New U.S. Bicycle Routes Approved

Adventure Cycling Association

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 21, 2012
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Route approvals in Michigan and Minnesota expand foundation of emerging U.S. Bicycle Route System; realignments in North Carolina improve routes

Missoula, Montana — Adventure Cycling Association and the American Association of Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) today announced that AASHTO's Special Committee on U.S. Route Numbering has approved U.S. Bicycle Route (USBR) 35 in Michigan, USBR 45 in Minnesota, and realignments for USBR 1 in North Carolina. Last year, AASHTO approved six U.S. Bicycle Routes in its annual May meeting. AASHTO and Adventure Cycling welcome this spring's two new route approvals as another important step toward creating an official U.S. Bicycle Route System (USBRS).

"We are pleased that the collaboration with Adventure Cycling has resulted in the approval of these bicycle routes and we look forward to continuing the implementation of the National Corridor Plan that was endorsed by AASHTO's membership in partnership with the bicycling community," said John Horsley, AASHTO's executive director. "It was also very exciting to hold our spring meeting right on one of the newly designated routes." This year, AASHTO's annual spring meeting took place in Traverse City, Michigan, near U.S. Bike Route 35.

Development of Michigan's USBR 35 and Minnesota's USBR 45 began soon after AASHTO's Board of Directors approved the U.S. Bicycle Route System's National Corridor Plan in October 2008. The National Corridor Plan is the template for planning interstate bicycle routes across the country.

Michigan's U.S. Bicycle Route 35

"We're very pleased with the way U.S. Bicycle Routes are being developed in the state of Michigan," said Kirk T. Steudle, director of Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and president of AASHTO. "U.S. Bicycle Route 35 is a collaborative effort of city administrators, the cycling community, and our own bicycle and pedestrian program staff. Cycling's increasing popularity provides an important boost to tourism along the Lake Michigan shoreline and the rest of the state." On Saturday, May 19, in collaboration with local organizers from the TART Trail, Inc. and the City of Traverse City, MDOT hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony and bicycle rides along the newly designated route, which goes through Traverse City.

Coordinated by South Haven Project Manager Paul VandenBosch, the U.S. Bicycle Route 35 Corridor Committee drafted a route, vetted it with the cycling community, and then conducted a series of public meetings to gain buy-in from community stakeholders. Adventure Cycling volunteers, Kerry Irons and Leslie Wills, helped the committee gain the jurisdictional agreements that were required to complete the AASHTO application.

Michigan's U.S. Bicycle Route 35 runs nearly 500 miles from New Buffalo, Michigan, (on the border with Indiana) to Sault Ste Marie, Canada. Comprised of state highways, county and local roads, and regionally significant multi-use trails, USBR 35 passes through dozens of small lakefront towns, past sandy beaches, scenic and historic destinations, as well as services and cultural attractions such as Traverse City, the nation's "Cherry Capital." Other notable attractions along the route include the Mackinaw Bridge, Mackinac Island, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, Holland (the "tulip city"), and South Haven (the "blueberry capital"), which will allow bicyclists to experience endless summer festivals where communities large and small celebrate farm-fresh produce, as well as local heritage and culture. Once complete, USBR 35 will continue south through Indiana and down to Mississippi.

Minnesota's U.S. Bicycle Route 45

U.S. Bicycle Route 45 in southeastern Minnesota extends 148 miles from just south of the Twin Cities Metro area in Hastings to the Iowa border. Also known as the Mississippi Bluffs segment of the Mississippi River Trail (MRT), this route includes bicycle-friendly roads and multi-use paths that closely follow the Mississippi River through steep limestone bluffs and hardwood forests, with long river vistas and wildlife viewing. The route passes through three state parks, the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge and more than a dozen river towns boasting historic main streets, riverboats, museums and bicycle-friendly hospitality. Highlights include Lake City, the birthplace of waterskiing, and Wabasha, home of the National Eagle Center. This segment is Minnesota's first designated U.S. Bicycle Route.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) has plans to designate the entire 800-mile MRT through Minnesota as part of USBR 45. This includes six distinct Mississippi River regions from the headwaters at Itasca State Park in northern Minnesota through the Twin Cities Metro area. Once complete, USBR 45 will continue south along the Mississippi River to New Orleans, Louisiana.

"It's gratifying to see Minnesota designate this amazing long-distance route along the Mississippi River," said Ginny Sullivan, special projects director and USBRS project coordinator at Adventure Cycling Association. "Mississippi River Trail advocates serve on the AASHTO Task Force on U.S. Bicycle Routes and helped develop the strategy for implementing the national network. Having Minnesota's first portion of the MRT designated as a U.S. Bicycle Route will help ensure that the entire, 3,000-mile MRT continues to develop in other states and sets up more opportunities for collaboration between agencies." Adventure Cycling provides technical assistance to states working on route implementation.

North Carolina's U.S. Bicycle Route 1 Realignments

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), through the Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation, submitted an application to AASHTO for two sections of proposed realignment on the existing U.S. Bicycle Route 1, which was originally designated in 1982. USBR 1 runs north and south through North Carolina from the Virginia to South Carolina. The first realignment re-directs the route away from Raleigh-Durham Airport and now passes through Umstead State Park in Raleigh, NC. The second realignment avoids conflicts with I-74/US-74 in Scotland County and now passes through Laurinburg. AASHTO approved the realignments.

According to Paul Morris, deputy secretary of transit at NCDOT, "The route makes use of mostly lightly traveled secondary roads with some busier sections found in urbanized areas. Every effort has been made to avoid high traffic areas therefore we needed to make these realignments. USBR 1 is a vital part of our NC Bicycling Highways Route system and we look forward to a more comfortable bicycling environment for local cyclists, as well as those visiting our state."

A National System for Transportation and Tourism

The U.S. Bicycle Route System is an emerging national network of bicycle routes that span multiple states and are of national and regional significance. These routes will serve as visible and well-planned trunk lines for connecting city, regional, and statewide cycling routes, and provide transportation and tourism opportunities across the country.

Tourism dollars were an oft-cited goal for communities joining the effort to establish these new routes. According to an April 2012 article in *Bridge Magazine*, bicycle travel is already an important part of Michigan tourism and is on the rise. Reports from Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Carolina, and Indiana also suggest that bicycle tourism is growing nationwide.

A highly collaborative effort, the U.S. Bicycle Route System project involves officials and staff from state DOTs, the Federal Highway Administration, and nonprofit organizations such as Adventure Cycling Association, 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 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, its primary goal is to foster the development of an integrated national transportation system.

Adventure Cycling Association has provided dedicated staff support to the U.S. Bicycle Route System since 2005, including mapping and research support, and technical guidance to states implementing routes. Support for the U.S. Bicycle Route System comes from Adventure Cycling members, donors, and a group of business sponsors, participating in its annual *Build It. Bike It. Be a Part of It.* fundraiser. In 2012, the project is also supported by generous grants from the SRAM Cycling Fund, the Surdna Foundation, the Lazar Foundation, New Belgium Brewing, and the Michigan United Tandem Society.

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 *is the premier bicycle-travel organization in North America with over 44,500 members. A nonprofit organization, its mission is to inspire people of all ages to travel by bicycle. It produces routes and maps for cycling in North America, organizes more than 50 tours annually, and publishes the best bicycle-travel information anywhere, including* Adventure Cyclist *magazine and the* online Cyclists' Yellow Pages*. With 41,399 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.*