its cyclists questions like ‘What types of streets do you bike on?’, or ‘Where do you ride to and from?’, ‘Do you like bike lanes?’, or the classic ‘What is your yearly income?’” (Ubrayj02, 3/10/08).

But the EPOP data is not being completely ignored in the 2008 BMP planning process. The same planner, Matt Benjamin whose working for Alta on the 2008 plan also helped to design, write, and implement the LACBC outreach project in 2003 while working for MTA. Because he was so involved with EPOP, he knows the report and all its data like the back of his hand and is using it to inform the 2008 BMP (Benjamin, 3/21/08). In addition, Benjamin argues that the outreach being done for the 2008 BMP is not redundant because “because cyclists have changed a lot since we did the survey for Metro.” The EPOP was started in 2003 and was a year and a half long process. Although this does not seem like much time, a lot of change has happened in the cycling community since the project was finished in 2005. There are a lot more people riding now, both for utilitarian and recreational purposes, but also for social networking since the number of organized social rides has increased. For Benjamin, this warrants a new round of outreach to collect information on the emerging bicycle community.

The 2008 BMP is also different from the EPOP in that the EPOP was written for Metro’s Strategic Plan, a document whose main objective was to provide a regional framework of policy. This idea was that it would encourage local cities to focus bike-planning efforts in a direction that would be most beneficial to the transportation system as a whole. This would also make it easier for local entities to get funding through MTA’s Call for Projects since they could reference Metro’s own document. However, because the MTA is a regional entity, it could not implement any of the BSP policy suggestions, such as bike lanes or education programs because it does not have the local authority to do so. For this reason, the 2008 BMP focuses on more specific roadway projects

¹⁰ See EPOP’s fact sheet for results of study in attached PDF file ‘EPOP’.

such as maintenance issues and bike networks that the city *does* have control over implementing. As described by Benjamin, the 2008 BMP “focuses more on street level policy this time around” (Benjamin, 3/26/08).

Although some of the outreach may be similar to that of the EPOP, and some may even believe it to be redundant or ridiculous, no one can deny that the planning process of the BMP has been extremely influential in engaging the bike community in a dialogue about bicycling as a political act. This has been a real challenge in a city where the majority of the growing bike community thinks of bicycling as more of a social outlet and less as a utilitarian mode for every day errands and social change. But the energy I have witnessed, at the community outreach meetings, in conversations with other cyclists, and on blog sites, since the announcement to update the BMP has been invigorating and hopeful. The Bicycle Master Plan has provided an opportunity for cyclists to organize as representatives of their community around issues that are important to them. Cyclists in LA have always been outspoken, opinionated, and radical individuals, but the BMP has given them a chance to voice their opinions in an open forum with like-minded cyclists to support their claims. This experience has been empowering for the cycling community and signals one more step forward towards the creation of a thriving bike movement.

Phase 1 of Public Outreach: 4 Community Meetings and the Discussions that Followed

Los Angeles City’s 2008 Bike Master Plan process began in late January of this year and is scheduled to extend into the February of 2009¹¹. The process includes an evaluation of the 1996 BMP, policy updates, roadway analysis, bikeway designs, and recommendations to the city in the form of a conclusive report to city officials on how to make Los Angeles more bike friendly. Within this process is an element of public involvement that consists of meetings, online surveys and commentary that may be posted on Alta’s public input website. The meetings happen in 3 phases with the first phase designated for transportation or commuter cyclists, the second phase for recreational or off-road cyclists, and the third for all cyclists in which Alta will present a draft of the plan to the public for input (Alta Planning and Design, Inc., Power Point, 18). During Phase 1 of public outreach, from February through the beginning of March, I attended the 4 meetings

¹¹ See Alta Planning’s project outline on page 18 of the attached PDF file ‘BMP Project Outline.’

scheduled for transportation cyclists to observe and evaluate the effectiveness of engaging the public in the community planning process.

The sites for these meetings were chosen by the Technical Advisory Committee, a group made up of representatives from nearly all the public entities within LADOT, and members of Alta Planning. They were held at government-owned, community or civic centers and were hosted in South Central LA near USC, West LA in Santa Monica, North LA in the Valley and in far South LA near Long Beach at the harbor. The meetings included policy boards with each aspect of the plan displayed separately, a power point that discussed bikeway planning and engineering with examples of successful models from other cities, a short question and answer after this presentation and maps of LA's streets to mark problem roads or suggestions for improvements. Participants were also encouraged to submit further input using comment cards at the meeting, completing an online survey designed by Alta, entering bike routes on an interactive map using Bikely.com, and posting comments on the BMP website forum.

The public meetings were designed to be as accessible to as many riders as possible and to provide a multitude of opportunities for people to voice their opinion (Benjamin, interview). As described by Michelle Mowery, the site locations of the meetings were chosen in areas all over LA so that they would be accessible to cyclists from different neighborhoods and communities. In addition, every meeting location was within a reasonable distance from a metro or bus stop, making it easier for those that lived too far away to take public transportation. The 2-hour long meetings were focused mostly on the power point presentation, with a short period before and after the meeting to post comments on the boards and maps. The meeting relied heavily on the input of specific individuals from these comment cards and sticky notes, steering clear of group brainstorming or focus groups. Matt Benjamin, project manager of the BMP, said that he felt there were too many issues to have broken up into groups and that they also did not want one person to dominate the discussion. They wanted to make sure everyone had a chance to give their input and the comment cards allowed for this.

These public meetings provided an important opportunity for cyclists to engage in the community planning process, but many cyclists felt that there were not enough of them and that Alta's outreach efforts were insufficient. "Four, 2 hour long meetings for the *entire* city of more than 3.8 million people? It's outrageous!" exclaimed local bike activist, Alex Thompson during a pep talk before the Westside meeting. "They call this outreach, but why does nobody know about the

meetings?” (Thompson, 2/20/08). One reason is that LADOT did not send out a press release to inform the public of these meetings. Although Wendy Greuel, chair of the Transportation Committee attempted to e-mail citizens and neighborhood councils about the Valley workshop in late January and Eric Garcetti's office e-mailed their media list in early February, neither the LACBC or BAC had a chance to get the BMP meetings on their agenda before the start of the workshops in mid February. By the time the community found out, cyclists had very little time to organize themselves. As described by Zach Behrens on his popular transportation blog, “this is hardly a demonstration of a commitment to an open, transparent and inclusive endeavor” (LAist).

Cyclists also felt that the locations of the meetings were poorly chosen and inconvenient for cyclists. Although there were meetings in the north, south and west of Los Angeles, there was no meeting in East LA, a mostly low-income Latino community where majority of people walk and cycle for local transportation. “We thought that by locating the first meeting in Central Los Angeles, that this would be accessible enough to people in the east,” described Mowery (Mowery, 3/18/08). Cyclists were also disappointed in the lack of bike parking at the buildings where the meetings were held. Although LACBC had set up an area inside for designated bike parking, the buildings had no facilities themselves. In addition, the condition of roads on the way to these meeting places were atrocious. On my journey from Northeast LA to the meeting in South Central LA, I encountered numerous potholes, debris of all kinds, not one bike lane and ended up half a mile away from the meeting point with a flat tire. The unacceptable road conditions made it difficult for me to get to the meetings but it also reaffirmed my reason for making the journey in the first place: the undeniable need for better cycling conditions. Knowing that most people attending these meetings would most likely be cyclists, and thus riding their bikes to the meetings, they should have chosen sites with better roads around them.

For these reasons, the turnout at these meetings was typically small and consisted almost entirely of activists and officials, with very few cyclists not directly involved in the movement. As described by Benjamin, “people who come out to these meetings are generally already really concerned and involved” (Benjamin, 3/21/08). Although Alta knew this prior to the meeting, they still decided to spend majority of the meeting's time on a power point presentation directed at people who know nothing about bikeway design and policy. Most of the people at these meetings were already familiar with the information presented during the power point and therefore found it to be a waste of their time. “We could have gotten a lot more out of group brainstorming sessions

or focus groups. Instead we just spent all of our time listening to the 'experts' tell us what they thought would be best for our city," said one cyclist after the first meeting in the Southside. Because of this, there was very little room for public input in the form of an open discussion. Questions and comments were accepted during the presentation but only in an orderly manner. Emotional or confrontational comments were cut off quickly and directed to the website or comment cards for further expression. This upset many cyclists, but it ensured a tight, controlled meeting that kept the audience subdued and the power in the consultant's hands.

But this attempt to control did not work at every meeting. This was especially true on the Westside where the turnout was highest and the cyclists were determined to voice their opinions publicly. The Westside meeting was different from the others because people went into it expecting to have an open forum of discussion in which the public would talk, and the consultants would listen. When they quickly learned that this was not the case, they were not afraid to be confrontational in order to regain control of the meeting. They disobeyed the talking rules and spoke with passion: "Why are there only four public meetings for the entire county of LA?" asked one cyclist in the crowd. Mia Burke, the head consultant of Alta Planning and presenter of the Power Point responded firmly by saying that "We don't have time to talk about this here. If you'd like to fill out a comment card-" until she was interrupted by the same cyclist with the rhetorical question, "And why not?!" By the end of the meeting, cyclists had taken over the presentation and redirected it toward public comment and discussion. They vented about LA's road conditions, the attitudes of city staff and they complained about the insufficient outreach process that they thought failed to engage the community in the BMP planning process. As described by Benjamin, "if you try to control the environment too much in a meeting, it can backfire and I think we tried to control it too much" (Benjamin, 3/21). The audience used their numbers and passion to push their way out of the controlled setting and into an open forum of shared dialogue.

Although hostile at points, the Westside meeting was also the most productive. "There was venting but we still kept it on track," described Benjamin (Benjamin, 3/21). People made good suggestions about specific roadway improvements, new policy and creative bikeway designs. They argued about bike lanes versus bike paths, and their effectiveness in protecting cyclists. They discussed issues of encouragement and education, and how to safely get more people riding bikes. But most importantly, they asserted themselves as experts of the street who hold important information about bike planning in Los Angeles because they ride the roads everyday. People

might have been hostile or angry, but this was natural. Cyclists are an underrepresented and marginalized bunch in a city where cars rule the roads and it is not every day that they are given the opportunity to talk with city officials about what they think needs to be changed. In fact, the last time was more than 10 years ago at the 1996 BMP meetings. Cyclists are freethinking, independent people by nature and they have strong opinions about what they believe in. The Westside meeting reflected this and showed that when cyclists come together, they can act as a very strong force.

But the productive discussions that started at the Westside meeting only continued in the days that followed both in blogs and on forums throughout the Internet community. Cyclists used these forums as a public space to discuss, analyze and recommend ways in which to be better activists. In a blog entitled "Bicycle Advocacy: Fail, Bike Advocacy: WANT!" posted by BWC member, Alex Thompson after the Westside meeting, he defended the confrontational behavior of the Westsiders by arguing that the passivism and niceties of bike advocates have gotten cyclists nowhere over the years (Thompson). He discussed why "infrastructure advocates" such as the LACBC have failed to win improvements with their safe and traditional organizing techniques, and how the "social bike organizers", such as C.I.C.L.E. and the many bike repair shops have succeeded in building a strong coalition of cyclists through culture. He argued that "Without mass support from cyclists the lone bicycle advocate did the best he could: he made nice with public officials." However, the new breed of political cyclist, identified as *bike activists* are different from these *advocates* in that they are not afraid to use confrontation as an organizing tool to get what they want.

What followed was a long slew of posts from different cyclists in the community supporting and criticizing this newly defined form of activism. Some responded in agreement with exclamations such as, "The New School is here!," while others disapproved, proclaiming that "anger is a difficult emotion to carry for the long term, and the long-term effort is what we're in" (Shay). Still others took the middle ground, arguing that anger and confrontation can be useful tactics, but only when used strategically in the appropriate environment. Cyclists argued back and forth for several days, hashing out the right and wrong ways of using the new political mass to be as effective as possible. But no one ever became hostile and the tone remained one of respect allowing for a productive conversation to continue. After nearly 30 posts of responses to Thompson's article, the conversation finally came to a close with this post:

“We would remember it always... when, early in 2008, cyclists of many views and convictions carried on a complex debate about how we should proceed as activists and advocates. This debate, though a bit rocky at first, eventually brought the bicycling community together and marked the beginning of an era of renewed strength and direction... And, thus, our Velorution was victorious!”

Rob - March 10 '08 - 10:27

As this ending quote suggests, the BMP public meetings and discussions that ensued mark the beginning of a new era for bike activists in Los Angeles. It got the social riders engaged in a political way and it served as a training ground for those activists already politically involved. New ideas were cultivated and cyclists began to imagine a political strategy to be more effective and get what they want. In essence, the Bicycle Master Plan showed that even among all the fun and partying there does exist a political will within the current cycling community. Although the Bicycle Master Plan is by no means expected to radically change the landscape of Los Angeles once adopted, it signifies a step in the right direction and represents an opportunity for activists, advocates and bike riders alike to use this energy as momentum to build a stronger, more strategic bike movement.

V. Findings

Analysis of LA's Bike Culture, Community and Politics

LA's Bike Rides and Bike Riders

The current bike culture grew out of a grass roots movement by cyclists interested in the use of bikes as a political tool to effect change. This small group of lone-wolf cyclists organized themselves into an organization and used volunteers to mobilize an effective political force. LACBC won important victories for cyclists and helped to cultivate a safer and more bike-friendly environment for LA's cycling culture to grow. But this group changed directions, deciding instead to focus more of their efforts on policy and their growth as a non-profit entity. This shift from a volunteer-based, grass roots organization to a fully staffed and funded non-profit has created a more institutionalized image of them in the bike community. This shift has been to their detriment as they are now seen by many in the cycling community to be ineffective and too institutionalized to adopt the kind of radical agenda needed to really make a difference in a city like Los Angeles.

What has evolved in reaction to the institutionalization of this once essential organization of cyclists is a new and different kind of bike movement that has grown organically out of LA's bike culture and community. The Midnight Ridazz and all the subsequent social rides that followed have attracted people to cycling by making it fun and this feeling has been infectious. The intention was not to organize a political force but to simply get more people having fun on bikes. They hoped to provide a different kind of entertainment to Angelenos by turning the city streets into their playground and inviting a few friends to join them. A few friends turned into a couple hundred acquaintances and before they knew it, they had become a part of something bigger than themselves. In doing so, they have created a new and vibrant culture based on the unique experience of riding a bicycle in a city obsessed with cars. The popularity of these rides is undeniable and the number of cyclists in LA only continues to grow.

These social and often themed rides create a spectacle out of riding bikes in Los Angeles. On the themed rides, people dress up in costume, play music and ride together in a large group. The bizarre and exciting nature of these performances has helped to get more people on bikes but it has also served to exotify the very act of riding a bike. Their visual and physical loudness grabs the attention of people in their cars and on the street as they roll through the city at night. Such a scene is aw-inspiring as it completely changes the landscape of Los Angeles, if only for one night. Suddenly, riding a bike becomes something new and outrageous; something that must be tried. This fun and ridiculous performance is what has attracted so many Angelinos to bike culture. But this may also serve to undermine the political potential of cycling in LA if people are unable to see the bike as a utilitarian vehicle and important mode of alternative transportation.

The varied and diverse themes of these rides attract many different types of cyclists which is both beneficial and detrimental to the movement. On the one hand, this diversity allows for many different choices. For example, if you like social rides but prefer not to party on two wheels, you may choose from a wide variety of educational or training rides that don't involve this party element. This allows for cyclists to find their niche in the community without having to compromise too much of their identity. Because most cyclists have such a strong sense of identity attached to their beliefs and lifestyle associated with cycling, this "diversity" among cyclists often encourages division in the community. Cyclists become righteous and judgmental of each other: roadies find it hard to relate to fixies because they don't take them seriously, while fixies think that roadies are illegitimate because they spend too much equipment and spandex. In response to this, Ron Milam made the point that "If all these different cyclists would just step back and compare themselves to mainstream America, they would realize that they are a lot more alike than other people" (Milam, 1/28/08). Until cyclists realize this, the movement will continue to be divided and thus less effective.

LA's bike culture is diverse in the *types* of riders it attracts, but not in gender and ethnicity. The scene is predominated by white males and underrepresented by women and people of color. This is especially true for young, low-income Latino males, who represent the largest and most active group of cyclists in Los Angeles. Although the argument is that these riders don't have time to participate in social rides and events because they are too busy working, it may also be argued that much of bike culture is spatially inaccessible to them. Since most Latino men live in East and South Cenral Los Angeles and majority of the rides meet in Central or West LA, it would take a lot of effort and time to make it out to one of these rides and then back home by the end of the night.

Women are also underrepresented because of the overly male-dominant environment. Many women feel uncomfortable or unwelcome in the often chauvinist and competitive bike world. Although there have been some efforts to encourage women to join the movement such as the all-girl, fast-paced GoGa ride and the Bicycle Bitchen, an all-women's night at the Bicycle Kitchen, women are still greatly underrepresented.

Bike Organizations and Activism: Successes, Failures and the Challenges that Lie Ahead

Such a growing number of cyclists presents the once lone cycling advocate with an opportunity to cultivate this culture into an organized force to change both the political and physical landscape of LA that has failed to serve cyclists for so long. But this opportunity is like a delicate flower that must be handled with care. LA's cycling culture is full of independently minded, anti-establishment individuals that do not like to be put in boxes or feel that they are being manipulated in any way. In fact, the attraction of most cyclists to bike culture is because of its rebellious nature. People ride bikes instead of cars, they party in the streets instead of bars, and they traverse the city in community instead of isolation. The challenge that faces bike activists then, is to figure out how to organize these rebel-rousing, independently-minded thrill seekers into a political force without them feeling that they are being controlled or forced to do so, while at the same time preserving the anarchic spirit of their culture.

One group that has been successful in doing this are the DIY bicycle repair shops such as the Bike Kitchen, the Bike Oven and the Bikerowave. These groups have become the lifeblood of the community and an open door for many into LA's bike culture. Like the original LACBC, they are volunteer-based and grass roots oriented. Their cheap prices and DIY mission make the possibility of owning and maintaining a bike a reality for nearly everyone. In addition, they help to foster community by providing a social space for cyclists to meet and interact. Like the Bicycle Kitchen in the new Bike District, these repair shops have become social hubs of the cycling community. They have been very successful at attracting new members to the bike community because they provide an important service while at the same time, serving as an entryway into bike culture. These repair shops do not attempt to push a political agenda nor do they require a membership, making participation or engagement completely voluntary. It is this kind of indirect and non-traditional activism that has served to popularize cycling and build the movement.

Activists are also imploring a more diverse and wide range of organizing tools to get people on bikes. With the advent of the Internet, groups have been able to organize more efficiently and engage the community in new and inventive ways. Through e-mail and regularly updated webpages cyclists can send and receive information on rides, events, and important updates at all hours of the day, from any computer in the world. Blogs and interactive forums of discussion have also been very important in shaping the dialogue and engaging the community. Groups such as Midnight Ridazz used the Internet to expand the scope of their rides and ended up starting a movement in the process. Other organizations such as C.I.C.L.E. and the Bike Writers Collective have used the Internet to shape a collective conscious about transportation issues in the media and to report on community issues not covered by traditional news sources. This has allowed for a much broader level of connectedness and grass roots organizing that has made it easier to reach new people and maintain community.

But the city's attitude towards cycling as an insignificant mode of transportation threatens to nullify the hard work of these activists. They have continued to build Los Angeles for cars because the money is available to do so and because LA engineers continue to see bikes as an obstacle in the transportation system. As described by Michelle Mowery, "Our biggest issue is that we have transportation engineers whose charge in life has been to provide for cars and bikes haven't even crossed their minds" (Mowery, 3/18). But these engineers have been allowed to continue designing the city by this ideology. They have felt no pressure from city officials to change and thus make no effort to do things differently. This ideology must be changed in order for cyclists to become an integrated part of LA's transportation system.

With the power of LA's growing bike culture and the current update of the Bicycle Master Plan, cyclists are in a more opportune position than ever to change this mentality. There is now a huge base of cyclists in Los Angeles that translates as mass support for the once lone bike advocate. This has changed the nature of bike advocacy in LA since activists may now be more confrontational in their tactics and more powerful in their demands. As described by Alex Thompson, the new bike *activist* is concerned with "participation on a massive scale, so she doesn't discuss politics quietly over coffee, she boisterously argues means and ends next to the keg with bikers" (Thompson). This was evidenced at the Westside BMP meeting when cyclists showed up in large numbers and successfully turned the *meeting* into a community workshop. The decision by the city to finally update the master plan is evidence in and of itself of the growing

power of the cycling community and the effectiveness of their organizing tactics. Cyclists must now use these confrontational tactics to further their agenda during the final stages of the BMP.

But the cycling community should also be careful to choose the right targets. In a city where cars determine the law of the land and city officials are often insensitive to the complaints of cyclists, it is not surprising that LA cyclists are so frustrated and seething with anger. They should be careful however, to channel this anger in a productive way by directing it towards the group or individual with the most power to affect cyclists' lives. Demonizing the BAC or venting frustrations about insensitive city officials to Alta is not the most effective use of this energy. Although these groups have been ineffective in many ways and certainly deserve constructive criticism, they are not policy decision makers. "It would be more effective to take their anger to the Transportation Committee, the Planning Committee, the MTA board who doles out transportation funding and to the elected officials," as described by Matt Benjamin. "That's where it can make a difference" (Benjamin, 3/21/08). By redirecting their frustration towards the right people with power, LA cycling advocates will be able to work more strategically and win more victories.

Policy change from within the political system is essential to the growth and sustainability of this movement. The growing culture of cyclists has the ability to ensure the place of bikes in the future of Los Angeles, but they must first create a political agenda. Culture is needed to continue growing a mass support of cyclist, but policy change is also necessary to ensure a safe and conducive environment for cycling. In order to achieve this, there needs to be more strategic thinkers and proactive activists willing to transform this mass support into political will. Unfortunately, there is currently no leading organization that focuses specifically on the kind of political advocacy needed to effect real policy change. Although the LACBC could be a good group to fill this need, their financial insecurity and structural changes do not make them a good candidate for this position at this time. Without a lead organization or coalition of activists committed to this kind of work, the vibrant bike culture of Los Angeles will continue to exist as a social phenomenon at best.

Not all cyclists need to be political activists to ensure this policy change; all successful movements have both leaders and supporters. But there need to be a few proactive cyclists in the community to organize a strong coalition of activists so that they may represent the cycling community in city hall, BAC meetings, and other planning processes to ensure that cyclists are included in the future of this city. This will allow the social riders to continue building culture

through rides and events without needing to insert a political agenda into the fun. They can focus on getting more people on bikes, while the activists work on getting bike facilities and bike-friendly policy adopted to support the growing number of cyclists. This relationship will be mutually beneficial for both sides of the movement: activists can use the growing cycling culture as power in city hall to demand better policy for bikes and the social riders (those who attend rides and events but do not participate in direct political action) will ultimately benefit from this since they will be able to ride more safely through the city.

The Bicycle Master Plan public input process provides an opportunity for these kinds of activists to emerge as leaders in this endeavor. Some of these individuals, including many members of the Bicycle Writers Collective have already shown their enthusiasm and potential as grassroots organizers in Phase One of the outreach process. They demanded respect at the public meetings and regained control of the community input process. They've shown an ability to think strategically in the online forum discussions that followed these meetings and they have shown a real political will in doing so. But it is important that they organize themselves and other cyclists in the community now, so that they may be as effective as possible in the final round of public outreach meetings this August. Ultimately, these meetings and the relationships formed at these meetings could represent a turning point in the history of LA's bike advocacy and a vision for the future.

Recommendations for a More Strategic Bike Movement

LA's growing cycling community is in an exciting time of transition in which cyclists are beginning to realize the power in their growing social culture. Their opportunity to organize is now, but they must first develop a strategic, political agenda. This includes working to strengthen relationships within their own community, building coalitions with other groups, and working with the city to reform their outdated ideology towards transportation planning. In order to continue the growth of bike culture, create an environment conducive to bike use, and ensure the sustainability of this growing movement, bike activists must also rethink their tactics.

1. Use Phase 3 of the Bicycle Master Plan Public Meetings as an Opportunity to Create a Political Strategy

Activists should start by simply organizing a mass group of cyclists in the next few months to ensure that the turn out at the BMP meetings this summer include cyclists of all regions, type, race, ethnicity and gender. This may be done through extensive outreach at rides, bike repair shops, the Bike District, and on websites. Organizations should also send out e-mails to all of their members or list serves to further inform cyclists of the importance of this opportunity. Cyclists also should organize social rides to these meetings as it gets closer to their dates to preserve the spirit of fun. What is important is that more activists and cyclists show up at these meetings to build political base for future actions and to show that they are interested and invested in changing the current system.

All bike organizations and web activists should be committed to the same goal of organizing a mass turnout at these meetings in order to get the optimal amount of input in the last stage of this process. Each organization should be committed to turning out a certain number of cyclists and work to create a unified and collective agenda to present to Alta. They should arrive to the meetings as an organized and unified force so that they may have the greatest influence possible. Although Alta cannot implement this plan, they have the ability to change the political ideology of the city by providing their expert opinion. Activists should ensure that this expert opinion reflect their needs and demands. When Alta presents this plan to the city, council members must know that this process was important to the cyclists and that it was a community effort.

Activists should also work to create a strategy for these meetings. They should create a kind of wish list that includes the top 5 or 10 policies most important to include in this plan. This will ensure that they show up to the meeting as a united front, all asking for the same thing. With this list they will be prepared to make demands on issues that are important to them even if they are not included in Alta's draft presentation in August. A strategy of tactics for these meetings should also be included to ensure that cyclists walk away with what they want. Compromises will certainly have to be made, but deciding how much to compromise and what tactics to use when they're not willing to compromise is important.

But it would also be a good idea for the community to communicate and work with Alta to inform them of how to make the next meetings more productive and beneficial for both parties. They could encourage them to spend less time on the power point and more time on focus groups or Q and A. This will help to avoid confrontation because cyclists will feel like they are being included in the planning process and respected as valuable sources of knowledge. Working with

Alta to host the meetings in places that would attract more cyclists, like the Bicycle District in West LA, would also be effective in turning out more cyclists. Planning the meetings around important cycling events such as Bike Summer would also be a way to encourage political awareness around the BMP.

What is important is that these bike organizations use the BMP as an opportunity to encourage a political awareness among the community about their potential to effect real, on the ground change with their growing bike culture. Right now most cyclists involved in this movement see it as something fun, but they have not yet realized their potential as a political force. The BMP should work to encourage this awareness and build on it for future actions.

2. Create a “Task Force” to Hold the City Accountable for the Implementation of the BMP After it’s Adopted

One of the most ineffective aspects of the 1996 Bike Master Plan was that it had no way of engaging the community to help implement its policies. Therefore, they didn’t end up getting implemented because the people expected to ensure their implementation (government entities and staff) were not cyclists themselves. Organizations should work to create their own task forces, but a community element should also be written into the 2008 BMP as a policy. Because cyclists are on the road every day, they are the best surveyors of implementation. If they see that something is not being done or the city is not following through with its promises, they can report this to all the bike organizations and the Bicycle Advisory Committee to start putting pressure on decision makers. The cycling community should use the 2008 BMP as a reference to ensure that city officials are doing their job and representing cyclists effectively. (they could do bike counts, survey roads and facilities, etc).

3. Refine Political Targets Within City Government to be as Effective as Possible

Part of being effective organizers is knowing the power structure of city government. This ensures that those with the most power to effect change receive the most political pressure. By identifying who has control over transportation funds and understanding the power dynamics of the different departments within LADOT and LADOP, cyclists can begin to be more strategic about directing their frustration in the right direction. One way to do this would be to use the Wiki on Bike Transportation Planning that Josef Bray Ali just recently started. In his blog on strategic bike

activism, he encourages cyclists to “fill in the blanks” in areas that are missing information or seem incomplete. By creating a publicly accessible and interactive webpage on LA’s Transportation Planning entities, cyclists and activists alike can begin to better understand the maelstrom that is LA city bureaucracy.

They should also work to identify sympathetic council members as allies. Members that represent districts with a high number of cyclists, include issues of sustainability and alternative transportation in their platforms, or who have publicly supported the use of multi-modal transportation through policy initiatives would be good candidates. This information could also be added to Josef’s Wiki, or a new one could be made. Cyclists could also talk with BAC members to identify which of their representatives are most sympathetic to cyclists and which are the toughest. Then activists can start to insert themselves in the process of organizing campaigns against enemies and recruiting allies to encourage a shift in the political will of these officials

4. Seek to Create Unity and Alliances Both Within and Outside the Movement

The cycling movement is divided by the varying types of cyclists and currently fails to incorporate an equal amount of women and people of color. Activists should work to unite the different *type* cyclists by planning events and/or rides that would appeal to both their interests. For example, a themed ride called “Roadies and Weekenders: the Yin and Yang of the Bicycle Community” might be organized to bring these groups together. Identifying a common cause that unites all cyclists in LA, such as road safety, and building a campaign around it might also help to change cyclists’ ideologies about each other by getting them to realize that their needs as cyclists are not really as different as they think they are. What is most important is that they realize what unites them is greater than what divides them.

Activists may seek to better integrate women into the culture by planning special events and rides for them too. This may include more rides specifically for women (like the current GoGa ride) so that those women who feel uncomfortable in the male dominant and typically more competitive rides will feel comfortable around other women. In addition, strong women in the community that feel confident about their skills should start their own rides and volunteer at the bike repair shops to help other women gain similar confidence. Increasing the presence of women at these repair shops is especially important to bringing more women into the movement. Since most women have never been taught mechanics (as this is typically seen as a male domain by

society) they feel insecure in these DIY repair shops where they are often times completely reliant on the men who volunteer there to help them. Knowing basic mechanics is essential to making cycling a part of your lifestyle but since many women don't have these skills they cannot fully integrate bikes into their daily lives. If more women were to learn the mechanics of bikes to teach other women, they could help to build a more self-reliant and empowered base of women to participate in the bike movement.

Cyclists of color, and particularly Latino males, may be better integrated into the movement by extending the scope ride meeting points into east and south LA. Currently, most of the organized rides meet in central and west LA where mostly white, affluent people live. By *starting* rides in different neighborhoods, they will become more accessible to people of color in these areas. Getting to and from these rides can often be hard and time consuming so making these rides as accessible as possible and easy to participate in will attract more people who maybe don't have the same amount of time or interest to go on these social rides. It is important that people of color feel welcome and included on these rides so that they may too become an important part of this movement.

The cycling community should also seek to create alliances with other groups outside the cycling community specifically and within the sustainability movement. They should create a coalition of both local and organizations from different sectors of the "green or sustainable" movement. These could include environmental organizations, public health advocates, Transit Oriented Development groups and Smart Growth organizations. In building a coalition around the broader issue of sustainability or environmental justice, these organizations will begin to represent a larger constituency. They can coordinate their efforts to work toward the same goal and thus be more time and energy efficient. Los Angeles is a huge city with many people and many problems. City officials hear from hundreds of angry constituents every day, but cyclists only make up a small percentage of these on their own. By joining forces with other groups and individuals, they may present themselves as larger constituency and organized force to make ensure their needs become priorities.

5. Create a Working and Collaborative Relationship with Cyclists, LADOT and LADOP to Help Facilitate a More Inclusive Ideology Toward Bikes in the Transportation Design and Planning

The current ideology of government officials and policy makers towards bikes needs to be reformed. A working partnership between the cyclists, planners, engineers and decisions makers should be created to ensure that bikes are included in current and future transportation system. The easiest way to do this is through the current government entity for bikes, the BAC. However, because the members of the BAC do not represent the goals of the current bike movement, activists should encourage council members to re-appoint their representatives. These new representatives should represent the growing number of transportation cyclists and be active members in the community. A sub committee of community members should also be created within the BAC to help facilitate a better and more communicative relationship between officials and cyclists in their districts.

LADOT and LADOP are currently understaffed and under funded, making it difficult for them to dedicate the necessary time and funds to bicycle projects. Activists should work to put pressure on council members to increase funding for these departments so that they may be adequately staffed to deal with LA's many transportation problems. Similar pressure should be put on council members to ensure that engineers and planners are designing the city for bikes. Bike facilities requirements should go into every no roadways project. Activists should build alliances with council members to ensure this.

VI. Conclusion

LA's cycling community has created a vibrant bike culture that seeks to challenge the isolated, car-dependent lifestyle that so many Angelinos lead. This means changing a long history of car-oriented policy, city planning and design, while also convincing Angelinos that they have a choice in their mode of transportation. The organized social rides and events created by people in the bike community show people how easy it is to live their life by bike and how fun it can be too. They attract people from all over LA county and bring them in contact with each other and their environment in a way that cannot be experienced by car. The many DIY repair shops that have grown out of this movement provide a much-needed place of community for social interaction in a city lacking public space. Other grass-roots organizations such as C.I.C.L.E, the BWC and the many Internet websites and blog forums have also helped to build a sense of community and connectivity among cyclists throughout the County. Their creative organizing techniques and informative blogs have helped to educate cyclists and set an agenda for the changes that must be made to make LA a more bikeable city. LA's bike culture and community have popularized cycling and changed the lives of Angelinos across the County by helping them to realize that cycling is fun, healthy and a great way to explore their city.

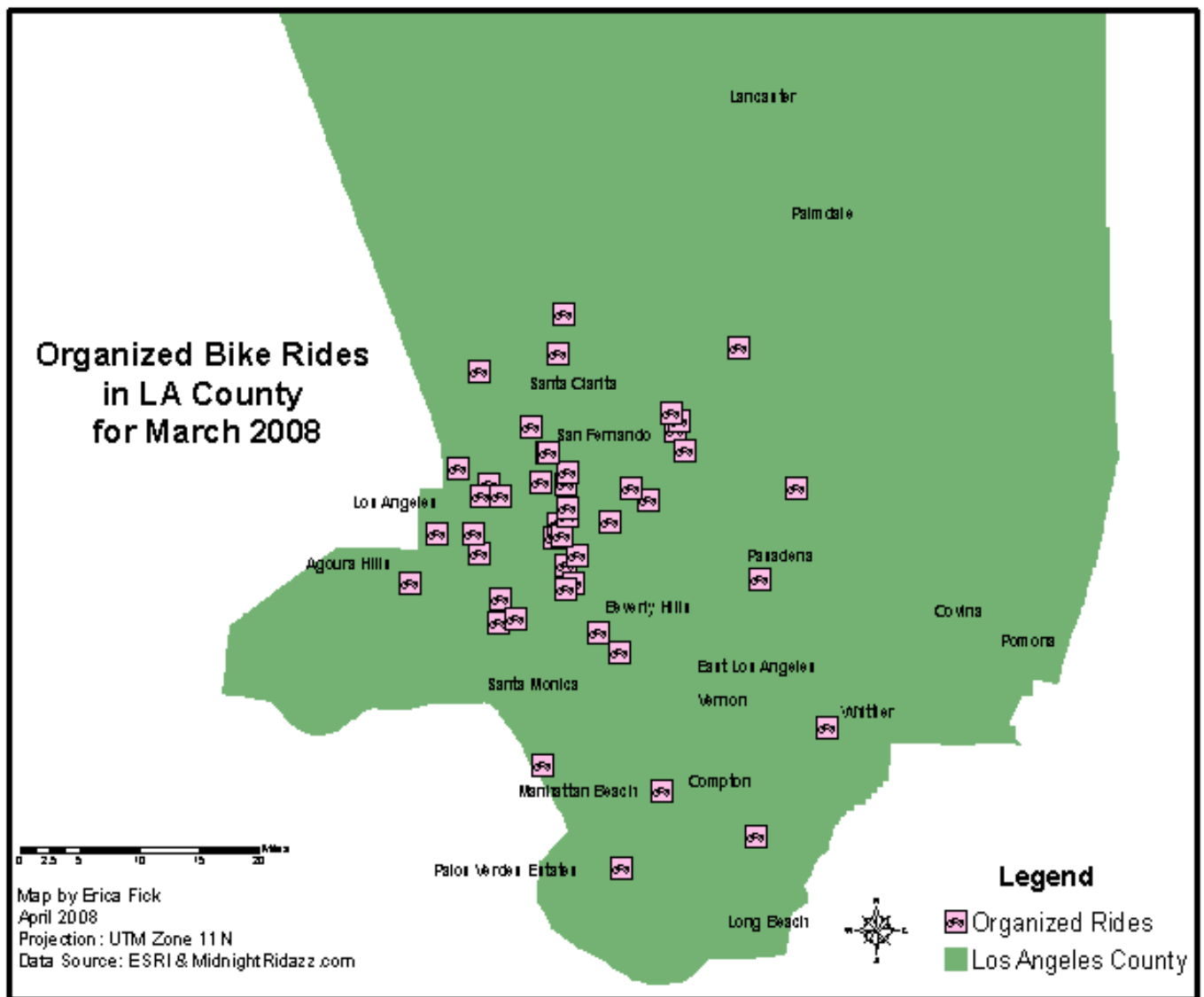
But the cycling community faces many challenges in turning this social-based bike movement into a political force to ensure the future of bikes in LA. LA's current bike movement was built on fun, not on politics. The bike movement is strong in numbers and more energetic than ever before but this must be catalyzed and aimed in the right direction if LA is ever to become a more bike-friendly city. It does not help that the movement is divided, both by types of cyclists as well as types of organizations: grassroots versus institutionalized ones. In addition, two of the communities most politically oriented groups, the BAC and the LACBC, are both in transition and paralyzed by their outdated idea of bike advocacy. City engineers do not see bikes as an answer

to LA's transportation problems and city officials do not yet have the political will to insist that they change this mentality. Cyclists must put pressure on these city officials to ensure that bikes become a part of city plans and designs but they must first develop a political strategy to do this. Key activists and strong leaders from within the community must come together to develop and implement this political strategy. The Bicycle Master Plan provides an opportunity for this and a chance for various bike organizations and individual activists to form a coalition to ensure that this plan reflect the needs and wants of the community. Cyclists have already shown their political will in stage one of public outreach, but they must continue this momentum by organizing and strategizing effectively for phase 3 and 4 of meetings this summer.

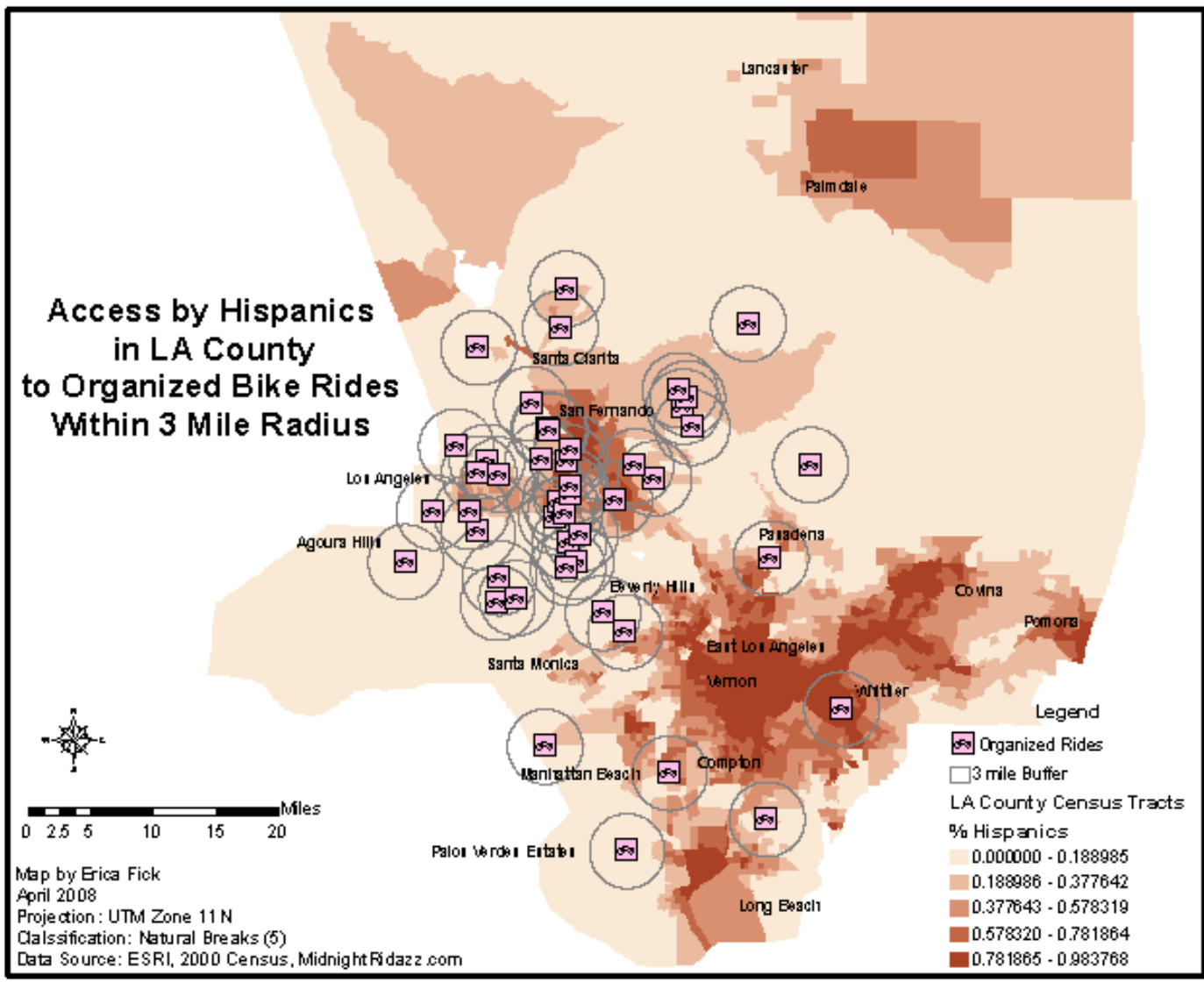
In order for LA to become a more livable city it must undergo some radical changes and the time is now. There are immense problems with energy and oil supplies, the environment, our economy and L.A.'s exploding population looming on the immediate horizon. Getting people to use bikes as form of transportation in our city can help deal with some of these issues, but it will require much more than a few organized rides or block party social events to get people out of their cars. Direct policy change is needed to make riding in LA easier and more safe. This requires changing the car-oriented mentality of LA's city government, a difficult task that requires mass support, strategic organizing and effective political pressure. The time is ripe for change and the cycling community is in no better position than now to make a difference in LA's political and physical landscape. LA's bike community is working hard to build a movement out of culture, but they must work harder and more strategically if they want to build a Veolrution.

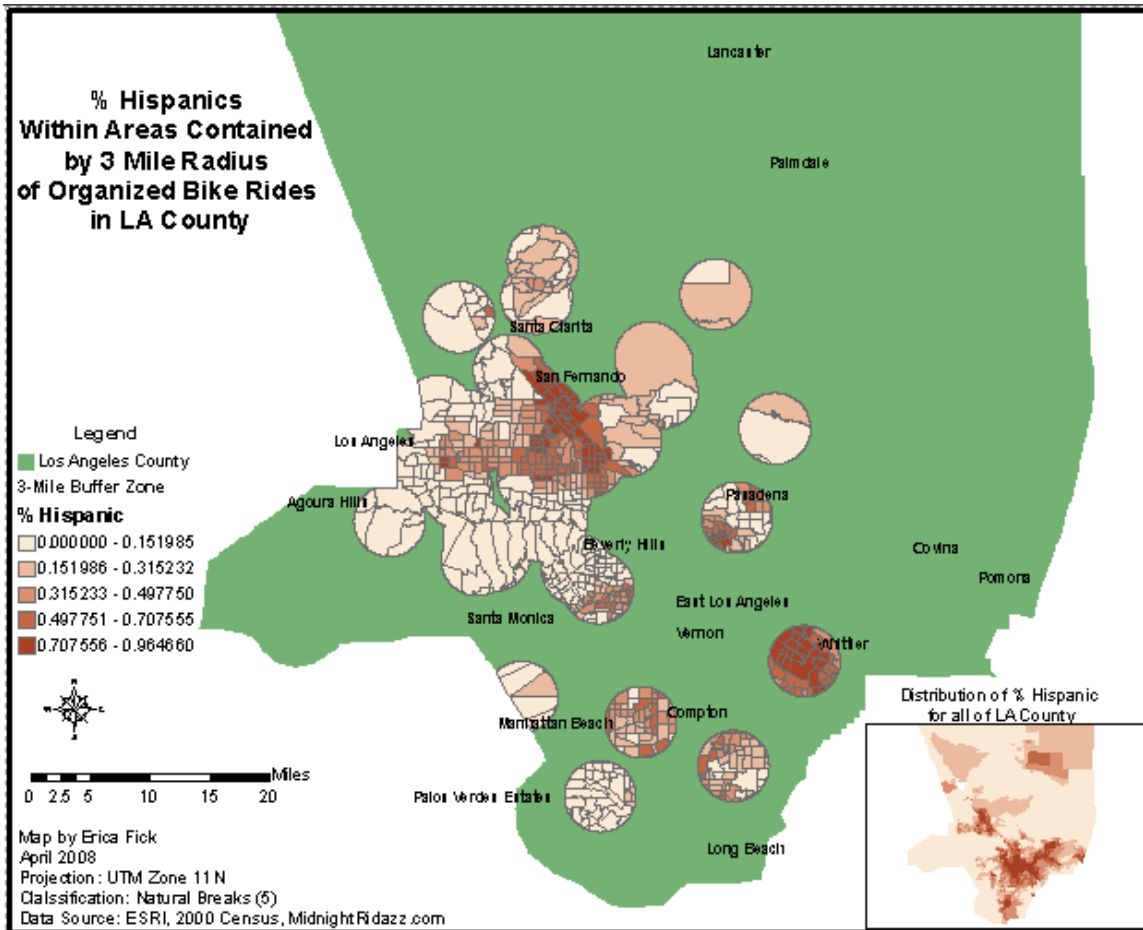
VII. Appendix

Maps of Organized Social Rides and their Accessibility to Latinos in LA County:

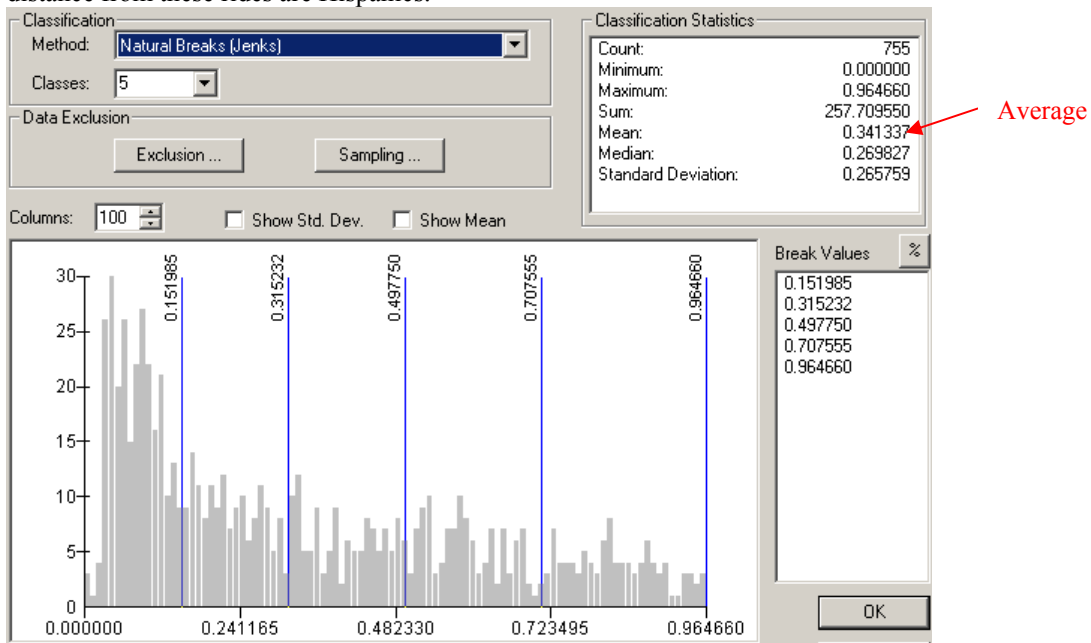


Access by Hispanics in LA County to Organized Bike Rides Within 3 Mile Radius



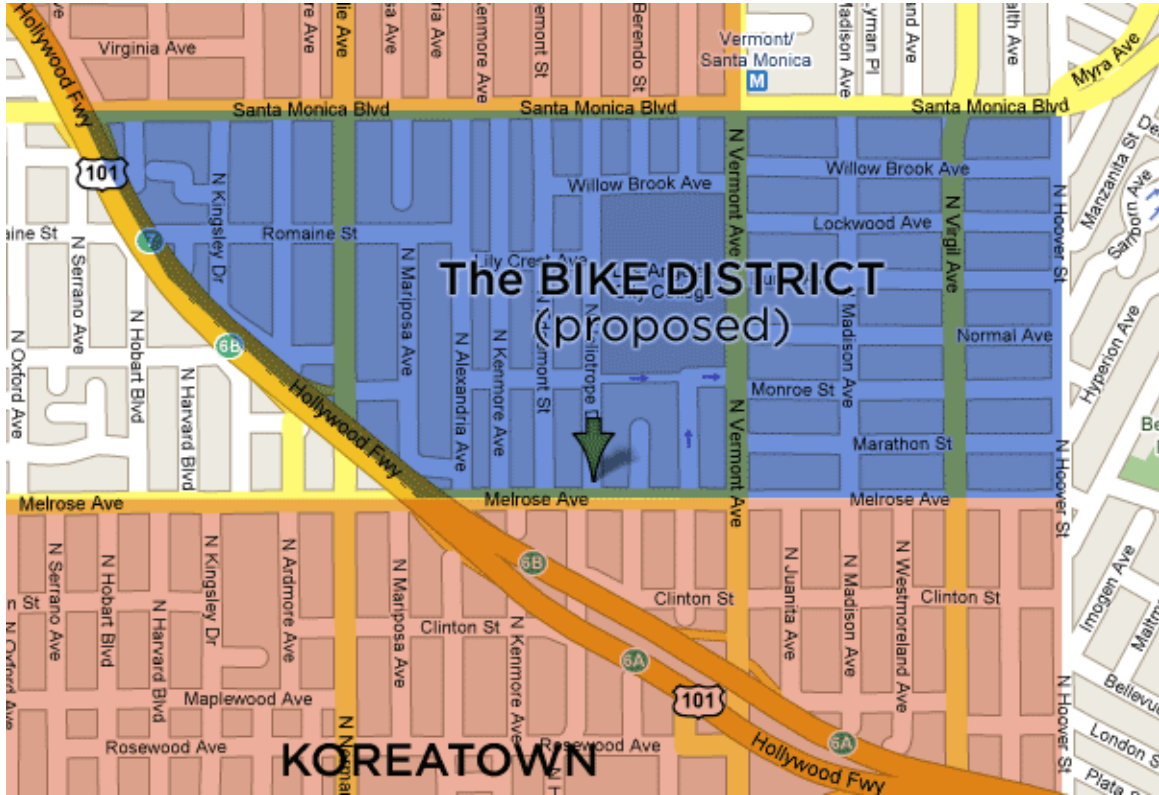


Below is a histogram of the percent Hispanics within these 3-mile radiuses. Note that the data is skewed to the left, or towards the lower percentages of Hispanics, and that the mean percentage of Hispanics for all these areas is only 34%. This means that on average, only 34% of the people living within an accessible distance from these rides are Hispanics.



Map of Bike District:

Although the area currently only consists of one block, the cycling community would like to expand the area and make the district's name official. Below: Map of Proposed Bicycle district with green arrow indicating the current Bicycle District at Melrose and Heliotrope.



* See also the Enhanced Public Outreach (EPOP) fact sheet, the Bike Writers Collective (BWC) Bill of Rights, and Alta Planning's project time line in the attached PDF files.

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