



NASHVILLE AREA

Metropolitan Planning Organization

MEDIA RELEASE

Third Biennial Field Count of Bicyclists and Pedestrians Confirms Many Middle Tennesseans are Walking, Bicycling

MPO leads volunteers in third biennial region-wide data collection as part of National Bike/Ped Documentation Project

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NASHVILLE, Tenn.— The Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization has just completed its third unannounced region-wide count of cyclists and pedestrians, documenting approximately 7,171 bicycle and pedestrian trips made at 33 sampled locations throughout five counties on Sept. 10. Despite thunderstorms and lightning during 2013's afternoon counts, the numbers are nearly identical to the last round of regional counts conducted in 2011. Middle Tennessee's volunteer-driven counts are coordinated by the Nashville Area MPO as part of the National Bicycle & Pedestrian Documentation Project – a nationwide effort to provide better data to planners and policy-makers so that they might better understand the need for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

“These biennial counts provide just a snapshot of pedestrian and bicycle traffic on a given weekday, but they're important for several reasons,” said Leslie Meehan, the MPO's senior planner for walking and bicycling. “They provide insightful data that we can reference when proposing or seeking to fund bicycle and pedestrian transportation projects in our planning area. We're also contributing to a national study that compiles our data with that of hundreds of communities across the nation. The bicycle and pedestrian trip numbers this year are strong, demonstrating a significant public desire for opportunities to walk or bicycle to area destinations. And if the weather this year had been fair during the afternoon round of counts, we expect the overall figures would've likely shown sizeable increases over 2011's.”

Non-motorized transportation planners have historically lacked a uniform way to document facility usage and demand. Without accurate and consistent figures on bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure demand and usage, it is difficult to measure and justify the benefits of investing in facilities like sidewalks and bikeways, or understand what factors influence trips made by walking and biking – especially when compared to the copious amounts of trip-data that exists for other modes such as the private automobile. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities are important for everyone, including motorists, as even drivers must make pedestrian trips (when walking from their cars to their final destinations).

The National Bicycle & Pedestrian Documentation Project assumes that, in order to estimate existing and future bicycle and pedestrian demand and activity, agencies like MPOs must conduct counts in a consistent, standardized manner—similar to those used by the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) to model motor-vehicle trips on the network.

The 2009, 2011, and now 2013 counts will help the MPO to: continue building the region's database of bicyclist and pedestrian count information; understand the transportation-facility uses of bicyclists and pedestrians, what's needed for their future use; gather information on potential trends for walking and bicycling trips; and share data with the National Bicycle & Pedestrian Documentation Project. An update to the MPO's *Regional Bicycle & Pedestrian Study* will also soon be underway, and three occasions of documented biennial counts could prove useful in planning for bicycle and pedestrian facility investments that might improve area communities' safety and livability.

The top count location overall was Belmont Blvd. and Bernard Ave. in Nashville, where volunteers noted 1,428 trips: 1,288 pedestrian trips and 140 cyclist trips. The counts were conducted in Davidson, Rutherford, Sumner, Williamson and Wilson counties during peak commute times [7-9 a.m., and 4-6 p.m.] on Sept. 10, 2013.

Several new locations were added this year, including the intersection of 24th and Blakemore Avenues near Vanderbilt University, where 696 bicyclists and pedestrians were documented – the third-highest overall count location for 2013. Another new location was Lebanon’s historic downtown square, where 223 pedestrians and bicyclists were counted, even despite the inclement weather on the afternoon of Sept. 10.

Volunteers were also asked to note the gender of each observed bicyclist and pedestrian. Women comprised nearly half (49 percent) of all pedestrians and a quarter of all bicyclists. Several global mobility experts contend that women cyclists are an “indicator species” for bike-friendly cities. Meaning, in places where a high percentage of bike trips are by women, rates of cycling are high; cycling conditions are safe, convenient and comfortable. Where relatively few women cycle, rates of cycling are low; cycling conditions are unsafe, inconvenient, uncomfortable, and sometimes impossible.

Cyclist counts at 21 morning locations increased 42 percent over 2011. Last week, the American Community Survey released data showing a ten percent increase in bicycle commute trips nationwide; a locally-documented increase four times that amount demonstrates a growing use of bicycles for transportation.

“Fifty percent of trips taken in U.S. metro areas are three miles or less and nearly thirty percent of trips are one mile or less. The average person can walk one mile in about twenty minutes and can bicycle the same distance in less than half that time. Creating safe, convenient routes for those who want to walk or bicycle for short trips –to work, school, or elsewhere– is a critical component of any metropolitan region’s transportation plan,” added Meehan.

One-third of Americans don’t own cars, and 12 percent of all trips in America are made by walking or bicycling. And despite the fact that 55 percent of Americans want to bike more than they do now, drive less and walk more, 65 percent of trips under one mile are still taken by automobile due to inadequate facilities for active transportation. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, just over 31 percent of Tennessee adults are obese, tying the state with Michigan for the tenth-highest obesity rate. The MPO seeks to pursue infrastructure policies that reflect a desire for healthier options to get around communities, including safer, more convenient means to walk or cycle for routine trips.

Investments in the non-motorized modes have been proven to: increase access to transit service; provide safe, reliable choices for short trips; promote physical activity; improve air quality and lower urban regions’ overall carbon footprints; encourage infill development along existing roadway corridors whose supporting infrastructure may be nearing capacity. These outcomes support the major policy provisions of the MPO’s *2035 Regional Transportation Plan*, as adopted by the region’s mayors in late 2010: 1) a bold, new vision for mass transit; 2) increased support for active transportation and the building of walkable Communities; and 3) preserving and enhancing existing, strategic roadway corridors.

For more information on MPO efforts to support a transportation system that’s safer and more inclusive of active trip-making, including forthcoming updates to its *2009 Regional Bicycle & Pedestrian Study*, visit NashvilleMPO.org/BikePed.

About the Nashville Area MPO:

The Nashville Area MPO is the federally-designated transportation planning agency for 2800+ sq. mi. and 1.5+ million people in Middle Tennessee. A regional partnership among the U.S. DOT, Tennessee DOT, elected leadership, planning and public works directors, the business community, and citizens across a five-plus county planning area, the MPO leads in the development of the region’s short, mid, and long-term transportation plans, and contributes to ongoing conversations about issues such as land use, economic development, climate change and the environment, safety and security, and health.

About the Institute of Transportation Engineers’ Pedestrian & Bicycle Council:

ITE’s Pedestrian & Bicycle Council represents and promotes the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists and other forms of non-motorized (human-powered) travel in the planning, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of transportation infrastructure. The Council seeks to promote the development of comprehensive transportation infrastructure that is inclusive of all modes of travel; serve as a crosscutting resource between other organizations and agencies on pedestrian and bicycle matters; and educate ITE membership, agencies, organizations, and policy-makers on the needs of the *pedestrian* and bicycle communities.

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