

Biking: OPPORTUNITIES FOR MICHIGAN'S THUMB



The southern Lake Huron coast is a fantastic setting for outdoor exploration. Promoting the region's natural assets can help build vibrant communities and support local economies. This series of fact sheets profiles different outdoor activities that could appeal to residents and visitors of Michigan's Thumb. We hope this information will help guide regional planning, business development and marketing throughout the region. **Here we provide an overview of biking — including details on who participates, what is unique about biking in the Thumb and how communities can attract cyclists.**

WHY BIKE IN MICHIGAN'S THUMB?

Michigan's Thumb Area has a varied landscape that offers cyclists the opportunity to ride along the coast of Southern Lake Huron, as well as inland, through picturesque communities. The Thumb's 150 miles of coast is dotted with small village centers, historic light houses, marinas, campgrounds and shoreline parks that provide great resting points. Bicyclists have the opportunity to see organic farms — or wind farms like those in Ubly and Pigeon. The Thumb is unique in that it doesn't have any major highways, and it remains a relatively undeveloped, out-of-the-way destination. On most paved and gravel roads, bicyclists can enjoy quiet biking. The terrain is generally flat with some gentle hills inland, which provides a fast riding experience suitable for cyclists of all abilities.

The road that runs along the coast, M-25, has recently added 8-foot-wide paved shoulders that provide adequate space for cyclists to comfortably share the road with cars. There are plans to add bike route signs, information kiosks and bike lanes in downtown areas. These improvements will help make the Thumb a bicycle-friendly destination for people interested in one- to three-day bike tours through quiet, pastoral landscapes.

HOW POPULAR IS BIKING?

In Michigan

- 69% of households own a bicycle. Michigan residents own more bikes than any other piece of recreational equipment.
- 15% of Michigan residents said that biking was their 1st, 2nd or 3rd most important outdoor recreational activity.
- Biking is the 7th most popular outdoor recreation activity in Michigan.

In the United States

- Biking is the most popular outdoor activity among youth 6- to 17-years old.
- 15% of Americans participated in road biking, mountain biking or BMX biking in 2010.
- The average bicyclist took about 60 outings in a year.

- The total number of bike trips more than tripled between 1977 and 2009.
- Although most bike trips are recreational, the number of bike commuters doubled between 2000 and 2009.

Who Bikes?

The following statistics describe the most active bicyclists in the United States in 2009.

- **Gender:** 76% of all bike trips are made by men, 24% by women.
- **Income:** Biking rates are fairly equal across income levels. However, low-income people bike mainly for utilitarian purposes, and high-income people bike more for recreation and exercise.
- **Geography:** Western U.S. states have the highest bicycling rates, while southern states have relatively low rates.
- **Ethnicity:** 77% of all bike trips are made by white individuals. However, over

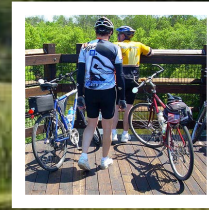
the past 10 years, Africans Americans, Hispanics and Asian Americans have begun to make up a larger percentage of U.S. bicyclists.

Economic Impact

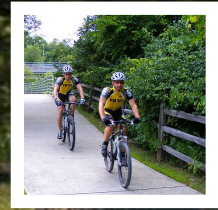
The biking industry has a greater economic impact than most people realize. People spend over \$200 million in Michigan each year just on bike purchases. The next two tables illustrate the annual spending and economic impact of cyclists in Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois and Ohio in 2005.

Nationwide, more Americans owe their jobs to bicycle-based recreation than there are people employed as lawyers. Americans spent 88 times more on bicycle-based recreation in one year than the total box office draw for Titanic, the top-grossing movie of all time.

RECREATION PROFILE: Biking



DAN PIENIAK, FLICKR



DAN PIENIAK, FLICKR

JOHN LOWBARD

BIKING-RELATED SPENDING BY AVERAGE PARTICIPANT (ANNUAL)

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| Number of day trips | 7 |
| Average spending per day trip | \$37 |
| Number of overnight trips | 8 |
| Average spending per overnight trip | \$218 |
| Retail sales for gear | \$77 |

ECONOMIC IMPACT (ANNUAL)

| | |
|--------------------------|----------------|
| Number of cyclists | 11.3 million |
| Total gear retail sales | \$873 million |
| Total-trip related sales | \$11.2 billion |
| Jobs supported | 190,972 |

2006 statistics for people who participated in road, mountain or BMX biking in the U.S. Source: The Active Outdoor Recreation Economy Report, 2006.

WHY PROMOTE BIKING?

There are many reasons why an area might want to expand and promote opportunities for biking.

Improve Public Health

- Michigan, like most of the U.S., is facing an obesity epidemic; 61% of Michigan's adults are considered overweight. In just one generation, the number of children who walk or bike to school has dropped 75% and the number of overweight children has tripled.
- Safe, attractive biking routes can encourage residents to be more active and healthy; 58% of people with nearby biking routes participate in some type of outdoor recreation activity, compared with only 47% of other Americans.
- Cycling for three hours a week can cut the risk of heart disease and stroke by 50%.

Enhance Communities and Economies

- Bicycle-friendly communities attract residents, tourists and businesses; 70% of Americans say that having bike lanes or trails in their community is important to them.
- Bicycle trails increase home real estate values and support nearby businesses.
- Cycling enhances recreational and social opportunities, especially for children.
- Rural counties with services for tourism and recreation tend to have stronger employment, higher incomes, lower poverty levels and improved health and education, when compared with rural areas without tourism and recreation attractions.
- 88% of bicyclists also participate in other outdoor activities, such as kayaking, running or fishing.

Improve the Environment

Safe, enjoyable cycling routes encourage residents to use their bikes rather than drive. Short car trips are the least fuel-efficient and produce the most emissions. Half of all auto trips are three miles or less — the perfect length for a bike trip. Bike commuting lowers energy costs, which makes Michigan less vulnerable to energy interruptions and rising oil prices. Biking also decreases traffic and auto accidents, and contributes to cleaner air.

Creating Bike-Friendly Communities

Communities can help encourage cycling by creating bike-friendly environments. For example, 40 percent of Americans say they would commute by bike if bike-parking facilities were available. Characteristics of a bike-friendly community can include:

- Multi-use trails safe for young riders and pedestrians.
- Bike lanes — 5-foot-wide shoulders with a curb or 4-foot-wide shoulders without a curb can be designated as bike lanes.
- Signs reminding drivers to share the road and be considerate drivers.

- Way-finding indicators for bicyclists;
- Trails or sidewalks to allow bicyclists to cross rivers and railways.
- Bicycle storage such as racks or lockers.
- Enhanced enforcement of traffic laws.

Resources

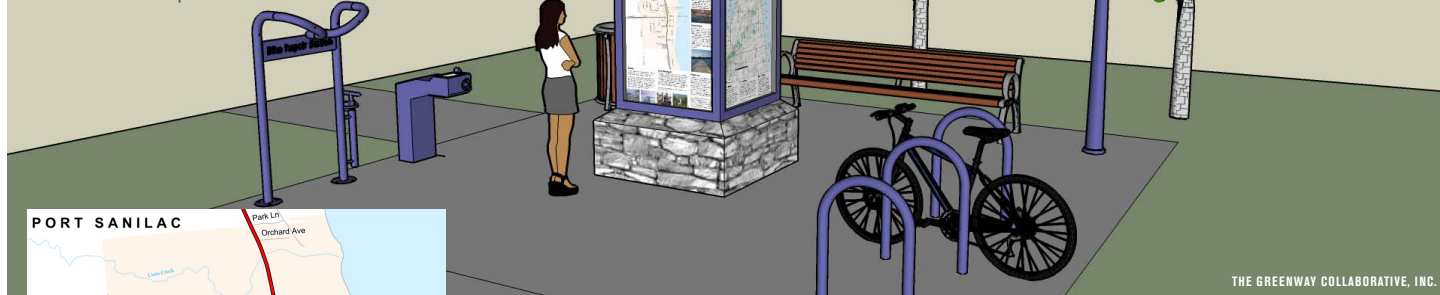
- **Safety Courses:** Michigan's Department of Transportation offers "training wheels" courses in order to help bicyclists, engineers, planners and community officials improve road biking facilities.
- **Bike Tours:** The League of Michigan Bicyclists and the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance organize and promote a number of bike events, including multi-day, guided, group rides in Michigan. Most tours are open to all types of riders and some include paddling or cultural attractions. A tour is a great way to bring new bicyclists to an area.
- **Maps:** Many organizations provide online resources for biking in Michigan, including maps and descriptions for routes that cut across Michigan from one lake to another. Printed maps may also be available. For example, the League of Michigan Bicyclists, Michigan Department of Transportation, Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, and the Adventure Cycling Association provide cyclist resources.

Types of Cycling

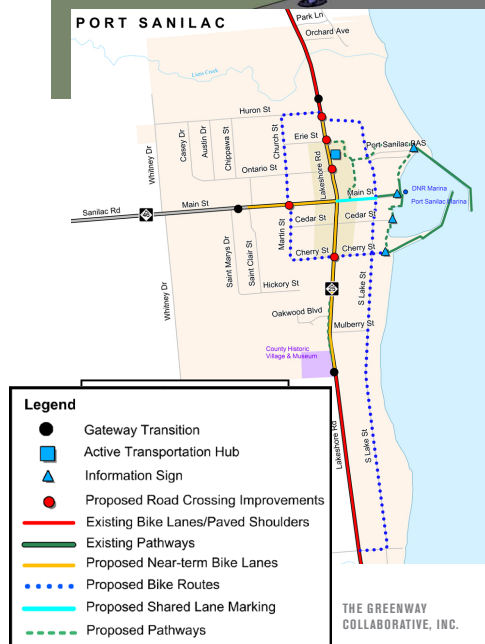
- **Road Biking:** Biking on the shoulders of paved roadways. Cyclists must share facilities and responsibilities with automobiles.
- **Bike Touring:** This involves a multi-day bike trip where cyclists may carry gear and stay in campgrounds or hotels on route. Usually considered a type of road biking.
- **Backroads Bicycling:** Biking on mixed surfaces that include gravel roads. This usually requires a bike with wider tires and sturdier frame than a typical road bike.

RECREATION PROFILE: Biking

Design for a cyclist rest station, from the Thumb Region Non-Motorized Transportation Plan.



THE GREENWAY COLLABORATIVE, INC.



THE GREENWAY COLLABORATIVE, INC.

Figure 1. Suggested plan for bicycle routes in Port Sanilac from the Thumb Region Non-Motorized Transportation Plan.

- **Off-Road Bicycling:** Biking that occurs on designated trails, such as converted railway trails or towpaths, which may be paved or unpaved. Often these facilities are shared with walkers and other recreational activities that like to avoid road traffic.
- **Mountain Biking:** Mountain biking is considered a more challenging version of off-road cycling, where bicyclists ride on rough trails or old fire roads that may have protruding rocks, roots and steep hills.
- **BMX:** BMX stands for Bicycle Motocross where riders use a specific bike with a smaller frame to take on challenging courses with jumps and banks.

BIKING POTENTIAL IN THE THUMB

Expanding Road Bike Routes

Some of the groundwork to making the Thumb bike-friendly has already been done,

and potential for developing biking in the Thumb is great. For example, most of M-25 has a newly expanded, 8-foot-wide shoulder, which could be used to attract road biking enthusiasts. The area also has long, scenic gravel roads suitable for bicyclists with hybrid, touring or mountain bikes. However, cyclists typically avoid M-25 south of Port Sanilac because of truck traffic, and although the shoulders on M-25 are very wide, gravel on the shoulders can be a problem for road bikes.

The Greenway Collaborative recently developed a plan for how the Thumb could further support biking and offer a premier mixed-surface riding experience. Detailed maps and suggestions have been developed to help coastal villages better accommodate bike traffic (Figure 1). Arrangements are being made with MDOT to build cyclist rest stations along M-25 that would include maps, sightseeing information, drinking water and air for tires. Additional suggestions are listed below.

Bike Trails

The Bridge to Bay Trail extends from Lake Huron to Lake St. Clair and includes dedicated trails and bike lanes. Lexington also has a five-mile bike path that connects Lexington and Croswell. Lexington's Business Association website provides suggested bike routes. Thumb communities remain interested in developing dedicated trails that connect to other long-distance systems. Currently, the public cannot ride across the Blue Water Bridge that connects Port Huron to Sarnia, Ontario. However, cyclists that contact the bridge authorities in advance can usually get special permission to be transported across the bridge.

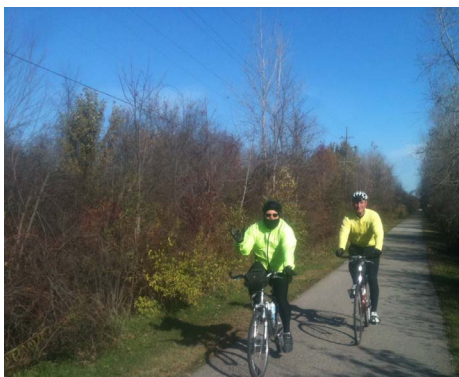
Biking Clubs

The Chain Gang Bicycle and Adventure Club is based in St. Clair County and rides throughout the Thumb. This club had 56 event participants last year and totaled over 16,000 bike miles. They ride in both urban and rural environments on trips ranging from 10 to 80 miles, including some statewide and out-of-state destinations. The group prefers quiet, inland roads, but they often use M-25 to create loop routes. This group is eager to expand paved trails for bikes and help visitors find the best routes.

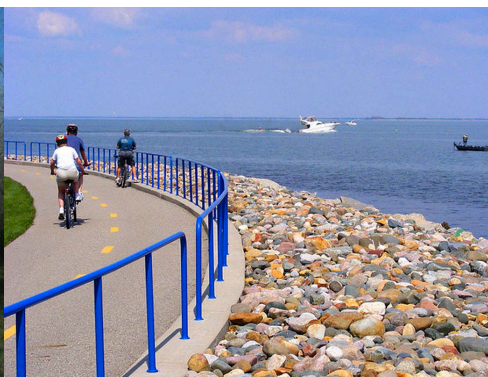
Future Development Opportunities for Biking

There are a number of ways the Thumb could expand biking opportunities and become known as a biking destination. Some suggestions include:

- Establish the extended M-25 shoulder for biking by providing way-finding signs, transportation hubs and supporting infrastructure.
- Sweep and maintain paved shoulders, especially after winter. Gravel can cause problems for road bikers.
- Promote bike routes and trails by registering with the League of Michigan Bicyclists. The only route currently registered that traverses the Thumb is the Lake Erie Connector that spans from the Blue Water Bridge.
- Promote the water trail on Lake Huron along with the M-25 bike route. Encourage kayakers to bring their bike for a multi-sport weekend.
- Provide a shuttle service to assist with transporting kayaks, bikes or people.
- Encourage MDOT to develop a biking map dedicated to the Thumb using information developed by the Greenway Collaborative.



JOHN LOMBARDI



DAN PIENIAK, FLICKR

- Work with the League of Michigan Bicyclists to develop a Bluewater or Thumb bike tour.
- Develop bike events through clubs and park departments for teenagers, families and seniors. Consider creating traditional or adventure triathlons.
- Create a cooperative recreation environment. For example, develop trails that are usable by walkers and riders alike and ensure that vehicle drivers follow “share the road” practices.
- Develop a Smart Transportation Plan outlining how the community or region can promote more public transit, biking, walking and carpooling.
- Partner with those producing bike routes in Ontario in order to create an international biking experience. Lobby for a more bike-friendly border crossing at the Blue Water Bridge.
- Add recommended bike routes to new or existing websites.

CURRENT FUNDING AND POLICIES

Federal funding for projects that promote walking, biking and alternative transportation have increased dramatically over the past 25 years. However, communities may need to find creative sources of funding for new projects that support biking. The League of American Bicyclists provides a web resource called Money Matters that provides a useful list of funding sources.

As of November 2011, 63 communities in Michigan have passed “complete streets” policies, which ensure that road improvements are done in a way that accommodates bicyclists and walkers. A statewide policy will be released in August of 2012, which will require that all MDOT projects consult with communities and consider the needs of non-motorized transportation. However, there are currently no communities in the Thumb that have passed “complete streets” ordinances or resolutions.

SOURCES

American Association for the Development of Bicycle Facilities (1999). Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities.

Bikes Belong Foundation. How do bicycling investments affect real estate? Accessed March 12, 2012 from: www.bikesbelong.org/Resources/Real_estate.pdf

Bureau of Transportation Statistics (2010). 2009 Omnibus Household Survey.

League of Michigan Bicyclist (2009). What Every Michigan Bicyclist Must Know.

Michigan Complete Streets Coalition: www.micompletestreets.org Accessed March 12, 2012.

Michigan DNR (2007). Michigan Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2008-2012.

Michigan Smart Commute. Facts and Figures. Accessed March 12, 2012 from: www.mismartcommute.org/facts

National Center for Safe Routes to School. 2012. Shifting Modes: A Comparative Analysis of Safe Routes to School Program Elements and Travel Mode Outcomes.

Outdoor Foundation (2011). Outdoor Recreation Participation Report 2011.

Outdoor Industry Foundation (2006). The Active Outdoor Recreation Economy.

Pucher, J., R. Buehler and M. Seinen (2011). Bicycling renaissance in North America? An update and re-appraisal of cycling trends and policies. Transportation Research A.

The Greenways Collaborative (2011). The Thumb Region Non-motorized Transportation Plan—Draft.

The League of American Bicyclists. Money Matters. Accessed March 12, 2012 from: www.bikeleague.org/programs/bikeadvocacy/moneymatters.php

U.S. Department of Agriculture (2005). Recreation, Tourism and Rural Well-Being.

U.S. Department of Transportation (2010). 2009 National Household Travel Survey.

Contact

Christine Vogt, Ph.D

Professor of Tourism and Recreation
Michigan State University
vogtc@msu.edu

Mary Bohling

Extension Educator
Michigan Sea Grant
bohling@msu.edu

The Southern Lake Huron Assessment is evaluating potential opportunities for the coastal region of Michigan's Thumb. The project and this research summary were sponsored by Michigan Sea Grant College Program, M/PD-44, under: NA10OAR4170071 from National Sea Grant, NOAA, U.S. Department of Commerce, with funds from the State of Michigan.

This profile was researched and written by Tracy Rymph and Christine Vogt from MSU.



MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

SOUTHERN
LAKE
HURON
ASSESSMENT