



Biking in the Time of Coronavirus

A Statewide Online Survey Conducted
by Rhode Island Paths to Progress

May to July, 2020



Executive Summary



Biking In The Time of Coronavirus

A Statewide Survey

Few aspects of life were untouched by the coronavirus pandemic of 2020. One clear and nearly immediate impact was on how people traveled. When asked to stay close to home to “flatten the curve”, many people chose to get around by bicycle; there was a significant surge in bicycling locally, nationally and internationally.

Increased bicycling has major implications for urgent social issues--climate change, personal and public health and social equity. Helping residents replace car trips with bicycle trips will allow the state and local governments to make progress on air quality goals, offset health care costs and provide viable transportation and recreational options for underserved communities. Rhode Island has a vested interest in encouraging residents to ride bicycles.

Paths to Progress, a statewide coalition of bicycle advocates in Rhode Island, sought to document the bicycling surge in Rhode Island, understand what made people feel safe riding bicycles and what, if anything, would help residents maintain their new riding habits in order to reap the multiple health, environmental and social benefits. This information will be valuable to policy and decision-makers as they prioritize projects and begin to implement the Bicycle Mobility Plan.

The present report documents the findings of the Biking in The Time of Coronavirus survey.

Key Findings

Paint is not enough. We need physical barriers from traffic.
- Providence

The Biking In The Time of Coronavirus survey was an online, 17 question, bilingual questionnaire conducted May 7 to July 20, 2020. Responses came from across Rhode Island -- 624 in all -- representing beginners, recreational riders and daily commuters. The questionnaire combined multiple choice with open-ended, write-in questions. The present report describes the respondents and summarizes the key findings. Upon analysis, three important themes emerge; taken together, the collected data show:

- When they feel safe, people--individuals and families with children--will ride bicycles, even those who have not made this choice before.
- Being separated and protected from motorized vehicles is a vital part of feeling safe, and under those conditions people will ride more often.
- Rhode Islanders love the state's multi-use paths, but are frustrated that they are crowded, need maintenance, and aren't connected.

I have rediscovered the joy of biking :)
- Wakefield

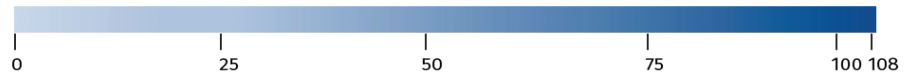
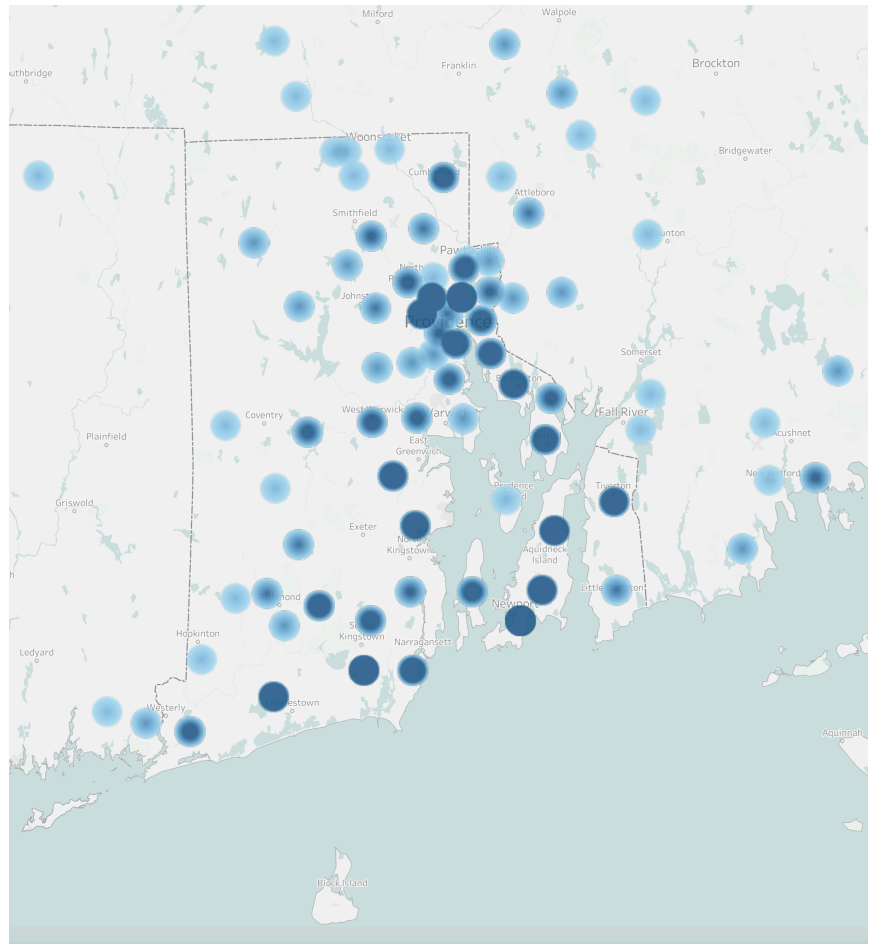
I'm seeing more people ride... Lots more families with young children on what were previously unthinkable dangerous streets
- Newport

We heard from riders from over **46** different cities and towns across Rhode Island. The highest concentrations of respondents live in the **Newport** and **Providence** areas...

80.5%
saw more people
riding bikes
compared to usual

93% *
reside in
Rhode Island

* 7% live over the borders in Connecticut and Massachusetts and reported riding their bicycles in Rhode Island.



The Four Types of Cyclists

We used a standard distribution of people into four categories of cyclists* to establish how people identify with the places and roads where they ride, and to help us better understand the answers. The four categories of cyclists are defined by their relationship to infrastructure and their differing needs to feel safe.

**Report and support for rider categorization:
<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/article/264746>*



Strong and Fearless

I will ride in any road conditions, including areas with car traffic.



Enthusied and Confident

I enjoy riding and am comfortable sharing the roadway with cars, but prefer bike lanes and bike boulevards.



Interested but Concerned

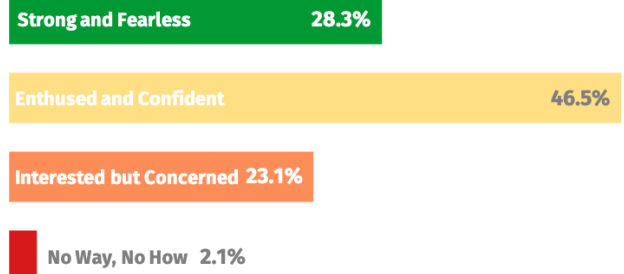
I like riding a bike, and I would like to ride more, but am afraid to ride with cars on the road.



No Way, No How

I am generally not interested in biking, although I may ride for recreation once in a while.

How would you describe yourself as a rider?



The most active rider types **spoke up** with the many opportunities to provide open-ended comments. The distribution of what they had to say, without being required, was very revealing...



50%



50%



48%

When asked to optionally comment on what would influence them to ride more often, riders strongly indicated a **desire to be separated from traffic.**

7%

78%

90%

When invited to optionally comment about why they selected their rider category, high percentages of riders shared **concerns about safety when riding with cars & traffic.**

35%

46%

60%

When invited to optionally 'Tell us anything else you'd like to share', significant percentages of riders wrote about how they **want more separation & protection from cars.**

Focusing on the ‘Interested but Concerned’ Riders

We had an excellent response from confident and experienced riders – nearly 75% of respondents fell into the top two groups. Not a surprise given the ease in reaching riders already engaged with the organizations behind the survey. But the coalition worked hard to promote beyond its member base, to the general public where we were more likely to find the most important group – the **Interested but Concerned**.

Nationally, 60% of people identify as Interested but Concerned, and of our respondents 23%. These are people who would like to ride bicycles, but don’t – because they are concerned for their safety and ambivalent to ride in proximity with cars and other motor vehicles. 60% of people want to ride bikes and don’t. Their concern prevents them from practicing an activity that is good for their health and the health of the environment and the economy. A practice that reduces traffic, stress and pollution.

The **Interested but Concerned** group can help us understand what we need to do to increase the number of people biking, to make biking safe, comfortable and a primary choice for getting around.

67% of **Interested but Concerned** riders were **riding more often** during stay-at-home orders.

Have you been biking more often since stay-at-home orders went into effect?

When asked why they were riding more often, the top reason selected by all types of cyclists was that they had more time to ride. For the Interested but Concerned group, the next dominant reason was that they felt **safer with fewer cars on the road**, selecting that choice **65%** of the time.

Do you think you will continue riding as often once stay-at-home restrictions are lifted?

“No... Once traffic from tourists picks up in Charlestown I won't feel safe on the roads. Will stick to bike paths and trails in Burlingame.
- Charlestown

“Yes... it feels great. And the new bike link at URI makes it so I don't have to use the road as much. I feel safer.
- South Kingstown

65% of **Interested but Concerned** riders **felt safer** with fewer cars on the road.

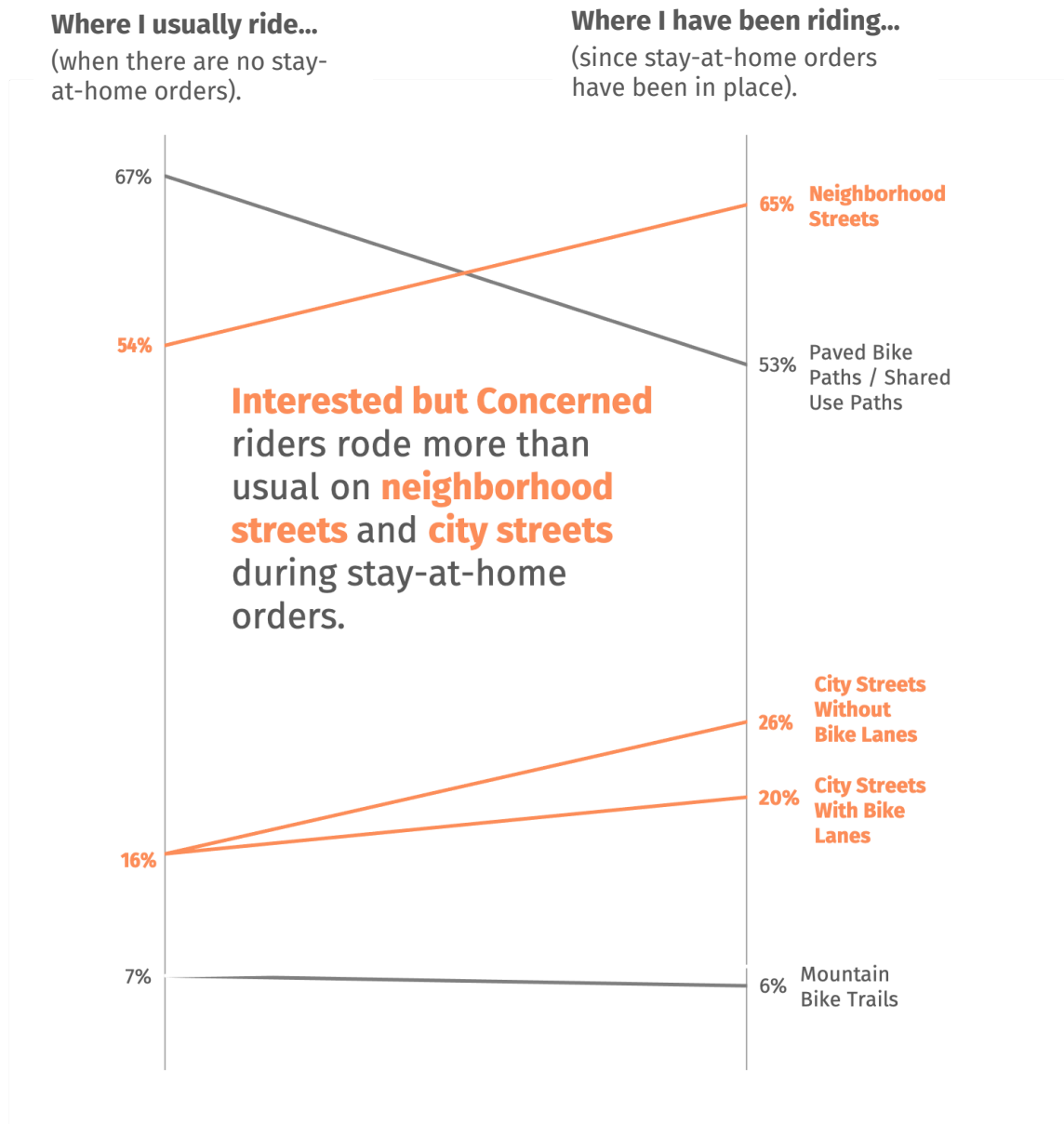


If you have been riding in new places, do you think you will continue riding there once stay-at-home restrictions are lifted?

“No... Hope Street and South/North Main Streets are much too crowded with busses, cars, and parked cars normally. Doesn't feel safe.
- Providence





“Yes... I am becoming a more confident bike rider. I enjoy it, although I do feel nervous about biking near cars.
- Providence

“No... More cars is too dangerous for my kids.
- Newport

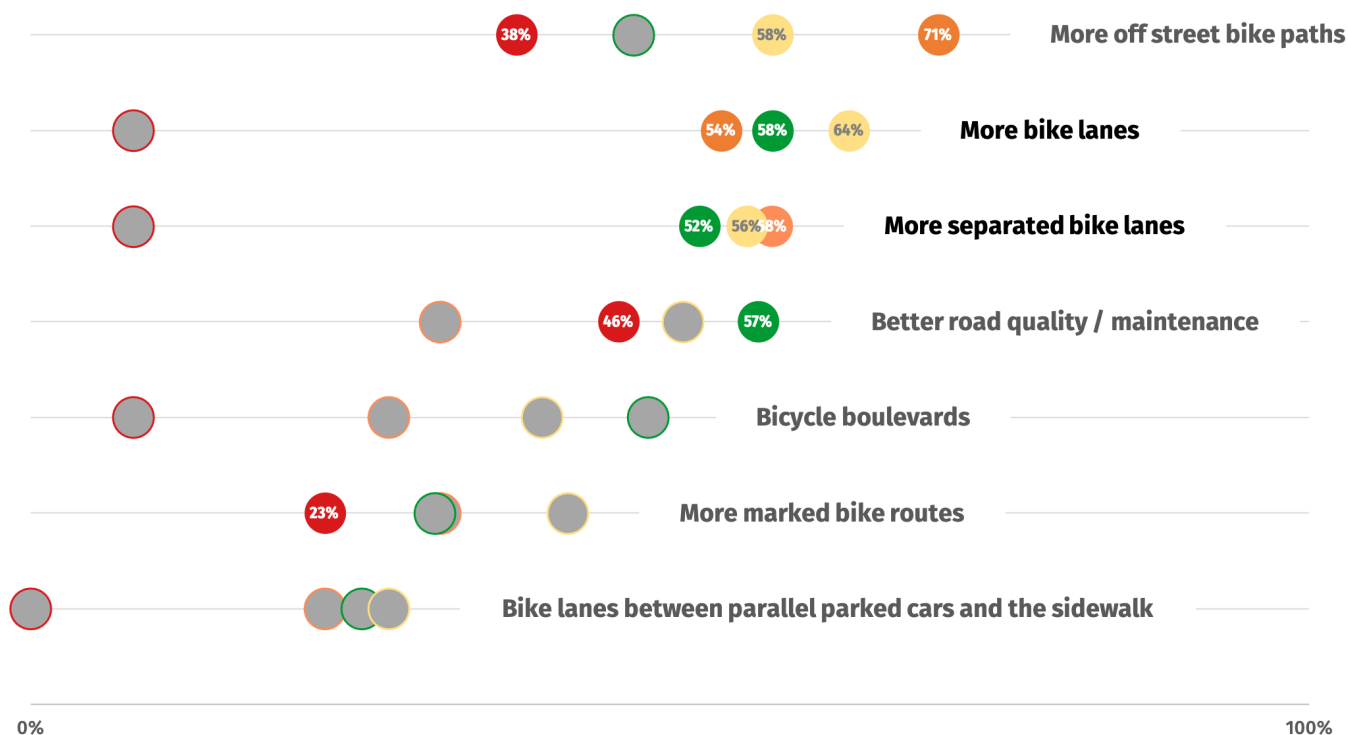


Which of the following improvements would influence you to bike more often?

Concerns about safety consistently determine how often and where people will ride. **Making bicycling more common requires addressing these concerns.** Recall that the four categories of bicyclists are defined by their relationship to infrastructure and their differing needs to feel safe. It's very informative to look at potential changes and improvements through the lens of these rider categories.

-  Strong and Fearless
-  Enthused and Confident
-  Interested but Concerned
-  No Way, No How

When asked which of the following improvements would influence them to bike more often, the three active rider types selected more bike lanes and more separated bike lanes as one of their top three choices.



Percentages represent how many riders from each rider group selected each choice, with the top three choices for each group highlighted in their respective colors. The lowest four choices for each group are shown in gray with a matching colored border.

58%
of all riders want
more **off street
bike paths**

54%
of all riders want
more **separated
bike lanes**

Altogether, over half of all survey respondents expressed their wishes for **protection from traffic** by choosing **off street bike paths** and **separated bike lanes** as priority improvements.

“
Painted lines and symbols
don't protect me. I want
real separation with posts
or grass or something that
protects me from a drifting
or distracted driver.
- Smithfield

Conclusions and Next Steps

This information supports the purpose of this study - to understand why more people are biking, and what long-term changes will help them to continue biking.

Conclusions:

People want to ride bikes more often.

People will ride more often where there are fewer cars.

People will ride less often where there are more cars.

People will ride more often if they are separated/protected from traffic.

People prioritize bike paths and separated/protected bike lanes above other bike infrastructure.

Next Steps:

In the context of the accepted and well-documented benefits to health, economy, and environment *:

- Recognize and elevate the wish to choose bicycles for transportation and recreation.
- Prioritize and fund bike infrastructure to make it possible for more people to choose bicycles for transportation and recreation
- Prioritize and fund separation/protection in bike infrastructure.
- Build a road safety culture that increases safety for all road users, especially for people not in cars.
- Continue this statewide survey to keep track of public wishes regarding bicycle riding and infrastructure.

* Numerous reports on benefits of biking are catalogued here:

<https://peopleforbikes.org/our-work/statistics/>

I have been riding more often and will continue... because riding bikes is better for the planet, better for my wallet, better for my health, and I love taking bikes out!
- Providence, RI

Paths to Progress coalition member organizations:

Bike Newport
Bike Tiverton
Blackstone Valley Tourism Council
Charlestown Bicycle Advocates
East Coast Greenway
Friends of the William C. O'Neill South County Bike Path
Grow Smart RI
Providence Streets Coalition
Rhode Island Bicycle Coalition
Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council

Full survey responses are available on request.

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