

A 21st Century Crossroad

“Promote transportation options such as bicycle trails, commute trip reduction programs, incentives for car pooling and public transit” (action item #3 from the Mayors Climate Agreement)

Back in the 1800's, Alliance made a name for itself as a transportation crossroad. At the intersection of major railways, it served as a link for the greater region. One of the country's first inter-urban streetcar systems thrived in Alliance, and connected it to its neighbor Canton. ...but somewhere along the way, while the rest of the world continued to develop their rail systems, America lost interest in mass transportation, and developed a love affair with the car.

Fortunately, the rest of the developed world has been better about maintaining their public transportation options. In London, Paris or Tokyo, life is easier without a car. In the Vauban neighborhood of Freiberg, Germany, cars are *verboten*. It is a “pedestrian and bicycle only” neighborhood. Copenhagen and Amsterdam are famous for their bicycles; and trains and bicycles are the primary form of transportation in Asia. However, the booming nation of China is beginning to look at the U.S. model...

“If China one day has three cars for every four people, U.S. style, it will have 1.1 billion cars. The whole world today has 800 million cars... It would need 99 million barrels of oil a day. Yet the world currently produces 84 million barrels per day...”
From “Plan B2.0,” by Lester Brown, Earth Policy Institute

Do we really want to put forth the model of three cars for every four people in this day and age of climate concerns? What can we do to reduce our disproportionate reliance on autos?

At the City level:

1. We could make it easier to bike. A bike plan that identifies safe biking routes, eliminates hazards on the city streets, and installs bike racks at public buildings would help. The greater Alliance area is depressingly blank on the ODOT's Bikeways map; let's push for completion of the Stark Parks Greenways project to fill in the blank, and develop bike paths that connect Alliance with surrounding communities. Think biking isn't for this climate? Check out the bike plans online for Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Chicago and Minneapolis, for starters.
2. We could make it easier to take the bus. SARTA is wonderful, but maybe they could work to develop more transparency in the bus system to make it easier to use – they could provide maps and schedules at public locations such as libraries, schools, grocery stores and post offices, or put up bus stop signs with schedules and maps posted. Maybe the city could work with SARTA to develop routes to connect Alliance directly with the airport, North Canton and Hartville areas, or Akron, rather than requiring time-consuming transfers through hubs in downtown Canton. This would make SARTA more useful and attractive for anyone who is traveling to points due west and north.

3. Parking stall requirements for new construction could be linked to alternative transportation, so that businesses could reduce the number of required stalls by providing alternatives – car-pooling, covered and secure bike parking, a new bus stop, or incentives to ride the bus.

Businesses and schools:

Show that your business is progressive: install good quality bike racks, develop car-pooling incentives, incentives to ride the bus, or even give bus passes to employees as a benefit. Educate students about transportation options, and about safe biking.

Individuals:

Try something new! Pick one place you go regularly, and try walking, biking, or taking the bus for a change (this is a challenge to myself, as well). Get “saddlebag” baskets or bags for your bike, so you can carry a couple of bags of groceries, or a briefcase and lunch bag. Ask business owners, or your employer, if they would consider installing a bike rack. Educate yourself by going online to the SARTA site for information on their routes and schedules.

Alternative transportation often takes more time, but if you integrate it with other goals, it won't be time wasted. Biking and walking can provide exercise without spending time and money on a gym or classes. Taking the bus can allow you the time to read while commuting, or you can listen to music or books on tape, or just stare out the window and relax. If you're the workaholic type, bring your laptop and work while commuting, without that pesky steering wheel getting in the way! All this, and do your part to reduce rapid climate change at the same time.

Imagine for a minute Alliance as a new crossroad, with increased recreation and commuting options for businesses and residents, and a better quality of life. Imagine it bustling with a healthy energy, and well connected to the larger region with a network of trains, buses and bike trails. We're on the right track – let's see it through.

Check it out:

SARTA schedules and routes: www.sartaonline.com/routes.html

Bikeways in Ohio: www.dot.state.oh.us/bike/

www.dot.state.oh.us/bike/MAPList.htm

Ohio Bicycle Federation: www.ohiobike.org/obf-cfc.html

International Bicycle Fund – info on everything: <http://www.ibike.org/>

Bike racks and lockers: www.cycle-safe.com/RenderTable.aspx,

<http://thinkbicycling.com/>,

Bike shelter ideas: www.cycle-works.com/

Pittsburgh Bike plan: www.city.pittsburgh.pa.us/cp/html/bicycling_plan.html

Plan for the greater Cleveland area: www.noaca.org/bikeped05.pdf

Stark County Greenway and Trail plan: www.starkparks.com/