U.S. Bicycle Route System Expands to 5,616 Miles

Adventure Cycling Association

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AASHTO approves new routes in Minnesota, Missouri, and realignments in Kentucky

Missoula, Montana — Adventure Cycling Association and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) today announced that AASHTO's Special Committee on U.S. Route Numbering has approved a new section of U.S. Bicycle Route 45 in Minnesota, U.S. Bicycle Route 76 in Missouri, and realignments for U.S. Bicycle Route 76 in Kentucky. With these new approvals, the U.S. Bicycle Route System (USBRS) now encompasses 5,616 miles of official U.S. Bike Routes in 10 states: Alaska, Kentucky, Illinois, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, North Carolina, and Virginia.

"The partnership between state departments of transportation, Adventure Cycling, local transportation agencies, cycling groups, and the FHWA, has produced significant results over the past several years," said Bud Wright, executive director of AASHTO. "The routes announced today are part of an emerging bike route network that is connecting communities of all types, all across the country." Presently, more than 40 states are working to create U.S. Bicycle Routes.

Minnesota: U.S. Bicycle Route 45
With the completion of the middle section through Minneapolis and St. Paul, U.S. Bicycle Route (USBR) 45 now runs the entire length of the Mississippi River in Minnesota from the headwaters at Itasca State Park in northwestern Minnesota to the Iowa border. Also known as the Mississippi River Trail (MRT), USBR 45 spans 700 miles, with route options on both sides of the river in certain sections.

The northern segment of USBR 45, designated in October 2012, begins in Itasca State Park, where the river originates as a small stream. The route then travels through the north woods and past numerous lakes, to Bemidji, Cass Lake, Grand Rapids, Brainerd, Little Falls, and St. Cloud. At Cass Lake, bicyclists have an off-road option to travel roughly 100 miles on the Heartland State Trail and Paul Bunyan State Trail. These routes merge in Brainerd, where the river widens and the land opens into farmland. The newly approved middle segment passes through the Twin Cities Metropolitan area and the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area — a 72-mile-long park managed by the National Park Service. Much of the route is on bike paths with scenic views. This segment of the route offers opportunities to connect with great restaurants, museums, parks, and festivals along the river. The southern segment, which was designated in May 2012, extends from just south of the Twin Cities Metro area in Hastings to the Iowa border. Also known as the Mississippi Bluffs segment of the MRT, this section includes bicycle-friendly roads and multi-use paths that closely follow the Mississippi River through steep limestone bluffs and hardwood forests.

"Designating the entire length of USBR 45 shows a strong support for bicycling in Minnesota," said Tim Mitchell, Minnesota Department of Transportation bicycle and pedestrian coordinator. "The route is a unique collaboration among many local communities and state authorities. It creates

regional connections and shared interests." This summer the Minnesota Department of Transportation will begin installing MRT bike route signs in order for bicyclists to navigate the route. Detailed maps and information are available to print, or access via smart phone or GPS unit, at www.mndot.gov/bike/mrt.

Missouri: U.S. Bicycle Route 76

Missouri's newly approved U.S. Bicycle Route 76, also known as the TransAmerica Bicycle Trail, begins at the Mississippi River in Chester, Illinois, traversing 348.5 miles before exiting the state 28 miles west of Golden City. The route passes through the hilly Ozark Mountains then levels out toward the western end of the state. Considered by geologists to be one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world, the Ozark Range consists of deeply eroded hills, which are blanketed by hardwoods and pines, small farms, and numerous rivers. Farmington, a mid-sized town along the route, is a bicycle-friendly community featuring a local bike shop, TransAm Cyclery, and the TransAm Inn, a hostel known affectionately as Al's Place. Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park on the East Fork of the Black River offers a spectacular demonstration of Mother Nature's hydraulics in a series of rock chutes and channels — a must stop for swimming. The route also passes through the Ozark National Scenic Riverways, a national park created to protect the Current and Jacks Fork rivers, and the scenic Alley Mill, or "Old Red Mill" history museum located in Alley Spring. In western Missouri, the route intersects the 35-mile Frisco Highline Trail in the small town of Walnut Grove. Before leaving the state, cyclists should be sure to stop at Cooky's Cafe in Golden City to sample one of their homemade pies.

The Missouri Department of Transportation will begin installing USBR 76 signs along the route later this summer.

Kentucky: U.S. Bicycle Route 76 Realignments

In Kentucky, U.S. Bike Route 76 spans 563.7 miles, entering the state near Elkhorn City and leaving at the Ohio River crossing via the Cave In Rock ferry. The route, which was originally designated in 1982, had not been documented electronically at AASHTO and was in need of some updates. The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet did a thorough review of the route across the state and submitted realignments for the route based on their rural road bicycle level of service model. Adventure Cycling Association plans to adopt these same realignments for its TransAmerica Bicycle Trail.

Kentucky's U.S. Bike Route 76 passes through a variety of terrain from the steep Appalachian Mountains in the east, and the hilly, wooded Cumberland Plateau to the rolling, fertile farmland of the Bluegrass Region. Berea, known as the gateway to the Appalachian Mountains and coal mining, is a notable highlight, home to Berea College as well as several museums. On the route, cyclists will pass the Lincoln Homestead State Park, and they can access the Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site by taking a short side trip off the route. Mammoth Cave National Park, the longest explored cave system in the world, is 40 miles south of the route but well worth the ride. The Rough River Dam State Park offers boat rides on the reservoir and bird watching opportunities. Once cyclists reach the Bluegrass Region, they will be treated to white-fenced horse farms and quaint towns known for their antique shops, country dining, and southern country hospitality.

The U.S. Bicycle Route System is a developing national network of bicycle routes, which will serve as visible and well-planned trunk lines for connecting city, regional, and statewide cycling routes, offering transportation and tourism opportunities across the country. Adventure Cycling Association has provided dedicated staff support to the project since 2005, including research support, meeting coordination, and technical guidance for states implementing routes. Work on the U.S. Bicycle Route System is highly collaborative and involves officials and staff from state DOTs, the Federal Highway Administration, natural resource agencies, and nonprofit organizations including the East Coast Greenway Alliance and Mississippi River Trail, Inc.

AASHTO's support for the project is crucial to earning the support of federal and state agencies and provides a major boost to bicycling and route development for non-motorized transportation. Securing approval for numbered designation from AASHTO is a required step for all U.S. Bicycle Routes. AASHTO is a nonprofit, nonpartisan association representing highway and transportation departments in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. A powerful voice in the transportation sector, AASHTO's primary goal is to foster the development of an integrated national transportation system.

Support for the U.S. Bicycle Route System comes from Adventure Cycling members, donors, and a group of business sponsors that participate in its annual *Build It. Bike It. Be a Part of It.* fundraiser each May. The U.S. Bicycle Route System is also supported in part by grants from the Lazar Foundation, New Belgium Brewing, Climate Ride, and the Tawani Foundation.

When complete, the U.S. Bicycle Route System will be the largest official bike route network on the planet, encompassing more than 50,000 miles of routes. Learn more at www.adventurecycling.org/usbrs.

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Adventure Cycling Association inspires and empowers people to travel by bicycle. It is the premier bicycle-travel organization in North America with more than 46,500 members. Adventure Cycling produces cycling routes and maps for North America, organizes more than 70 tours annually, and publishes the best bicycle-travel information anywhere, including Adventure Cyclist *magazine. With 41,420 meticulously mapped miles in the Adventure Cycling Route Network, Adventure Cycling gives cyclists the tools and confidence to create their own bike-travel adventures. Contact the office at (800) 755-BIKE (2453), info@adventurecycling.org, or visit www.adventurecycling.org.*