

Bike group pushes for more paths

By Rick Barrett of the Journal Sentinel



Rick Wood
Lynn Relich of Milwaukee checks the handle grips on a Trek Neko women's bike Saturday at the Bike Expo at State Fair Park. The bike is popular with women who want versatility between a mountain bike that can handle trails and a road bike for everyday use. The event runs through Sunday.

West Allis - The patchwork of bike trails and bicycle-friendly routes in Wisconsin needs a dedicated and consistent source of funding.

So says the Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin, which argues that bicycle lanes and paths can be built for a fraction of the cost of roadways.

Saturday, the nonprofit group was at Bike Expo, an annual State Fair Park event sponsored by the Wheel & Sprocket bicycle stores.

For 2012, the bike federation has made bicycle infrastructure funding one of its priorities.

It hopes the state Legislature will see it that way, too, and find a source of funding for bike paths and lanes.

That's never been done before, said Matt Gissibl, the federation's development coordinator.

There are efforts to connect the maze of bike trails and lanes, some of which end abruptly and send riders onto busy streets, but it takes money and people with "skin in the game," Gissibl said.

The latter must come from individual communities where people rally to support bicycle and walking path infrastructure.

"It takes organization," Gissibl said.

Plans for a bike lane along the extended Lake Parkway are one example of improved infrastructure.

The six-mile extension of the four-lane highway could have a separated multiuse path, 10 feet wide, to serve bicyclists and pedestrians.

The pathway received little attention at a public hearing earlier this year but was part of the \$207.2 million estimated cost of the new roadway from Edgerton Ave. to Highway 100. Construction could be at least 10 years off, after approvals and engineering.

The bike federation hasn't given up on a bike lane on the refurbished Hoan Bridge, although the Department of Transportation rejected proposals to include it in reconstruction set to begin in 2013.

Bicycling has a \$1.5 billion annual impact on Wisconsin's economy, according to the bike federation, with much of it coming from Trek Bicycle Corp., in Waterloo, and companies including Saris Cycling Group of Madison and Hayes Disc Brake of Mequon.

Bicyclists also spend money in towns along bike trails, such as the 32-mile [Elroy-Sparta State Trail](#) and the 30-mile paved [Interurban Trail](#) in Ozaukee County.

Trails are expensive to maintain, and it costs millions of dollars to lengthen them.

"We want the Legislature to allocate unique or specific funding for bicycling," Gissibl said.