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Florida ranks in the bottom third for bicycle and pedestrian investments and safety

Fort Myers, FL – January 28, 2010 – Florida has a ways to go towards investing in safe streets, according to a report released today by the Alliance for Biking & Walking. “Bicycling and Walking in the U.S.: The 2010 Benchmarking Report” shows that while 8% of trips in Florida are by bicycle or foot, bicyclists and pedestrians account for 20% of traffic fatalities in the state.

Lack of investment in bicycling and walking could be to blame. Nationally, 10% of trips in the U.S. are by bike or foot, 13% of traffic fatalities are bicyclists and pedestrians, and biking and walking receive less than 2% of federal transportation dollars. In Florida the disconnect is even greater: While 8% of the trips are by bicycle or foot and 20% of the traffic fatalities are bicyclists and pedestrians, just 1.2% of Florida’s federal transportation dollars are spent on biking and walking.

Florida also ranks in the bottom third of all states because it lacks adequate state policies and priority focus to encourage walking and biking, according to the report. While many states have published goals to increase walking and biking, Florida has none. While many states have master plans for bicycling and walking, Florida has none. Many states have a bike/pedestrian advisory committee; however, Florida has none. While 72% of states have a publicly available bike map, Florida has none--although it is a major tourist state with many visitors looking for places to cycle.

While the report credits Florida with a “complete streets policy”, the longstanding FL statute requiring “full consideration” of bicycle and pedestrian facilities in planning state road projects, has not been implemented by the state consistent with a complete streets approach. Complete streets are streets that are designed, built, operated and maintained for safe and convenient travel for all users: pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Both this report and the national “Dangerous by Design” report released in November recommend a complete streets approach as a way to make our streets safer for all users.

“This report provides new evidence of Florida state government’s neglect of pedestrians and bicyclists, as shown in the poor scoring by every benchmarking indicator—from the share of commuters who bicycle and walk to work, to safety, funding, staffing, and bike/pedestrian policies,” said Darla Letourneau, a local community advocate and BikeWalkLee leader.

Recently, Lee County, through adoption of complete streets resolutions this year by both the Metropolitan Planning Organization and by the Board of County Commissioners, has embarked on a path to safer streets for everyone. In addition, Lee County is developing a countywide bicycle pedestrian master plan that will provide the blueprint for a safe, accessible, and connected bicycle/pedestrian system throughout the county. “For the county to be successful it needs support and leadership from the governor and state agencies. BikeWalkLee has asked the Governor and Lee

Legislative Delegation to make complete streets a state priority, and to provide a fair share of highway safety funds for pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements,” said Letourneau.

While minimal investment in bicycling and walking has caused thousands of preventable deaths across the U.S., it doesn’t have to be. “State and local governments choose how to spend their transportation dollars – whether it’s on roads that encourage speeding traffic or on complete streets that are safe for everyone, including bicyclists and pedestrians,” says Jeff Miller, President of the Alliance for Biking & Walking. “Data show that increasing investment in biking and walking could lead to more people biking and walking. The more people who bike and walk, the safer it is and the healthier the community. It’s a virtuous cycle.”

“Bicycling and Walking in the U.S.” was funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and made possible through additional support from Bikes Belong Coalition and Planet Bike. For more information and to download the report, visit www.PeoplePoweredMovement.org/benchmarking.

About BikeWalkLee:

BikeWalkLee is a community coalition raising public awareness and advocating for complete streets in Lee County—streets that are designed, built, operated and maintained for safe and convenient travel for all users: pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities. For more information, visit www.BikeWalkLee.org.

About the Alliance:

Alliance for Biking & Walking is the North American coalition of over 160 grassroots biking and walking advocacy organizations. The Alliance works to strengthen state and local organizations through research, sharing best practices, training, resources, and grants. For more information or to find a local organization, visit www.PeoplePoweredMovement.org.
