

City streets designated as bikeways

New signage helps cyclists, motorists be aware of shared roadways

By NANCY BERGERON

Bicycle enthusiast Chris Bartlett is excited about the bright yellow signs appearing along Ruston streets reminding motorists that they share the road with cyclists.

“That sign is poignant,” said Bartlett, a recreational cyclist and owner of Ruston’s Turbo Goat bicycle shop. “There’s an implied courtesy there.”

Designating specific city streets as bikeways and erecting the “Share the Road” signs is part of the Ruston 21 transportation plan. On designated bikeways, motorists and cyclists use the same roadway. The designated routes represent the safest cycling routes for primary point-to-point destinations within the city.

“The ultimate goal is to increase accessibility for cyclists and pedestrians,” Richard Aillet, Ruston’s director of engineering services, said.

The city piggy-backed on state routes already designed as bikeways by adding local streets that connect to the state roads. Among those streets: Maryland, Vaughn, Bonner, and Monroe. Signage is expected to be completed in those areas by the end of February.

“It will definitely make for a more connected city,” said Kevin Singh, a cyclist and member of the Pine Hills Cyclist club. The club helped the city decide which streets to select as bikeways.

Singh estimates Ruston has as many as 400 citizens who regularly cycle, whether for pleasure, athletic training or as a primary means of transportation. Designated bikeways not only enhance the quality of life, but also help promote fitness and is environmentally friendly, Bartlett said.

“You leave a smaller footprint on the earth when you ride your bike instead of taking your car,” cyclist Jim Liner said.

Public education on the part of both cyclists and motorists is an important part of bikeway safety, riders and the city officials say. The city has tagged March and April as bikeway awareness months, leading up to National Bicycle Month in May.

“The more the general public realizes that cyclists are on the road, the safer the people who ride the bikes are going to be,” Bartlett said.

Liner knows about that first-hand. In 2009 he was hit by a car that pulled out in front of him. He suffered multiple injuries and spent five days in the hospital.

“It happens,” he said. “A lot of people just aren’t looking for cyclists.”

“The biggest thing is making cyclists and motorists both aware of how to maneuver with a bike on the road,” said Troy Ketchum, who cycles to work several days a week.

Cyclists and motorists are supposed to follow the same rules of the road. Louisiana law also requires that when passing a cyclist, vehicles must leave at least three feet between them and the cyclist.

“A little room is a good thing,” said Ketchum, referring to the so-called “Three Foot Law.”

Riders say bikeways are a definite boost for Ruston.

“It’s an incredibly valuable thing as Ruston moves forward in economic development to include this type of thing,” Bartlett said.

Mayor Dan Hollingsworth sees the bikeways designations as just one step in making Ruston more cycle friendly as the city seeks to implement a complete-street plan.

“Signage is where we’re starting,” Hollingsworth said. “Hopefully, it will make it a little safer. We’ve taken the steps we can to begin the process. We will continue to expand on it.”

Nancy Bergeron is communications manager for the Ruston-Lincoln Chamber of Commerce.

