USBRS 101

The U.S. Bicycle Route System (USBRS) is a developing national network of bicycle routes which will link urban, suburban, and rural areas using a variety of appropriate cycling facilities. [mura]$.dspObject('component', 'A14D0530-A11A-4F45-3D396F8B8E26261B')[/mura]

State departments of transportation (DOTs) nominate U.S. Bike Routes for numbered designation through the the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials' (AASHTO) Special Committee on U.S. Route Numbering, which is the same committee that assigns numbers to U.S. highways and interstates.

For a route to receive official designation as a U.S. Bicycle Route, it must connect two or more states, a state and an international border, or other U.S. Bicycle Routes.

The National Corridor Plan shows officially designated U.S. Bike Routes as dark, solid lines. The lighter lines indicate corridors where routes may be developed. Corridors can be added or changed based on opportunities or local support.

The USBRS project is a collaborative effort, spearheaded by a task force under the auspices of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). Members of the task force include officials and staff from state DOTs, the Federal Highway Administration, and nonprofits, including Adventure Cycling Association, the East Coast Greenway Alliance, and Mississippi River Trail, Inc.

History

In 1982, two U.S. Bicycle Routes were established: U.S. Bike Route 1 in Virginia and North Carolina, following, in part, Adventure Cycling's Atlantic Coast route, and U.S. Bike Route 76 in Virginia, Kentucky, and Illinois, which follows the TransAmerica Trail. After these two routes were designated, no additional routes were nominated and the project lay dormant for over 20 years.

In 2003, in an effort to reinvigorate the U.S. Bicycle Route System, AASHTO formed a Task Force on U.S. Bicycle Routes comprised of transportation agency staff, Federal Highway Administration, and bicycling organizations, including Adventure Cycling Association, which began providing staff support to the project in 2005.

First, to get a picture of what already existed, the task force developed an Inventory Report (PDF) and Inventory Map, which documented existing routes nationwide. Using the Inventory Map, they created the National Corridor Plan, which defined numbered 'corridors' for cross-country cycling routes linking destinations, cities, and transportation hubs. Corridors are 50-mile wide areas where a route might exist or be developed. The National Corridor Plan suggests the best placement for U.S. Bicycle Routes based on the task force's extensive research; it is intended as a guide for states wishing to implement U.S. Bikes Routes.

In October, 2008, AASHTO's Board of Directors passed a resolution in support of the National Corridor Plan and the Task Force went to work on creating a new application, completed in May, 2009. At this point, states could begin implementing corridors into on-the-ground routes.

For a more in-depth history of the vision for an official U.S. Bicycle Route System, read the long version USBRS history.

Status Today

With more than 40 states working in some way to implement U.S. Bicycle Routes, Adventure Cycling Association continues to provide staff support to the project. Adventure Cycling offers technical assistance, coordination, and outreach to help states move their process forward. We work to build awareness and interest of the U.S. Bicycle Route System in the transportation sector, as well as in cycling and trail communities.

In some cases, the state transportation agencies are stepping forward and committing staff time to the project, and in some states, volunteers are leading the project on behalf of the DOT. Ultimately, the state DOT is responsible for the application, therefore, it must be a willing partner.

Applications for U.S. Bicycle Routes are accepted twice a year, 5-6 weeks prior to AASHTO's spring and fall meetings. Learn more about implementing a U.S. Bicycle Route, or submitting an application.

U.S. Bicycle Routes have already been designated by states, learn about these routes by visiting our Use a U.S. Bicycle Route page.

What's Ahead

Want to help? Review the interactive National Corridor Plan to see what's happening in your state and to find your state contact. If you have expertise in route research, or have worked with public agencies or government, and would like to volunteer, we'd love to put you to work. Contact usbrsinfo@adventurecycling.org.

Graphic by Casey Greene/Adventure Cycling Association