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BIKE OMAHA NETWORK

See a map of bike-friendly routes, lanes and trails on Omaha.com.

38-mile network unifies city's bike paths

600 signs mark routes for bicyclists in downtown and midtown Omaha; some say the effort is not enough

BY CHRIS PETERS
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It should be easier than ever for Omaha cyclists to pedal around town thanks to a cohesive network of bike lanes, trails and shared roadways.

On Friday, Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert announced the completion of the city's Bike Omaha Network. In essence, the network is an interconnected system of bike-friendly pathways brought together by the use of signposts that stitch together trails, bike lanes and roads around midtown and downtown Omaha.

Critics of the Bike Omaha Network say it is little more than a

collection of signs and a map that points riders down the city's trails, roadways and piecemeal bike lanes, which many riders consider too risky to use.

The network covers 38 miles of pavement and uses 600 signs at 400 locations around town. The \$75,000 worth of signs were paid for by private donations from entities including the Peter Kiewit Foundation and the Sherwood Foundation. Live Well Omaha coordinated the sign-making, and the City of Omaha's Public Works Department installed the signs in December and January.

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Bikes: Project to add new signs and routes, could expand into west Omaha

FUTURE ADDITIONS

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Friday's announcement comes on the eve of Bike to Work Week, scheduled for May 13-19.

"We're at a place where we can celebrate a milestone," said Sarah Sjolie, CEO of Live Well Omaha. "All of the signs throughout a 38-mile bike network are all posted."

Green-and-white signs indicate the distance to nearby destinations.

Some indicate when a bike lane begins or when a lane is designated as a shared lane for bicycles and cars.

According to the Bike Omaha Network organizers, the signs help reduce confusion for bicyclists, show how easy it is to travel by bicycle, alert motorists to watch for people bicycling on the street, guide trail users to key destinations off the trail and help people report emergencies and direct

first responders to their location.

Sarah Johnson, owner of Omaha Bicycle Co. in Benson, said the plan left a lot to be desired.

"It's frustrating because (the City of Omaha) doesn't ever take a big enough step," she said. "I want a protected bike lane and not just two blocks. One extra stripe of paint next to another stripe of paint is not enough to make people feel safe."

The Bike Omaha Network is billed as an ongoing project that will add new signs, bike lanes and minor trails in the future.

Johnson said a second phase needs to emphasize safety and enforcement.

A 2015 analysis of Omaha's bike networks by the League of American Bicyclists gave Omaha a "bronze" rating, giving the city 4 out of 10 or lower in each major category, including engineer-

ing, education, encouragement, enforcement and evaluation and planning.

Sjolie said she hopes to see the Bike Omaha Network expand in the future, possibly by increasing the network of bike-friendly trails within neighborhoods in midtown and downtown or by expanding the network's reach into west Omaha.

The network is imperfect, she said, but it's progress.

"Is it done? No. Does it solve biking in the community? No. But it's a huge milestone ahead," she said.

Cyclists can find a map of the network at area bike shops or online at livewellomaha.org/bike-omaha-network.

The Bike Omaha Network is planning to add new bike lanes, trails and signs in the coming years. Here's what's up next.

Bike lanes (2019-21)

» South 24th Street from

Leavenworth Street to South High School

» North 24th Street from Cass to Seward Streets

» North 30th Street from Nicholas to Sprague Streets

Bike trails (2019-21)

» Pacific Street from South 36th Street to Field Club Trail

» Locust Street along the west and north banks of Carter Lake to Abbott Drive

» Abbott Drive from Gallup Riverfront Campus to Locust Street

» A railroad crossing to connect Riverfront Trail and Mike Fahey Street north of the CHI Health Center

Signs

(late 2020 or early 2021)

» Metropolitan Community College's South Omaha campus

» Metropolitan Community College's Fort Omaha campus



RYAN SODERLIN/THE WORLD-HERALD

Marty Shukert rides his bike near 38th and Farnam Streets in 2015. A critic of the Bike Omaha Network, Benson bicycle shop owner Sarah Johnson, said the project needs to emphasize safety and enforcement in its second phase.