

# Comparison of Bicycle-Friendly Community Applications from Burlington, VT, Missoula, MO, and Corvallis, OR.

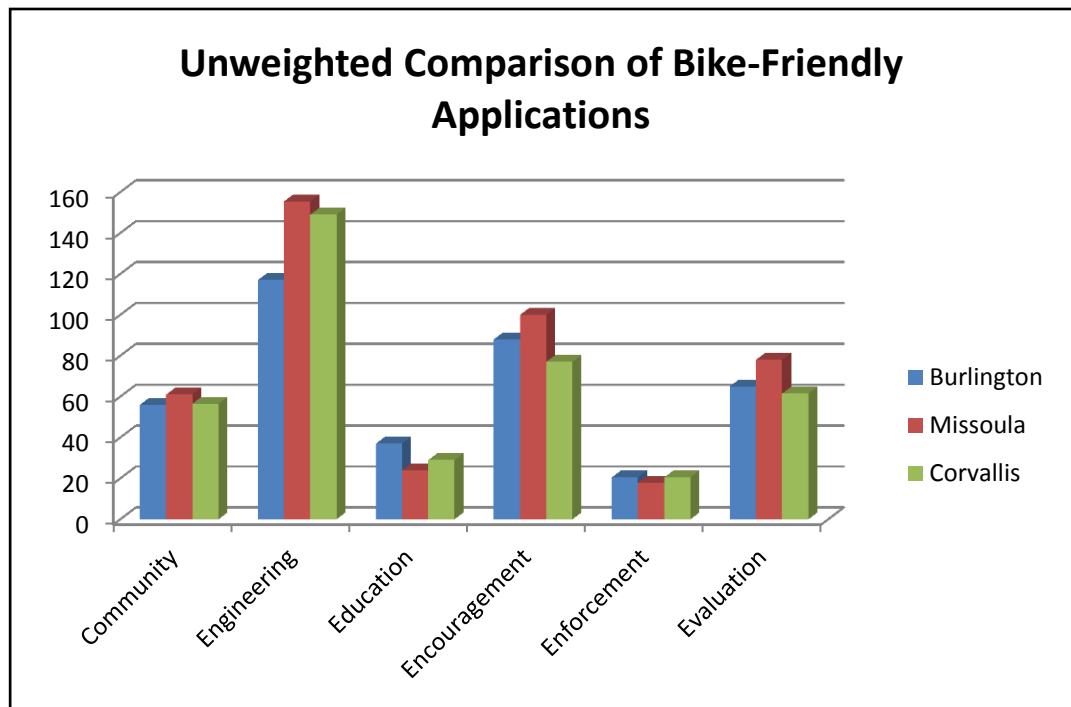
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## Introduction

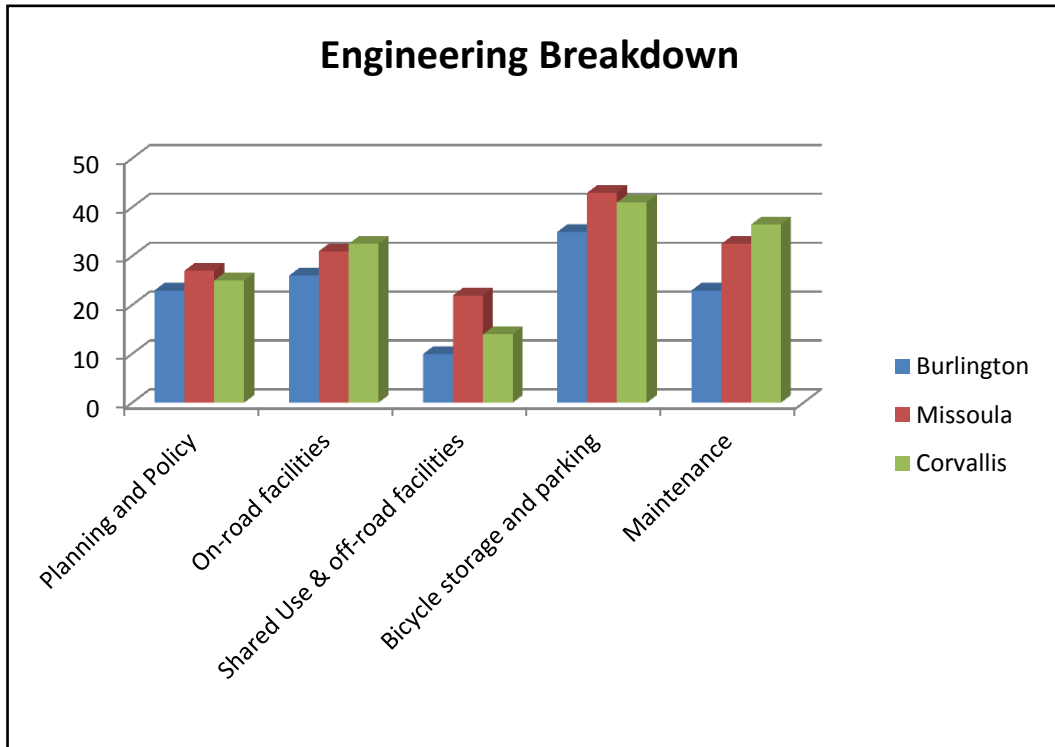
Burlington was named a Silver Bicycle-Friendly Community by the League of American Bicyclists in 2011. We plan to submit a new application in 2014, and hope to achieve Gold status. To facilitate understanding the opportunities for improving our bicycle friendliness (and our application), we compared Burlington’s application with those of Missoula, Montana and Corvallis, Oregon, both small cities slightly larger than Burlington that have achieved Gold status.

The application was split into six parts: Community, Engineering, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, and Evaluation and Planning. The main gap between Burlington’s application and those of Missoula and Corvallis appeared to be in the area of Engineering. While the application review did identify opportunities for improvement in the areas of Community, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, and Evaluation and Planning, Burlington appeared to be more on par with Missoula and Corvallis in these areas (although Missoula has the edge in Encouragement and Evaluation).

The following table illustrates a comparison of the applications’ responses to each section, with 0 to 5 points assigned to each response in the section. The questions were not weighted, so relatively minor questions received the same weighting as more critical issues; thus this ranking is only suggestive of the differences between the applications.



The following chart provides a little more detail on the breakdown of topics within the Engineering section, which was by far the longest section.



## Summary of key findings

**Political support.** Our application indicated “lukewarm support for bicycling infrastructure by some at the top levels of city government.” This is clearly a barrier to continued progress and should be addressed by the new administration.

**On-road facilities.** At the time of our application, only 50% of our arterial roads had “bike lanes or wide shoulders,” compared to 90% and 98% for Missoula and Corvallis, respectively. In order to succeed, Burlington needs to make critical investments and improvements in our on-road physical infrastructure, to ensure that we have the facilities to support bicycling. In particular, we identified the following areas for assessment and improvement:

1. Increase the percentage of arterial roads with accommodations for biking, such as bike lanes or separated cycle tracks.
2. Expand the network of bike routes through downtown.
3. Increase accommodation for bicycles in general, including bike lanes, sharrows, bike cut-throughs, counterflow lanes, bike tracks, bicycle boulevards, etc.
4. Improve traffic signals and intersections for safe accommodation of bikes, such as marked bike-sensitive loop detectors, bike boxes, and other approaches.

**Bike Storage and Parking.** While our community does have a lot of opportunities for parking and storing bikes, there are some clear gaps and opportunities for improvement in the form of additional bike racks, storage lockers, and on-street bike parking. Our application indicated that less than 15% of parks and recreation centers have bike racks, whereas these areas ought to have 100% coverage. The application also

identified gaps in bike storage at public housing, government buildings, the airport and other transit stations, office buildings, and retail areas.

Maintenance. The application indicates a primarily reactive (complaint-based) approach to maintenance, with no sweeping or snow clearance for the shared use paths, and no prioritization of bike lanes in street sweeping and snow removal. Since road maintenance is even more important for bike lanes than it is for motorized vehicle lanes, maintenance should be prioritized and subject to periodic proactive inspection for identification of issues.

Shared Use and Off-Road Facilities. Burlington has a great resource in its 17 miles of shared use paths, most prominently on the waterfront, but the application did not indicate any unpaved paths or mountain biking facilities. While this may not have been accurate, this is clearly an area for improvement. There may also be room for improvement

Policy: While Burlington's policies relating to biking appear to be fairly good, we could strengthen our position in this area through adoption of NACTO guidelines, as well as ensuring that bicycle planning is fully integrated into other planning and regulation activity.

Education. The Education section of the application indicated that this is an area of particular strength, but there are still opportunities for improvement. The application suggested that one of our middle schools and at least one of the elementary schools (not including private schools), as well as the high school, do not participate in the Safe Routes to Schools program. There are a number of ways in which we could expand safety education for schools, the general public, and driver. We also need to ensure that existing efforts continue.

Encouragement. The Encouragement section of the application suggests that Missoula does more to encourage biking than Burlington does, including more community biking events, stronger promotion of National Biking Month, and a substantial public bike sharing program. The application also shows that Burlington has no identified Bike-Friendly Businesses and no mountain-biking facilities. There is clearly more we can do in several of these areas.

Enforcement. While Burlington's application is relatively strong in Enforcement compared to the other communities, there is still room for improvement in terms of communication between the biking community and the police, regulations, and enforcement priorities.

Evaluation and Planning. Despite some good efforts in Evaluation and Planning, the application suggests that we also have a number of significant gaps in this area. In particular, the application indicates that Burlington does not have a specific program in place to reduce the number of cyclist/motor crashes, is not meeting targets for implementation of its bicycling plan, does not have a mechanism to ensure biking is supported in traditionally underserved communities, and that planning efforts do not include mountain biking interests. While the application may not have accurately represented our efforts in these areas, this does suggest significant opportunities for improvement.

Accuracy. In a number of places, our application appeared to misrepresent and/or undersell Burlington's support for bicycling. In our next application we should be sure to capture accurately all the ways that we support biking, and also to describe them enough to show how they contribute to our bike-friendliness.

Results. In an email, we received the following summary feedback from the League: “For us, the outcome (a lot of people are riding bikes for transportation and recreation) is of greatest importance, particularly in the higher award categories. Burlington currently has a mode share of just over 4%, which is a solid number but too low for its potential (as we have seen in the National Bike Challenge!). In comparison, Missoula has a mode share of 6.4% and Corvallis has a mode share of 11.9%. The city needs to evaluate what is keeping people from riding bikes more often and develop action steps to address these concerns.” While commuter mode share is just one measure of bicycling on our community, it is clear that increasing the number of bikers on the streets is a critical indicator of the success of our efforts to improve Burlington’s bicycle friendliness, and is in fact .

## More detailed recommendations

The following are the summary recommendations from each section. Comments on particular questions in the application, as well as the responses to each question from the three communities, may be found in the spreadsheet document Gold Comparison.xls. Additional recommendations may be found in the League of American Bicyclists’ feedback on our application.

### A) Community

- 1) In order to succeed we need to make critical investments and improvements in infrastructure, to ensure that we have the facilities to support bicycling.
- 2) In order to succeed it is clear we also need greater political support in city government.
- 3) A key measure of success will be improved ridership numbers (mode share).
- 4) Identify ways to have a higher FTE in City government working on bicycle-related issues.
- 5) Pursue participation of other parties in the Bike Walk Council, including specifically law enforcement, perhaps school board, and other parts of city government.

### B) Engineering

- 1) Increase the percentage of arterial roads with bike lanes, or sharrows if lanes are not feasible. Also consider opportunities for more advanced bicycle accommodations like counterflow lanes, bike tracks, bicycle boulevards, etc.
- 2) Expand the network of bike routes through downtown (e.g., S. Winooski) and throughout the city, and increase accommodation for bicycles in general, including bike lanes, sharrows, bike cut-throughs, counterflow lanes, bike tracks, bicycle boulevards, etc.
- 3) Add more bike racks and lockers, in particular ensuring that we have adequate bike racks at all parks and recreation centers, government buildings, transit centers, public housing, major commuter/shopper destinations, and other locations. Especially look for opportunities for covered and/or secure bike storage facilities at major destinations (schools, public housing, offices, downtown, parks).
- 4) Improve and prioritize maintenance of bike lanes and shared use paths, including street sweeping, snow removal, and pothole maintenance. This should include proactive periodic inspection and seasonal sweeping, as well as responses to complaints. Snow removal on the bike path should also be re-examined with an eye toward maintaining accessibility for both bikers and skiers. The new path maintenance budget should help address this issue.
- 5) Assess traffic signals and intersections for safe accommodation of bicycle traffic, and consider adding bike boxes, marked bike-sensitive loop detectors, and other specialized approaches where needed.
- 6) Find one or more locations for single-track or other natural surface trails to accommodate mountain biking, and look into opportunities to increase the shared use path network.

- 7) Ensure we have adequate regulations in place to require accommodation of bicycles in all road projects. Consider also a building accessibility ordinance to ensure that people can bring their bikes inside.
- 8) Adopt NACTO design guidelines to enable more street solutions, and "Ensure that new and improved bicycle facilities conform to current best practices and guidelines." (from LAB)
- 9) Consider increasing ongoing training of staff to ensure awareness of bicycle issues, including perhaps a Smart Cycling course.
- 10) From the LAB feedback: Consider measuring the bicycle level of service (LOS) on community roads and at intersections, to be able to identify the most appropriate routes for inclusion in the community bicycle network, determine "weak links" in the network, prioritize sites needing improvement, and evaluate alternate treatments for improving bike-friendliness of a roadway or intersection.
- 11) From the LAB feedback: Improve the coordination and communication between city departments and state paving and rehabilitation projects and facilities maintenance. Consider offering oversight to state DOT staff and contractors working within municipal boundaries. Ensure that facility design follows current best practice and that they are properly installed.
- 12) Ensure that our application adequately highlights all of the efforts we are making to improve our biking facilities, as well as the facilities themselves.

#### C) Education

- 1) Ensure that all Burlington schools take part in Safe Routes To Schools programs and promote biking to school, and also assess the accessibility of all schools by bicycle.
- 2) Expand on existing public education efforts through advertising and other means to ensure distribution of information on bike and traffic safety and availability, including both campaigns for the general public as well as targeted campaigns to specific groups (e.g., kids, college students, commuters, recreational bikers, etc.). Explore opportunities for partnering with other entities such as the health department, AARP, etc.
- 3) Explore opportunities for providing education to professional drivers (including truck drivers, city employees, bus drivers) on sharing the roads with bikers, as well as perhaps augmenting the standard driver education classes.
- 4) Expand on existing education activities (classes, workshops, etc.) to reach more students and adults and promote both bike safety and bike skills such as changing tires and simple maintenance.

#### D) Encouragement

- 1) Promote and assist businesses in applying for and achieving Bicycle Friendly Business status, and similarly support UVM, Champlain, and Burlington College in becoming Bicycle Friendly Universities.
- 2) Encourage more employers, and particularly the City of Burlington and institutions, to create bike-to-work incentives if they do not have them already.
- 3) Create a mountain biking park or similar facility if not already in progress.
- 4) Promote National Biking Month more fully with a mayoral proclamation, PSAs, and mayor-led community ride.
- 5) Create a closed street event and/or other bike-centered events (e.g., community rides), both annual and also in conjunction with major improvements to bicycle infrastructure (bike path rebuild, new bike lanes, etc.).
- 6) Assess the feasibility of developing a public bike-sharing program similar to Missoula's.
- 7) Review the 'low hanging fruit' feedback as it appears we are doing several of these things already and maybe just need to be clearer in our next application.
- 8) Show a clearer connection that our bicycle community has in the planning process.
- 9) Ensure that our application adequately highlights all of the current efforts for encouragement of biking.

E) Enforcement

- 1) Establish a more regular line of communication between the BWBC (or other representatives of the biking community) and the BPD, either by having a representative of the BPD come to BWBC meetings or setting up a separate mechanism.
- 2) Review bike-related training program for BPD and assess whether to recommend additional training.
- 3) Review enforcement priorities for traffic safety laws and assess whether changes should be recommended to the BPD and/or UVM security, including the possibility of "positive enforcement."
- 4) Consider implementing a Share The Road campaign and/or giveaways of safety equipment, as well as other opportunities to disseminate information on safety and regulations.
- 5) Consider additional safety regulations that could be recommended to the City Council, such as penalties for dooring and prohibitions on cell phone use while driving.

F) Evaluation and Planning

- 1) Develop a specific plan for reduction of bicycle/car incidents and fatalities (see item 76).
- 2) Identify barriers to meeting targets for implementation of the bike plan, and work on ways to get back on target. (see item 77)
- 3) Ensure that mountain biking interests are adequately represented in plans and that there is communication between mountain biking community and staff (see items 78 and 79).
- 4) Ensure that our application adequately highlights all relevant information, such as trip reduction incentive programs (item 80a), programs for "traditionally underserved" neighborhoods (item 82), information on bicycle use (item 73), and the November 2012 ballot measures and other funding streams.
- 5) Seek out additional sources of evaluation information on bicycling in Burlington and surrounding areas, including non-commuter biking, and use these evaluation efforts to measure our success.
- 6) Improve Burlington's "Journey To Work" mode share from the current 4.5%.