



NEWS RELEASE

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Bicycle safety task force kicks off this week

Group spearheading the idea will lobby for laundry list of safety measures, access to hospital study

The City of Austin will launch its bicycle safety task force this week, some seven months after the League of Bicycling Voters (LOBV) proposed the step as a means of addressing safer cycling. LOBV led the campaign against last year's failed proposal for a mandatory bicycle helmet law for Austin adults.

"We're a bit perplexed as to why it has taken so long for the city to get moving with the task force, but at the same time, we appreciate the fact that city leaders are taking the issue seriously and putting a lot of effort into making it a high-profile group," said Rob D'Amico, LOBV president.

The task force is named "Street Smarts" and was formed by the COA Public Works Department with an invitation to potential task force members from Mayor Will Wynn and seven-time Tour de France winner, Lance Armstrong. The group—which is charged with coming up with a report for the City Council over the following six months—will kick off on Thursday, March 29, at 11 a.m. in the City Hall Boards and Commissions Room.

LOBV will be represented on the task force, as will other bicycling organizations, public safety officials and medical/health professionals. In all, some 39 individuals were invited to be members, although it's uncertain how many will participate.

"In the wake of another area bicyclist being killed by an automobile Friday, it's obvious that this task force is charged with an important duty—coming up with innovative ways to make bicycling safer while also promoting the idea that bicycling can be a safe and economical way to stay fit and get around Austin," D'Amico said.

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“It’s interesting that out of the hundreds of words used on the invitation and introduction letter from the mayor, not one was ‘safety,’ so LOBV is going to make sure that safety is at the forefront of everything this task force does, and we have a detailed list of recommendations for the task force to consider.”

Additionally, D’Amico said the LOBV will stress that the task force get immediate access to data from a current Seton Hospital study looking at bicycle injuries and correlating them with helmet use. That study began in October of 2006, but the bicycling community did not get an opportunity to review the study’s methodology or the questions that would be asked in each case. The study’s goal is to put a price tag head injuries resulting from bicycle accidents to reinforce the idea that the City Council should enact a mandatory helmet law for Austin adults. LOBV was instrumental in defeating the proposal last summer for an adult helmet law and believes such an ordinance is an ineffective and divisive way to address safety. (A current ordinance already mandates helmets for those 17 and under.)

“Aside from being shut out of the development of the hospital study, we also felt it was unfair to publicize figures for bicycle-related injuries without putting them in context by providing the figures for auto-related injuries,” D’Amico said. “The first step we’ll ask for on this task force is getting access to data and also finding out if the study is asking the right questions.”

Other top LOBV issues to be discussed on the task force include:

- * A PSA/Public Education campaign educating the entire community about bicycle safety and the benefits of bicycling
- * Public education campaigns directed to bicyclists/motorists on the rules of the road
- * A study of possible safety improvements for Loop 360
- * Review of proposals from the Texas Bicycle Coalition for a “safe-passing law”
- * Issues surrounding parking in bike lanes
- * Creation of bike lanes and other bikeways in new development
- * Giveaways for “blinkies” and bike lights
- * Bicycle safety training for task force members
- * Promoting bicycle safety training to the community
- * An examination of danger spots for bicycles
- * An examination of problems with road hazards and how to ensure they are fixed quickly
- * A review of enforcement issues for bicycles/motorists

The original LOBV request for a safety task force can be found at:

<http://www.lobv.org/TaskForceStudy.pdf>

The City of Austin invitation and introduction letter can be found at:

http://www.lobv.org/StreetSmarts_invite.pdf

<http://www.lobv.org/streetsmartsletter.pdf>