

## CHICAGOLAND BICYCLE FEDERATION

# On the road to a healthier Chicago, policy advocates promote physical activity

The *Chicagoland Bicycle Federation* (CBF) envisions a region where children and their families can safely walk and bike to school, work, and other important destinations. For Rob Sadowsky, CBF's Executive Director, promoting active transportation isn't simple: "The hardest thing for us is: how do we make a lot of impact in communities that are struggling economically? How do you go in and talk about physical activity and nutrition when people are struggling to work?" Even though none of their wins have come easily, CBF is beginning to see physical activity become a front-burner issue in the region.

Among CBF's statewide policy successes in 2007 was a piece of Complete Streets legislation, requiring that the state include bike and pedestrian pathways in the planning and construction of state roads. In partnership with The League of Illinois Bicyclists, CBF also pushed successfully for state law that will require



CBF WORKS ON POLICY IN ADDITION TO BIKE SAFETY EDUCATION

### QUICK FACTS

**LOCATION** . . . Chicagoland Bicycle Federation

**POLICY JURISDICTION**

Local  State  Federal

**POLICY ORIENTATION**

Policy  Poised  Education

**APPROACH**

Environmental/Institutional  Services/Programs

**EQUITY FOCUS** . . . . . Strong

**ISSUE AREAS** . . . Physical Activity

**POLICY DOMAINS**

Bikeability/Walkability

**WEBSITE** . . . . . [www.biketraffic.org](http://www.biketraffic.org)

cars to have a three foot clearance when they pass bicyclists. A third policy victory for 2007 was a state mandate to set heavier penalties for drivers who crash into school crossing guards.

At the local level, CBF runs a campaign seeking selected street closures that would afford pedestrians the use of car-free streets on Sundays. Working with the Consortium to Lower Obesity among Chicago's Children, CBF advocates for the return of physical education classes and active recess to local area schools. As a lead organizer for the Northeast Illinois Safe Routes to School Task Force, CBF works to make sure that children can walk and bike safely on their way to and from school. Safe Routes to School programs are now cropping up throughout the metro region.

Building the membership base to take on state and local bike and pedestrian issues has taken a mixture of



BIKE EVENTS RAISE MONEY AND AWARENESS ABOUT ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION AND BIKE SAFETY

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organizational coalition building and community-based outreach and engagement. In addition to policy advocacy, the 5,700 member organization also hosts public events and runs programs such as Go Healthy!, which encourages people in low-income communities to incorporate walking and bicycling into their daily lives. Participants are asked to complete 3-day travel diaries, indicating all of their trips and Go Healthy! Coaches help them figure out which trips they can most easily substitute with a walk or bicycle ride. CBF pays two community liaisons to engage Chicago resi-

dents to advocate for safer streets and accessible physical activity opportunities.

When asked about their keys to success, Sadowsky admits, “We’re very effective in what we do. We are not a shouting organization. We praise loudly and scold very softly.” So far, that approach seems to be working, but CBF still faces some uphill battles. Since the State Supreme Court recently declared that bikes were not intended for the road, CBF has taken up a local fight to protect the rights and safety of bicyclists. The Supreme Court’s ruling (*Boub v. Wayne*) discourages municipalities from putting up traffic signs for bicyclists on the basis that the signage would then make cities liable for injuries to bicyclists.

Though disappointed when bike-hostile decisions are handed down from the legislature or the courts, Sadowsky is not deterred. “We have a vision of 7,500 miles (the equivalent of 2.5 trips from New York to San Francisco) of trails and bike lanes in Chicago and the surrounding region. Our goal is to get 15% of the regional population to bike to work. It’s at 1% now.” With their sights set on increased ridership and better infrastructure, CBF and its vocal membership see a lot of opportunities to improve the physical environment so that children and families can be engaged in regular, safe physical activity at school and on city and state roads.