



# BIKING IS FOR EVERYONE

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM NICE RIDE NEIGHBORHOOD

**B**ICYCLING CONTINUES TO GROW in popularity and acceptance nationally as a sustainable mode of transportation that promotes health and wellbeing. Communities of color and communities with low wealth often face structural challenges to increased bicycling such as lack of access to bicycles and bicycling skills and education, as well as disconnection from bicycling infrastructure. Some advocates around the country are working to bridge these gaps to promote bicycling, sustainable transportation and livable communities for everyone. However, many questions remain. Who bikes? Why do people bike or not bike? Who really benefits from biking and bike infrastructure?

Minnesota's Twin Cities has a robust bicycling community and has consistently been ranked as one of the top 10 bike-friendly cities in the country with its extensive network of bike lanes and trails. Nice Ride Minnesota launched an urban bike share program in Minneapolis in 2010, with 65 stations and 700 green bikes. In its first phase of operation, Nice Ride deployed stations primarily in and around downtown Minneapolis—areas that are dense with multi-unit housing, businesses, and attractions. By the end of

2015, Nice Ride had 190 stations with a fleet of 1700 green bikes. The system does not extend into every neighborhood, and early on it became clear that the stations in some neighborhoods saw more use than stations in other neighborhoods.

Across the country, bike share programs have struggled to be effective in underserved communities – to build on assets, become relevant, and meet needs. Within this context, Nice Ride and its partners launched Nice Ride Neighborhood as a three-year pilot program in 2014. **The program is based around respected community organizations, community liaisons and strong, community-rooted bicycle advocacy groups.** The goals of the pilot were to see if a community-based approach was a better way to do bike share to promote and support bicycling for transportation in underserved communities. Nice Ride also hopes to find better ways to implement bike share in lower-density residential neighborhoods. This report describes what we have learned about biking from participants in this program and the importance of community-based bike share as a way to make biking available and accessible to everyone.

“ For everybody that wants to ride. It’s for the residents to come together and bike ride.”



## NICE RIDE NEIGHBORHOOD:

# WHAT DID WE DO?

To implement Nice Ride Neighborhood, Nice Ride Minnesota built partnerships with a local institution or non-profit in each neighborhood.

Participants enroll in the program through a designated community liaison at each organization. In addition to recruiting participants, liaisons provide timely and critical input to guide program development and tailor implementation to meet community needs. These organizations are highlighted below.

Program participants receive a high-quality, highly visible orange bike and accessories to use during the Minnesota biking season (May-October) and receive free mechanical support for their bikes at partner bike shops throughout the duration of the program as well as ongoing skill-building and education provided on group rides. Group rides are a central component of Nice Ride Neighborhood. Participation in at least four large group rides is part of the requirement for earning a \$200 voucher to a local bike shop. More importantly, the rides present opportunities for participants to develop biking skills and connections with other bikers in the program and to test themselves and push their limits. Ride partners led the rides and Nice Ride provided logistical support and a catered meal. The rides typically used roads with bike lanes, or bike paths through parkland. Ride partners involved in group rides included: the Major Taylor Bicycling Club of Minnesota, St. Paul Women on Bikes, and the Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota.

### Nice Ride Neighborhoods

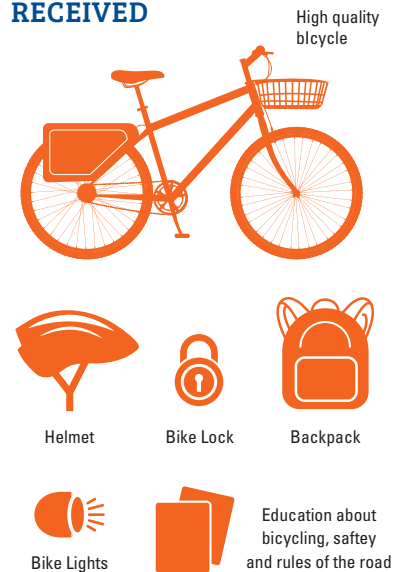
In 2015, Nice Ride Neighborhood liaisons distributed a total of 273 bikes to participants from a diverse array of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds in four neighborhoods:

**North Minneapolis** North of downtown and west of the Mississippi River, north Minneapolis has a rich history of social activism, strong community and social ties, and is the historic home of Minneapolis' Jewish and African-American communities. *2015 NRN participants: 199*

**Frogtown and the East Side of St. Paul** Frogtown and the east side of St. Paul, located northwest of downtown and on the eastern side of the city respectively, boast ethnically diverse communities. Nearly 40% of the residents in these neighborhoods speak a primary language other than English. *2015 NRN participants: 46*

**Little Earth of United Tribes** Located in south Minneapolis, Little Earth offers housing, a community farm, an early childhood learning center, community meeting spaces, and culturally relevant services and programs for the urban Native American population in the city. *2015 NRN participants: 15*

## PARTICIPANTS RECEIVED



## PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS

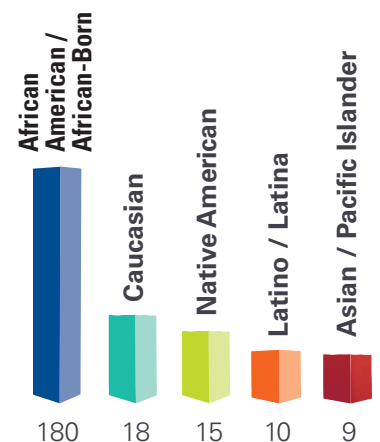
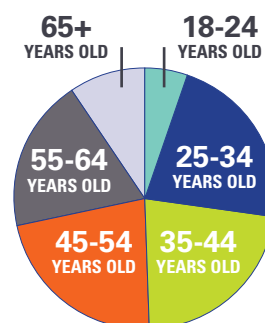
- Attend an initial orientation.
- Ride the orange bike at least two times per week (self-reported).
- Attend a minimum of four organized group ride events.
- Attend a final closing event to return the orange bicycle.

Upon successful completion, participants received a \$200 voucher to a neighborhood bike shop.

## 2015 PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS\*



\*Some participants did not provide demographic data



# THE LOCAL SCENE

## Community Liaison Organizations

*Connecting riders with orange bikes*

**Northpoint Health and Wellness Center** is a community-based organization that provides culturally relevant and holistic medical, dental, and mental health services, as well as a variety of human services.

**St. Paul Public Housing Agency (PHA)** provides safe, stable housing and connections to community services to help individuals and families with low incomes achieve greater stability and self reliance.

**Model Cities of St. Paul, Inc.** is a 501 (c) (3) private nonprofit organization that provides culturally relevant community-based services and develops multi-family and single-family housing that supports revitalization efforts in and around the Frogtown and Summit University neighborhoods of St. Paul.

**Little Earth of United Tribes (Little Earth) in partnership with the Indian Health Board** implemented NRN at the Little Earth development, which offers housing and culturally relevant programming and services for 1,200 residents in south Minneapolis.



## Group Ride Partners *Supporting bicycling skill development*

**St. Paul Women on Bikes (WOB)**, a program of St. Paul Smart Trips, is a bike advocacy group that hosts rides and community-building events intended to get women involved in biking and bike advocacy.

**Bike Alliance of Minnesota (BikeMN)** is a state-wide nonprofit bike advocacy group that promotes bike-friendly projects and programs, consults with businesses and cities, and provides education to drivers and cyclists.

**Major Taylor Bicycling Club of Minnesota** is a recreational bicycling club founded in 1999 with the commitment to promote increased participation of the African American community in the cycling for sport, transportation and health improvement. It is named for Marshall Walter Taylor, world cycling champion in 1899, and the first African-American world champion in any sport.

## Community Bike Shop Partners *Providing mechanical support and voucher redemption*

**Cycles for Change (C4C)**'s neighborhood shops offer a variety of programming for underrepresented community members including youth, people of color, low-income people, and new Americans.

**The Hub Bike Co-op** is a worker-owned cooperative bike shop that offers new and used bikes, repair services, and classes aimed at helping riders maintain their bikes.

**Venture North Bike, Walk & Coffee** is a full service bike shop that offers educational bike programming for all ages and skills levels.

## LITTLE EARTH OF UNITED TRIBES *in South Minneapolis*

15

PARTICIPANTS



Reinforcing family and cultural ties  
and “expanding participants’ bubbles”

## NICE RIDE NEIGHBORHOOD:

# WHAT HAPPENED AS A RESULT?

Participants shared their experiences and thoughts about the program through interviews and surveys. The evaluation team also participated in the program and learned from participants as they engaged in Nice Ride Neighborhood. We learned from participants about how Nice Ride Neighborhood worked for them.

### Increased Knowledge, More Biking

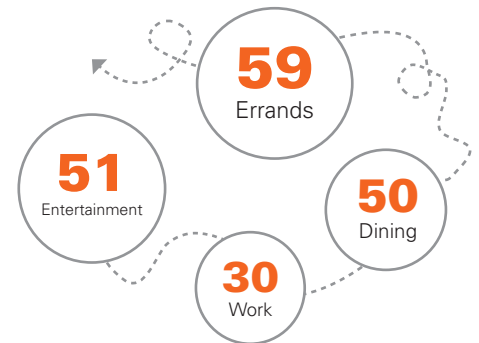
Many participants shared that the orange bike was the first bike they'd ridden since childhood. Prior to Nice Ride Neighborhood many were concerned about biking because they did not know the rules of the road, had concerns about safety when riding in traffic, and believed that they would not be able to bike long enough distances to make it worthwhile. After participating in group rides with other novice bicyclists and learning about bicycling in a supportive environment, participants learned about safe biking routes and ways to bike safely in traffic. **They developed confidence in their own biking abilities and started biking more frequently and longer distances.** Participants from 2014 said they continued to bike in 2015 as a result of the skill, education, and motivation from Nice Ride Neighborhood. They also learned about bike infrastructure and noticed many other cyclists on the road who looked like them, particularly others with orange bikes. Many participants reported commuting to work by bike, attending community events outside those organized by NRN, and exploring recreational bike trails with friends and family.

### Stronger and Healthier

Nice Ride Neighborhood participants said that improvement of physical health was a motivation for participating in the program. Many said that they believe their health did improve as a result of joining Nice Ride Neighborhood. **Most participants said that during Nice Ride Neighborhood, they experienced increased stamina, increased muscle strength, lower blood pressure, and weight loss.** Some interviewees described mental health benefits to participation, noting that they felt "calm" and "free" while riding, and that riding a bike was "relaxing." Several participants suggested that participation in Nice Ride Neighborhood led to increased physical activity in other parts of their lives; participants reported exercising and walking daily once they realized that the physical exertion of bicycling contributed to a greater sense of physical well-being.

“ I started riding my bike to work. ...I realized that there are so many different ways to get to places on a bike. That was really cool!”

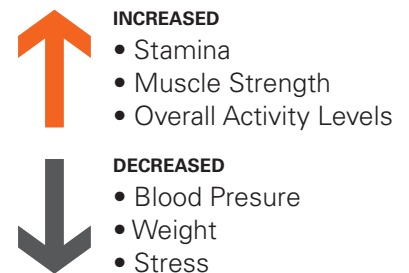
### WHERE DO PARTICIPANTS BIKE?



Based on 97 people who completed a survey after the program

“ My blood pressure has gone down and I had lost 11 pounds.”

### SELF-REPORTED HEALTH BENEFITS



**NORTH MINNEAPOLIS** North of downtown Minneapolis and west of the Mississippi River

Strengthening community bonds and expanding social networks with a huge fleet of orange bikes

**199**  
PARTICIPANTS

## Community is Key! Support and Motivation

Participants described three specific ways that a notion of “community” supported their participation in Nice Ride Neighborhood:

1. Meet new people in their community
2. Build a cycling community with other participants that feels safe, supported and encouraged by cycling with others
3. Experience and interact with their communities in ways that are markedly different from their experiences as motorists

Many participants reported developing new friendships as a result of participation, and getting to know long-time neighbors. Participants described overcoming fears and preconceptions about their own abilities to bike by riding with other bicyclists “who are in the same boat as me.” Many participants also pushed themselves to ride further and for longer periods of time as a result of the support encouragement and support from other NRN participants and group ride leaders.

## Getting to Know the Community by Bike

The presence of the NRN program impacted the community in a number of ways. These impacts were most noted by interviewees from the north Minneapolis program, as the large size of the program resulted in higher visibility. **Many interviewees felt that the sheer volume and visibility of the orange bikes and orange bike riders raised awareness, not only of bicycling, but also of physical activity and health in their communities.** Participants increased their social capital, forming new connections and friendships with other participants and with ride leaders and community liaisons. Several participants reported that they noticed new features and assets in their communities, having previously only traveled through neighborhoods in cars. Others reported learning more about their neighborhoods on group rides where ride leaders shared bits of local cultural and social history. Group rides also exposed participants to bike infrastructure, such that many interviewees remarked on its presence (or absence) in their immediate neighborhoods. Many participants seemed to finish the program with more positive views of their communities and their neighbors and a greater sense of community connectedness.

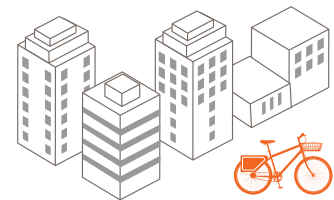
“Riding with others, talking with people, meeting people was the best part. I didn’t know any of the participants before I started.”

## CREATING CONNECTIONS



“I liked the events, I always learned something new. I learned about neighborhood equality—like how neighborhoods can grow and prosper.”

## DISCOVERING COMMUNITY



**Participants reported more social capital and new insights into their community**

**FROGTOWN** Northwest of downtown St. Paul **EAST ST. PAUL** on the east side of the city

**46**  
PARTICIPANTS



Working across cultural and linguistic barriers

# NOW WHAT?



## Who Rides Bikes?

*The New Majority: Pedaling Toward Equity*, a 2013 study from the League of American Bicyclists suggests that bicycle riding is growing in every demographic with the greatest increase in bicycling among African American, Asian, and Hispanic populations.<sup>1</sup> People bike for many reasons including, exercise, family time, and transportation (errands, work, appointments, shopping, etc.). However, the stereotypical notion of a “biker” as certain type of person still persists: a white man wearing Spandex who rides fast and doesn’t always obey traffic rules. Conversely, some communities view bicycle riding as a form of transportation for those with no other means.<sup>2</sup> Because of these perceptions, many Nice Ride Neighborhood participants who bike regularly do not necessarily consider themselves “bikers.”

## Why Does This Matter?

Negative perceptions of bicyclists extend to perceptions of bicycle facilities. Some communities see bike lanes as “white lanes” and as an early warning of gentrification that will price some people out of their homes.<sup>3</sup> Negative perceptions of bicyclists and bicycling infrastructure can prevent people from thinking that bicycling is something they could do, especially if these perceptions are coupled with a lack of bicycling skills. Organizations in many cities are working to overcome logistical barriers to bicycling. This work could happen in tandem with efforts to address negative perceptions and beliefs about bicyclists.

## Community and Biking

If biking is, or can be, for everyone, then all people should benefit and have the opportunity to determine for themselves and their communities how biking fits in their lives. When seeking to promote biking, we need to ask some important questions. What do people in different communities want and need? How, if at all, can bicycling help people in communities exercise, spend time with friends and family, travel to work, and run errands? What are ways that bicycling can fit into people’s lives?

Participation in Nice Ride Neighborhood has generated energy and excitement around bicycling while also elevating awareness of community assets and challenges related to bicycling infrastructure, transportation, health and wellbeing, and other community-level issues. Bicycling has the potential to be a tool for rallying residents around neighborhood concerns, presenting opportunities for community members to take the lead in advocating for their own communities. Outreach and positive, supportive, learning opportunities and experiences with bicycles can demonstrate that bicycling is something anyone can do, if they want to do it. It can also build social capital and community. Nice Ride Neighborhood demonstrates that effective bicycling promotion listens to communities and supports community members as they determine for themselves how bicycling can fit into their lives.

<sup>1</sup> American League of Bicyclists & Sierra Club. (2013).

<sup>2</sup> Hannig, J. (2015). Perceptions of Bike Sharing in Underserved Communities Within Milwaukee and the Twin Cities.

<sup>3</sup> Hoffmann, M. L. (2013). Our bikes in the middle of the street: community-building, racism and gentrification in urban bicycle advocacy (Doctoral dissertation, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA).

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**For more information about Nice Ride Neighborhood, contact [customersevice@niceridemn.org](mailto:customersevice@niceridemn.org)**

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