

# National Bike Summit – March 2011

Submitted by Bob Hoel

The 2011 National Bike Summit was again held in Washington, DC, on March 8 – 10. A total of 15 people attended as part of the Illinois Delegation, including representatives from communities, bike industry and shops and advocacy organizations. A total of over 750 registered delegates were at the Summit, covering all 50 States and Canada. What follows are some of the highlights of the Summit.

## **Tuesday, March 8, 2011**

The keynote speaker at the opening dinner was Sec. of Transportation Ray LaHood, an Illinois native and past Illinois Congressman from Peoria. Here are some highlights from his talk.

- We need to tell Congress that their constituents want communities that are cycle friendly.
- Livable and sustainable communities are where all forms of transportation are available, including walking, biking and mass transit.
- We need to lobby members of Congress and they will get the message.

When Secretary LaHood moved to Washington two years ago, he and his wife brought their bikes. On Sundays they bike on the Chesapeake and Ohio Trail and see families having a good time. The Summit can make it happen.

He described the Summit as a “sea of political leadership” for alternative transportation and he gave credit to the Obama administration for this agenda of the next generation of transportation. He needs our help (those attending the Summit) more now than ever before in light of the new Congress.

He closed by promising us that we have a full partner in the Department of Transportation.

Andy Clarke, president of the League of American Bicyclists closed this first session by saying that this year there are no “big asks” (requests) of Congress as in past years as this is not the right time to ask for grand plans in a poor economy. He emphasized that what we do at the Summit and on Capital Hill does make a difference. We need to emphasize the impact in our communities of the investments afforded by Transportation Enhancement projects. We need the voice of local businesses telling our elected official how much these investments mean to maintaining their work force. It really is about the business.

## **Wednesday, March 9, 2011**

The morning session was kicked off by Congressman Earl Blumenauer with his usual mantra: “Tell me what is wrong with this picture – I am sitting in my car, stuck in traffic, driving to the health club where I will sit on a stationary bike.”

## National Bike Summit – March 2011



“We are here as agents of change. We have a message to bridge the divide between the 2 views” that are in today’s Congress (Democrat and Republican). “Our message is fundamentally different and people like it. We are not about crushing unions or slashing spending.....We cannot spend more on healthcare” and get mediocre care.

“Cycling threads that needle that speaks to most of the issues on the front page of our papers every day.” Health, transportation, safety.

In Washington, DC, recently 63 businesses converted 107 vehicular parking spaces to accommodate 1,140 bike parking spaces and 50 other businesses want to join this effort. “This indicates we are winning.” We have Bike Share in DC and it looks great and it is being used.

“Convert calories, not fossil fuel.” Visiting Congressmen on Capital Hill is critical. Tell them to keep the (biking) framework in place. “Leave it alone.”

“Don’t cut what you haven’t visited.” Stay the course.

Next up was Janette Sadik-Khan, the Commissioner of Transportation for the City of New York. Some of you may be following the huge progress that New York has made under Mayor Bloomberg in the area of bike and pedestrian accommodations. Nearly \$500 million has been committed to this effort each year for the next 10 years. The Commissioner is currently seeing the strongest pushback on these efforts from the usual NIMBY crowd. The record stands, however, that the number of collisions involving motorized vehicles and cyclists has been reduced dramatically. Here are a few notes from her talk.



“It would be great to have a new, fully-funded Transportation Bill but we can’t wait for Washington.” We can see the value and power of biking on Pennsylvania Avenue (DC), Broadway (New York), Market Street (San Francisco, Commonwealth Avenue (Boston) and Milwaukee Avenue (Chicago). None of this existed 5 years ago and it has been a tremendous breakthrough. There have been setbacks but that is to be expected in the business of change. It took the political courage and leadership of Mayor Bloomberg to make this happen in New York.

# National Bike Summit – March 2011

The most important change we have seen in New York is a “big decrease in traffic fatalities, the lowest we have seen in 10 years and in line with world class cities.” Protected lanes have shown a 40% - 50% improvement for all users of the street.....pedestrians, cyclists, seniors.

Speeding was a huge problem and surveys showed that most New Yorkers had no idea what the speed limit was. Our education campaigns have had a big impact on this. These were low cost projects with big paybacks.

Andy Clarke then asked a couple of questions of the speakers. Here were the responses.

## **Where do you get your inspiration from?**

Janette S-K: “I get my inspiration from seeing how cities have transformed themselves. Barcelona, for example, has helped fuel a competition to see who will be develop the next great green strategy for livable and walkable cities.”

Congressman Earl B: “Watching people engage (on this topic) over the last 25 years and what they have accomplished. This is the power of the people.”

## **What do you see happening going forward?**

Earl B: “This wave is cresting and the tide will not be stopped. Witness the economic impact leading to clean economic activity.”

The follow-on speaker was Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar. The Secretary has started an initiative entitled the Great Outdoors, a project to reconnect people with nature. Here are a couple of notes from his talk.

“What we do with conservation and biking helps pull us out of the economic slump with over 6.5 million jobs.”

Children spend too much time inside. Getting them outside affects their mental and physical health.

The luncheon speaker was Robin Schepper, Executive Director of the First Lady’s Let’s Move campaign, an effort to address the issue of childhood obesity. Here are some of her thoughts.

One of our efforts is trying to cross-pollinate over 80 Federal government programs. Their silo efforts, each working strictly on their own, has been holding back their effectiveness. Over 500 mayors have signed on.

# National Bike Summit – March 2011

Programs like the Great Outdoors (Dept of the Interior) and Safe Routes to School (Dept of Transportation) have helped us with “Let’s Move Outside.” It has helped us identify the barriers to kids getting outside, helping them with an active life by design.

From the perspective of cycling, the questions we are trying to answer are:

1. What do we need to do to inspire kids to bike to school, to get active?
2. What infrastructure is needed to support this?
3. How do we get access to the parks and paths with the right programming?

I won’t attempt to go into the many speakers and panels of the breakout sessions but the wide range of topics had something to help everyone.

## Thursday, March 10, 2011



This day was dedicated to meetings with our Senators and Congressmen, starting with the weekly constituents’ reception hosted by Senators Durbin and Kirk followed by a full schedule of meetings with 16 of Illinois’ 19 Congressmen. In most cases these meetings were actually with the transportation staffers as it was a busy week of voting for the Representatives.

Our main requests of the Representatives were:

1. We realize that the economy dictates budgets cuts but your district has been a big recipient of Transportation Enhancement (TE) and Safe Routes to School (SRTS) dollars. As budgets are cut, we ask that these be across the board and not target specific projects. Your constituents have shown that TE and SRTS projects are important to making their communities more livable and sustainable.
2. The Bike Caucus, a group of Representatives and Senators who support biking as recreation and transportation. If you are not already one of the nearly 200 people signed on, please consider joining this “bike”-partisan effort.
3. Finally, a new Complete Streets bill is about to be introduced. We would like you to be a co-sponsor.

## National Bike Summit – March 2011

Generally we were well received at our meetings and in a few cases it seems the staff was looking forward to getting their bike pins, a very treasured commodity. The bike pins served as the identifier of Bike Summit lobbyists in the Congressional offices. Our 750 people in the halls made a big impression as we were easily the largest group on the Hill that day.

Overall this was a very success Summit in that we were well represented in a relatively party-neutral topic. After all, who can argue against an enjoyable and safe bike ride!