

## BMTS Article Digest September - October 2015

BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee Members:

The following is a compilation of articles that may be of interest to BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee members. This and past digests can also be accessed in the Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee page of [www.bmtsonline.com](http://www.bmtsonline.com).

Scott

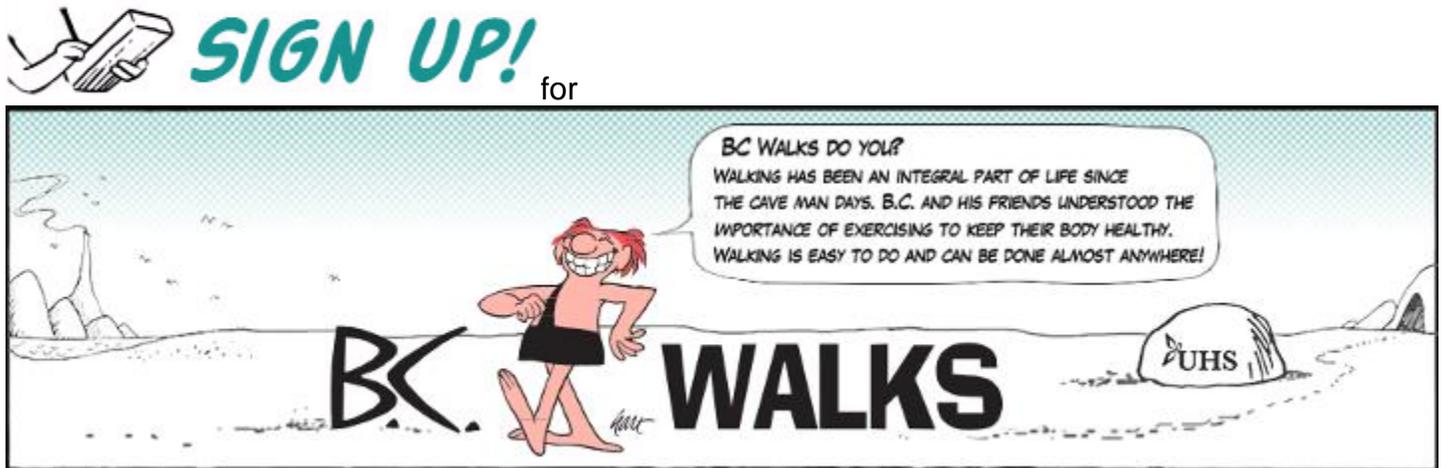


Take a look at the National Center for Bicycling & Walking's newsletter, **CenterLines**. You can also arrange to have it emailed directly to you.

See <http://www.bikewalk.org/newsletter.php>.

**CenterLines** is the bi-weekly electronic news bulletin of the National Center for Bicycling & Walking. **CenterLines** is our way of quickly delivering news and information you can use to create more walkable and bicycle-friendly communities.

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Go to [www.BCWalks.com](http://www.BCWalks.com)!

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Check out this website for Bike & Pedestrian Information!



[www.coexistnys.org](http://www.coexistnys.org)

In particular, view the interactive educational video clips.

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**Send the County some photos for its website that show: people walking or biking, the Binghamton Bridge Pedal, Two Rivers Greenway, etc. See below.**

**THE BUZZ** – Press & Sun-Bulletin (September 16, 2015)

If you have an eye for images that showcase what Broome has to offer, the county is looking for your photos.

The county's new website, which went online earlier this summer, will host a new submitted picture each week, under the "Broome County Photos" dropdown of the "visit" tab at [gobroomecounty.com/](http://gobroomecounty.com/).

"We developed this brand new website, and we want to use it to show off the beauty of our community," Broome County Executive Debbie Preston said in an emailed news release. "We are asking you to send us photographs, children's pictures and more to show the outside world what our community has to offer."

The website's \$30,000 overhaul was intended in part to promote Broome as a destination for tourism and business.

Submissions may be emailed to [photo@co.broome.ny.us](mailto:photo@co.broome.ny.us). Please include names of people shown and a brief few sentences describing where each photo was taken. That information will be posted as well.

By submitting a photo, you are giving the county permission to post it on its website.

**Broome County's official website, [www.gobroomecounty.com](http://www.gobroomecounty.com), recently received an overhaul.**

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## **GUEST VIEWPOINT: Best way to see New York City – by bike**



**by Bob Kingsley**



**Bicyclists pass by a view of the lower Manhattan skyline in Brooklyn in 2002.**

is too close to see. At a family reunion, the two New Yorks would view each other with vague trepidation mixed with a sense of familial obligation.

While the car is generally synonymous with freedom for anyone living outside of a large metro area, it becomes a rolling prison when you enter the confines of Manhattan, where three-quarters of the

A car ride from Binghamton to New York City rewards you with that unmistakable Manhattan skyline popping up surprisingly, followed by the mad dash through the toll gate funnel that squirts drivers all across the expanse of the George Washington Bridge, high over the nearly mile-wide Hudson River.

Following a boring-by-comparison three-hour ride through idyllic and rural countryside, the iconic gateway into New York pushes you into an overwhelmingly rapid rush of noisy sensory overload, challenging your ability to adapt quickly and to cope, all forced on you in just a few seconds as New York swallows you up.

If upstate and downstate are related at all, the complexity of divergence between the two becomes most evident when the skyline

residents don't own one. The worst way to see Manhattan is by car or bus. I only realized that after seeing The City for the first time courtesy of a bicycle trip.

Parking at the ferry terminal in Port Imperial on the New Jersey side of the Hudson, we unpacked our bikes from the car and headed north toward the George Washington Bridge. Our plan was to cycle across the bridge and traverse the island of Manhattan along the Hudson Green Way, then take the ferry back.

After a difficult climb on the streets of metropolitan New Jersey, the entranceway onto the George Washington Bridge is where the real excitement begins. Hundreds of bikes jammed onto the walkway, going in both directions, flashy jerseys, carbon-fiber frames, Oakley wraparounds, Tour-De-France quality and performance in some cases, newbies and awestruck tourists in others, like us.

Not unlike the roadway next to us, the same levels of performance and caution were definitely required in maneuvering through the horde of cyclists. After a spiral staircase like decent into Manhattan, the Hudson Green Way provides incredibly nice bicycling right alongside the Hudson River, a strip of land maybe a few hundred feet wide, inaccessible by car and mostly invisible to everyone except those using it, maybe the best kept secret in The City.

We biked all the way to the Battery at the end of the island with occasional forays into the edges of the city to see things that caught our attention. Along the Green Way, kayaks, paddle boards, Frisbees, dogs, kids, fountains, cafés, tennis courts, even a trapeze school, all on the Hudson River, away from but a very special part of The City.

We people-watched and saw a side of New York that only a few get to see, impossible to enjoy from a car, all courtesy of our bikes, the west side of the west side, incredibly cool.

*Bob Kingsley is a Port Dickinson resident.*

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## The Skirmisher stands tall in Binghamton

Gerald Smith, Correspondent 11:48 a.m. EDT September 15, 2015



*(Photo: Broome County Historical Society photo)*

People go by him without paying attention, but there is a man carrying a rifle and pointing it at the place he used to call home. He was pushed away from the place he stood for more than six decades. And still, few pay any attention.

Is he some type of terrorist, or a person bent on hurting others? No, he is a simple soldier protecting his fellow soldiers. He is the Skirmisher, a statue to honor the men who served during the Spanish-American War.

The Spanish-American War – that “glorious, little war” that lasted less than one year, brought territory and people into the American fold while still promoting James Monroe’s idea of Manifest Destiny. It also brought to the forefront people like Theodore Roosevelt, and the charge up San Juan Hill. But for most who served, they received little recognition for their effort.

In Broome County, five men died from disease while waiting to serve in combat. Others made it to the conflict, only to be lost when they arrived back to the mainland.

In the 1920s, groups from around the country began efforts to commemorate the service of their local residents during that war.

Members of the Thomas H. Barber Camp 3 of the United Spanish War Veterans began a sincere effort to raise money to design and build a statue to honor those who served. Two private subscriptions were done, before funds from the Broome County government helped to raise \$10,000 for the sculpture.

The group sought the service of sculptor Robert Ingersoll Aiken, a well-respected artist who had worked on a number of pieces across the United States. He was best known for creating the west pediment of the Supreme Court building in Washington, D.C. He was also a Spanish-American War veteran and interested in the project.



Robert Aiken next to his bust of Thomas Jefferson. (Photo: Photo provided)

The west pediment of the U.S. Supreme Court building, designed by Robert Aiken. (Photo: Provided photo)



It was Aiken who arrived in Binghamton in the early 1920s and picked the

location for the statue in a circle near the Washington Street Bridge, close to the then-under-construction Memorial Bridge. It would be a bronze statue of a soldier carrying his rifle, standing on a stone base. The proportions were such that he could not be missed.

The statue stood 9 feet tall and was on a base that added 10 feet to the height of Aiken's work. With due diligence, Aiken proceeded on his sculpture, completing it in 1924. But it would not be dedicated until July 14, 1925.

With due pomp and circumstance, the statue was unveiled to great reception. The newly designed traffic circle between the two bridges seemed like an ideal location for our soldier. It connected with Washington Street and could be seen from the downtown and West Side areas.

But time is a funny thing. As the decades rolled on, more and more traffic seemed to flow near the Skirmisher, especially as Northshore Drive connected with Riverside Drive.

Roadways had to be made wider to handle the heavier traffic, and the perfect circle now slowly evolved into an ovoid that kept getting narrower and narrower. Worse yet, trucks had clipped the base of the Skirmisher statue, and it was feared that he could be destroyed.

In the early 1990s, there were efforts to redesign that whole area. The South Washington Street Bridge was undergoing maintenance to open it as a pedestrian and bicycle bridge after being long closed. Confluence Park was going to be built to replace what was an eyesore near our rivers, and the Skirmisher stood right in the way of the progress. The decision was made to move the statue out of the way of traffic to avoid any accident.

Once again (since he had been shifted once before, by four feet), our soldier was picked up and moved a few feet south, to be the entrance to the new pedestrian bridge. For him, it was a good move, since it was found that only one of four bolts remained intact with the pedestal, and we were able to restore his time capsule. Today, he still guards the area – 90 years of service to our community.

*Gerald Smith is the Broome County historian. Email him at [historysmiths@stny.rr.com](mailto:historysmiths@stny.rr.com).*

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[http://www.communitycommons.org/2015/09/surgeon-generals-prescription-for-health-walk-more/?km\\_Sept-16%20Email%20Campaign=health](http://www.communitycommons.org/2015/09/surgeon-generals-prescription-for-health-walk-more/?km_Sept-16%20Email%20Campaign=health)

## Surgeon General's Prescription for Health: Walk More

By Jay Walljasper, Senior Fellow at On the Commons and editor of [OnTheCommons.org](http://OnTheCommons.org)

We've always known walking is good for us—it burns calories, reduces stress and helps the environment.

But we never knew how really great it is for us until the just released [Call to Action on Walking](#) from US Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy, who explains, “An average of 22 minutes a day of physical activity—such as brisk walking—can significantly reduce the risk of heart disease and diabetes. The key is to get started because even a small first effort can make a big difference in improving the personal health of an individual and the public health of the nation.”

Surgeon General Murthy announced a [national campaign](#) to encourage Americans to walk more and make all communities safer and easier for walking. His office will partner with schools, citizens groups and businesses to meet these goals.

“Walking is a simple, effective and affordable way to build physical activity into our lives,” Murthy adds. “That is why we need to step it up as a country ensuring that everyone can choose to walk in their own communities.”

Warning on the dangers of smoking—is based on definitive [medical evidence](#) that moderate physical exercise boosts your health cuts your chances of diabetes, dementia, depression, colon cancer, cardiovascular disease, anxiety and high blood pressure by [40 percent](#) or more.

A [major study](#) released this year shows that lack of exercise is twice as deadly as obesity, according to Cambridge University researchers who studied more than 300,000 people over 12 years. Their findings match another [comprehensive study](#) that found sitting for long periods is linked to higher death rates.

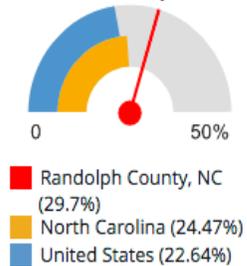
This explains why the Surgeon General and a growing chorus of health care experts are singing the praises of walking.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Protection (CDC) recommends Americans walk at least [30 minutes a day](#) five days a week—or bike, run, swim, dance, garden do aerobics and play sports. (For kids, it's 60 minutes a day seven days a week.) Taking a walk is the exercise that [people stick with](#) most over time, according to the American Heart Association.

[Download Data](#)

Report Area	Total Population Age 20+	Population with no Leisure Time Physical Activity	Percent Population with no Leisure Time Physical Activity
Randolph County, NC	105,000	32,340	29.7%
North Carolina	7,186,702	1,796,364	24.47%
United States	231,341,061	53,415,737	22.64%

Percent Population with no Leisure Time Physical Activity



Note: This indicator is compared with the state average.

Data Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion](#), 2012.

Source geography: County

Indicator reports offer an excellent opportunity to look at factors that affect the health of your area. Create a Community Health Needs Assessment Full Indicator report by simply entering your state and county (or several counties) and the data automatically populates for you.

“Walking is like medicine for my patients. If walking was a pill or surgical procedure,” it would be all over the news, says [Dr. Bob Sallis](#), a family practitioner in Fontana, California.

“You don’t have to be an athlete to be physically active, just walk, walk, walk!” says the [Bernard J. Tyson](#), president of Kaiser Permanente, one of America’s largest health care providers that powers the [Every Body Walk! Collaborative](#) (involving more than a hundred other organizations from the National PTA to AARP to the National Association of Realtors) to get more Americans walking.

Walking stands out as Americans’ favorite aerobic activity because it’s free, easy, available anywhere—and, most of all—it’s fun. Six in ten Americans take a walk at least once a week, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), and the number of Americans walking has risen six percent since 2005. That adds up to 20 million more people on their feet.

The U.S. Department of Transportation reports that eleven percent of the nation’s trips are now made by walking. That rises to 28 percent for all trips under one mile, including 35 percent to work, 40 percent to shopping and 46 percent to religious services.

### Good For Your Health—But Also For Your Pocketbook and the Local Economy

The rising tide of walkers across America brings us other benefits too.

**Lower health care costs.** [Physical inactivity](#) costs Americans an estimated \$177 billion a year for medical costs, and accounts for 16 percent of all deaths, according to the American Public Health Association.

**More social connections:** Strong [social connections](#) improve both our physical and mental health, and walking is one of the best ways to meet neighbors and deepen ties with friends.

**Stronger communities:** “Exercise is medicine. It’s also good for the social fabric of our communities,” says former Dr. Regina Benjamin, US Surgeon General from 2009 to 2013, explaining why she added a walking path to the grounds of her health clinic in rural Alabama. “Health does not just happen in doctors’ offices and clinics—it happens where we work, live, play and pray,” she says.

“What makes people walk is what makes great places to live,” adds Harriet Tregoning, head of the Office of Community Planning at the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). “Walkability is the secret sauce that improves the performance of many other things ” in our communities.

**Improved school performance.** Walking to school boosts “[cognitive performance](#)” in students, according to Mary Pat King, the National PTA’s Director of Programs and Projects. Dr. Richard Jackson, a pediatrician and former Environmental Health Director at the US Centers for Disease Control finds that [walking to school is good](#) for children’s learning ability, concentration, moods and creativity.

**Improved creativity and reduced anxiety:** Eighty five percent of Americans believe that walking helps reduce anxiety and feelings of depression, and two-thirds of Americans report that walking “stimulates their thinking” according to a national [survey](#).

Putting one foot in front of the other is intrinsically tied to our minds as well as our bodies. “To solve a problem, walk around,” advised St. Jerome in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century. Fifteen hundred years later, Henry David Thoreau agreed: “The moment my legs begin to move, my thoughts begin to flow.” The Buddhist philosopher Thich Nhat Hanh observes, “Every time we take a step on this Earth, we can appreciate the solid ground underneath us.” The Bible counsels, “ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.” [Jeremiah 6:16]

**A stronger economy:** “Walking is a business issue. A healthy workforce means a more successful workforce,” says Karen Marlo vice-president of the National Business Group on Health, a consortium of leading companies across many fields. Indeed, communities with many walkable neighborhoods do better economically than those with just a few, according to a report from the [George Washington University](#) School of Business.

**Lower cost of living:** Transportation costs rival housing costs for many American families today, especially those living in places where it is hard get around without a car (25 percent of household expenses) compared to walkable communities (9 percent), according to the [Federal Highway Administration](#). The yearly costs of a owning and operating a car at \$8698, which means that figuring out how to walk more and drive less makes economic sense, according to the [American Automobile Association](#)

**Higher quality of life:** [Walk with a Doc](#), a group of more than 200 doctors in 29 states, documents 100 “[Benefits of Walking](#)”, including many medical advantages but also increased physical energy, clearer skin, improved athletic performance, reduced anger, increased self-control, longer lives and a greater sense of well-being.

## Getting America Back on Its Feet

In light of all this evidence, it’s clear that walking is a healthy, economical, sociable, pleasurable thing to do. Yet less than [half of us](#) meet the CDC’s weekly minimum for walking or any other physical activity—30 minutes a day five days a week.

Americans [walk less](#) than people in most other countries. In fact, Australians walk almost twice as many steps each day as we do, a surprise in a country that is similar to the US with high rates of car ownership and spread-out suburban development.

While ninety four percent of Americans participating in a [national survey](#) said that walking is “good for their health,” 79 percent admitted they “should walk more.”

So what’s stopping them?

- 40 percent of people said their “neighborhood is not very walkable”
- 40 percent said there are “few places within walking distance of my home”
- 39 percent said “they don’t have time”
- 25 percent cited a “lack of sidewalks or speeding traffic”
- 25 percent cited “no one to walk with”
- 13 percent cited “crime in my neighborhood”

“Everyone deserves to have a safe place to walk or wheelchair roll,” Surgeon General Murthy . “But in too many of our communities, that is not the reality.”

To get Americans back on their feet —to enjoy better health and other rewards— we need to make strolling and striding a natural part of daily life again. This can be accomplished by removing the personal and physical barriers that discourage us from walking for recreation, relaxation, and transportation.

Most Americans support significant changes in our communities to promote this goal, according to the survey sponsored by Kaiser Permanente. Eighty percent “want to design streets to make walking safer” (even if it means driving slower); 71 percent “want better enforcement of speed limits” (even if it means driving slower), and 54

percent “want communities where destinations are within walk distance” (even if it means building homes closer together).

These steps are popular because they are not some radical upheaval of our way of life, but a common-sense readjustment. Walking has always been one of the most elemental human acts, central to our lives the same as breathing, eating and sleeping. Making streets and neighborhoods more safe, convenient, comfortable and interesting for people traveling on foot (or rolling in wheelchairs) is a sensible return to traditional values. It not only enhance our health, but enriches our lives by better connecting us to people and places in our communities.

*Jay Walljasper is a writer, speaker and consultant on making our communities great places for everyone and author of the Great Neighborhood Book. He is the Urban Writer in Residence at Augsburg College in Minneapolis and a Senior Fellow at Project for Public Spaces. Contact him at [JayWalljasper.com](http://JayWalljasper.com).*

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Wednesday, 23 September 2015

### **DITCHING FOUR WHEELS FOR TWO**

**People pedal through Bogota, Colombia, for “World Car-Free Day” on Tuesday. With over 1 billion motor vehicles on Earth, the effort aims to cut the pollution, noise and danger they pose.**

GUILLERMO LEGARIA, AFP/GETTY IMAGES



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[http://www.aol.com/article/2015/09/25/man-who-commutes-to-work-on-foot-brought-to-tears-by-roeland-par/21241158/?a\\_dgi](http://www.aol.com/article/2015/09/25/man-who-commutes-to-work-on-foot-brought-to-tears-by-roeland-par/21241158/?a_dgi)

## **Man who commutes to work on foot brought to tears by Roeland Park officer's good deed**

ROELAND PARK, Kan. (WDAF) -- The Roeland Park Police Department is making headlines again -- for good deeds.

In July, an officer helped a young mother who was caught stealing diapers. She was later booked on federal drug charges, but officers say nothing is going to stop them from being good Samaritans. What one officer did this week, is proof. Following a call for suspicious person at a park, officers arrived to find a greater story.

"Sometimes I have to sleep outside because I want to keep my job. That's just how it is," Samuel Meixueiro said.

He says he's fallen on hard times. With a checkered past behind him, he says a lot of doors have been shut in his face. He lost his home and has been sleeping in a church; walking from Kansas City to Mission every day for work.

"It's a five-to-six hour walk. I've been doing it so I can keep my job," Meixueiro said.

On Tuesday, he decided to take a break in Sweeney Park before work. Someone nearby saw him and thought he looked suspicious, and called the cops.

"He shook my hand, we had a chat like I was talking to a friend of mine," Officer Zach Stamper said. "As I told him my story he started loosening up. Started realizing I'm not a vagrant. I have a job. I'm doing the best I can," Meixueiro said.

Officer Stamper gave him a ride to work, but Meixueiro's story stuck with him long after he dropped him off.

"I was like, wow. My commute, I drive to work and it's done. I couldn't imagine spending five hours a day traveling back and forth to work, let alone on foot," Officer Stamper said.

He came back a half-hour later with a bike for Meixueiro and a duffel bag for him to carry all of his things in.

"I cried. I couldn't believe it. Things are so hard for me right now. Any kind of help is just a blessing," Meixueiro said. "Thank you from the bottom of my heart."

"It made my day. It made my career," Officer Stamper said.

Meixueiro says the bike meant the world, but what meant more is someone believing in him and his future. The pair exchanged phone numbers and plan to stay in touch for a long time to come.

# McCarthy vows to pass six-year highway bill



By [Keith Laing](#) - [The Hill](#) 09/29/15 10:57 AM EDT

House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.), who is looking to succeed outgoing Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio), is vowing to pass a six-year extension of federal transportation.

"Well, fundamental, I'm going to change as Speaker. We're going to make sure we get the highway bill done," said McCarthy on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" on Tuesday, when asked how he would differ from the departing Boehner.

"If we pass a highway bill with tax reform at the same time, that's policy," he continued. "That changes the inversion process; that means more money comes back to America. That puts a six-year highway bill on to the floor and starts moving and building roads that we need in American infrastructure."

McCarthy is seen as the favorite to replace Boehner, who has said he would leave Congress in October.

Congress is facing an Oct. 29 deadline for extending the federal government's authority to pay states for transportation projects.

Transportation advocates complain that Congress has not passed an infrastructure measure that lasts longer than two years since 2005 due to a highway funding shortfall that is estimated to be \$16 billion annually.

The traditional source for transportation funding is revenue that is collected by the federal gas tax, which is currently set at 18.4 cents-per-gallon. The gas tax brings about \$34 billion per year, but the federal government typically spends about \$50 billion annually on transportation projects.

Transportation advocates have pushed for an increase in the gas tax to help make up the difference, but McCarthy said Tuesday that he would prefer using revenue from corporate overseas taxes to pay for roads.

"You're not going to see an increase in tax, gasoline tax, no, but you're going to see a change in the tax structure to territorial tax," he said.

McCarthy was also confident he could move a long-term bill.

"You're going to see a difference that it's going to be a six-year bill," he continued. "You're going to see reforms when you want to talk about policy as well, that we don't wait 10 years when we approve a road to be built.

"You're going to see that they're going to have the process if a state already has [the California Environmental Quality Act] involved there, is you don't have to duplicate when it comes to the environmental controls. So we're going to find a bill done next month that is a six-year highway bill," he added.

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## Calves burn, pedals turn in Cascadilla Hill Climb

**ANDREW CASLER**

[ACASLER@PRESSCONNECTS.COM](mailto:ACASLER@PRESSCONNECTS.COM)

A 200-foot climb ascending a halfmile of road separated cyclists from the finish line when they squared off in head-to-head races Saturday morning at the Cascadilla Hill Climb.

Race organizer Glenn Swan, owner of Swan Cycles, describes the track's drastically steep, twisting residential streets as something that cyclists might seek out in Switzerland.

"Not many towns have a road that's as cool as this; this street is a little treasure in Ithaca," he said. "You can't waste something like that."

Despite the serious climb, and the fact that the event has drawn professional racers in the past — Swan himself won the hill climb event at the 1994 World Masters Cycling Championships — statistics and finishing times have never been important at the Ithaca competition, Swan said. He started the late-September race during the early 1980s as a reprieve from long seasons of serious bike racing. There's no podium or prize money, he added.

Biking partners Scott Krazinski, 46, of Elmira, and Tom Tryon, 44, of Horseheads, said they signed up because of the event's casual atmosphere and physical challenge.

The pair squared off against each other on the very first race.

"Turn around, Scott," Tryon said before their climb.

Now pointing to Krazinski's back, he added, "Right there, that's what I'm going to see. If I'm lucky I'll see a glimpse of it (Tryon's back) going around the last corner."

The winding course ascends Cascadilla Park Road and then turns onto De-Witt Place on East Hill in Ithaca.

On Saturday, racers and organizers emanated the spirit of light-hearted competition and general inattention to who was winning or losing.

Even the overall winner of Saturday's event, Hugh Wallace, 38, of Ithaca, thought that he was still one race away from the final when he claimed victory.

"I ride with a lot of these guys regularly so it's fun for bragging rights," Wallace said.

*Follow Andrew Casler on Twitter: @AndrewCasler*

**"Not many towns have a road that's as cool as this; this street is a little treasure in Ithaca. You can't waste something like that."**



## GLENN SWAN

RACE ORGANIZER, OWNER OF SWAN CYCLES

**Adam Mahor, 21, of Ithaca, leads through a steep corner on Cascadilla Place just before Abe Stroock, 42, of Ithaca, cranks past Mahor to win the race.**

ANDREW CASLER / STAFF PHOTO

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[Press and Sun-Bulletin](#) | [Page B04](#) Sunday, 27 September 2015

## 'City of Light' trades traffic for tranquility

**Elena B erton**

Special for USA TODAY

**PARIS** For once, Parisians won't have to escape to the countryside during the weekend to get a breath of fresh air.

Sunday, Paris will institute its first car-free day, banning most vehicles from the central part of the city and allowing people to stroll, cycle or skate from the Arc de Triomphe to Place de la Bastille.

Landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower, the Champs Élysées, Notre Dame Cathedral and the Left Bank will be free from car noise and exhaust fumes from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday.

"Parisians will be able to take back their daily living space and experience the city in a different way," said Mayor Anne Hidalgo, who would have liked to make the entire city off-limits to vehicles Sunday.

The closure is unprecedented for the French capital and will open the city center to pedestrians for a day, expanding on popular areas off-limits to Sunday traffic such as the fashionable Marais, the cobblestoned Montmartre and the hip neighborhood along Canal Saint-Martin.

Bumper-to-bumper traffic that normally clogs the city's boulevards will be replaced by street parties, yoga classes, produce markets and — this being Paris — food tastings with top chefs.

Exceptions will be allowed for buses, taxis, garbage trucks and emergency vehicles. Elsewhere in the capital, cars and trucks will be forced to slow down to a plodding 12 mph.

The plan received an enthusiastic thumbs up from Parisians, as well as unlikely parties such as the head of a French drivers association, 40 million d'automobilistes.

"I rarely agree with the mayor of Paris, but this time, I am on her side. Closing off a few streets on a Sunday once a year is not a bad idea. It's a symbolic gesture that allows people to rediscover certain streets," the group's president, Pierre Chasseray, said.

Paris' motor-free day is by no means a world's first. Brussels, the traffic congestion capital of Europe, launched its first car-free Sunday 15 years ago, an example followed by Montreal, Jakarta and other cities.

Paris' decision to keep cars off its pollution-choked streets for a day is no coincidence. In November, the city will host the United Nations' World Climate Conference, when political and environmental leaders will converge to discuss global-warming issues.

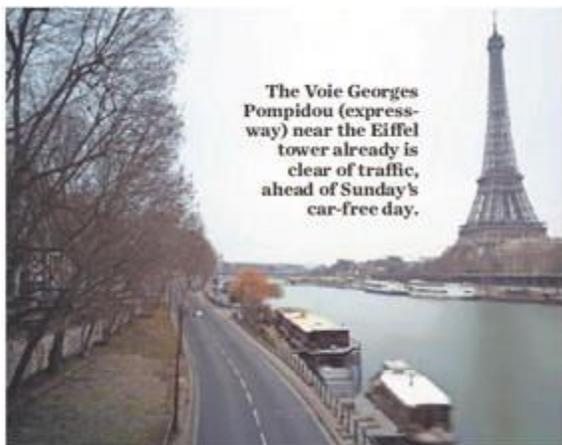
The move follows a severe pollution spike in March, when Parisians woke up to discover the Eiffel Tower enveloped in smog.

The sight of Paris shrouded in a brown haze prompted city officials to impose emergency measures — such as a partial driving ban and free public transportation — for the second time in a year as pollution levels in the French capital briefly topped those of Shanghai, one of the world's most smog-plagued cities.

Parisians have proved reluctant to give up their addiction to cars, despite clogged thoroughfares and an electric car-sharing program launched four years ago.

The capital is France's most congested city, where drivers spend 45 hours every year sitting in traffic, according to road traffic data provider Inrix.

As elsewhere in France, pollution is made worse by the prevalence of diesel vehicles, which successive governments have promoted by subsidizing the fuel and making it 15% cheaper than gasoline. Although diesel engines produce lower carbon emissions, they still emit a large amount of the tiny particles that threaten human health.



Kim Le Minh, 37, a career services coordinator who lives in Paris' southwestern 15th arrondissement, welcomes the car-free initiative but doubts drivers will switch to more environmentally friendly transportation.

"I see (the car-free day) as a communication campaign to make people reflect in general about the environment and pollution," she said. "But I doubt they will be persuaded to use their car less. I don't think they will change their habits in the short term."

**The Voie Georges Pompidou (expressway) near the Eiffel tower already is clear of traffic, ahead of Sunday's car-free day.**

PATRICK KOVARIK, AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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