

Ride for Magnus: Ride for Your Life

Accelerate the Installation of Traffic Safety & Active Transportation Infrastructure

The Problem

Magnus White died on July 29, 2023, on Colorado Highway 119, a road connecting Boulder to Longmont that is popular with bicyclists. In 2012, state officials determined that this route was becoming increasingly dangerous for users and that a multi-use path should be built. Despite these safety concerns and Magnus' death, current plans show the route will not be completed until 2027, an unacceptable delay given user safety risks.

Highway 119 is not unique, and Magnus' death will not be the first unless we change the pace of building high-quality active transportation (bicyclist and pedestrian) infrastructure. The design of roads and access to biking and walking infrastructure *directly impact both safety and the number of people who decide to ride bikes and walk*. Unfortunately, in Colorado and across America, road engineers in past decades designed most roads to prioritize vehicle speed and throughput over safety, leaving our state with fast, dangerous roads where active transportation options have been treated as an afterthought.

Despite the safety benefits and growing public demand for changes to our built environment, the pace of change remains exceedingly slow. Too often, while auto and truck infrastructure projects race forward, authorities require years more time to plan, install, or build traffic safety improvements and active transportation infrastructure. Magnus and others are dying and being injured as a result of the delays.

Four factors that contribute to this delay include:

1. Public funding for the construction of major safety infrastructure falls far short of the need.
2. With few exceptions, such as Boulder County, many municipalities still lack active transportation plans, and transportation agencies fail to include stand-alone active transportation projects in their long-term transportation plans; at best, these projects are relegated to a footnote.
3. Unlike vehicle infrastructure projects, officials routinely strive to secure approval from a supermajority of the public before building active transportation infrastructure. Pushback from a vocal minority can delay or even terminate a project. Such was the case with the half-mile protected bike lane project on Marion Street Parkway in Denver. Despite the project's approval by city authorities and widespread public support, the project was delayed by five years due to a vocal minority. Amid the delays, 37-year-old Alexis Bounds, a mother of two, was killed on Marion Street on July 25, 2019, while riding her bike.
4. Transportation-related agencies chronically understaff active transportation teams, with most having only one or two full-time low or mid-level positions dedicated to this growing priority.

The Solution

Solutions to some of these problems are straightforward:

- Governments must adopt active transportation plans, and long-term comprehensive multimodal transportation plans must prioritize traffic safety and active transportation projects.
- Public engagement processes should have firm timelines that reflect the urgency to move quickly and allow residents to provide input to improve project design; community engagement must not be a referendum on essential infrastructure that saves lives.
- Increase the staff of active transportation teams to match the workload of implementing active transportation plans; ensure that leaders of these teams hold a senior leadership position and report to the agency director.

Finally, federal, state, and local governments must invest significantly more in active transportation, using existing and new revenue sources.

Reallocate Existing Sources of Revenue

1. Transportation agencies must establish a separate budget line item for traffic safety and active transportation projects. Many government agencies do not have such a line item, making it difficult, if not impossible, to monitor the level of investment.
2. Transfer funds into this budget line item and away from projects that conflict with traffic safety, active transportation, and climate goals, such as widening roads.
3. Restructure existing federal and state transportation and climate grant programs to allocate more funds for road safety improvement and active transportation projects. For example, the 2021 federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill represented a historic investment of \$108 billion; unfortunately, less than 5% (\$5 billion) was allocated to the five-year Safe Streets for All discretionary grant program. On average, grantees received approximately \$1.7 million each. To put this in perspective, Boulder County's Transportation Plan, which strongly focuses on biking, walking, public transit, and safety improvements, includes 61 projects totaling \$2 billion.

Create New Sources of Revenue

Most governments—especially state and local municipalities—must generate new revenue to fund traffic safety and active transportation projects. All revenue-generating options, such as service fees, fines, taxes, and asset monetization, should be carefully considered.

| Services Fees | Fines | Charges or Taxes | Asset Monetization |
|--|---|--|---|
| Governments raise revenues by charging for services such as public parking and toll roads. | Governments use fines to deter behavior at odds with the public good and generate revenue. | Governments levy charges and taxes on property owners, income, sales, and other transactions. | Governments can generate additional income through leases, joint ventures, and joint development agreements. |
| Examples: Allocate fees from public parking and toll roads to safety improvement and active transportation projects. | Examples: Increase fines for traffic violations (e.g., speeding, running red lights and stop signs, and parking) and allocate these funds to traffic safety and active transportation projects. | Examples: Introduce a new mill levy specifically to build an active transportation network; introduce a new vehicle registration charge based on vehicle size and weight and allocate these funds to traffic safety improvement projects; introduce congestion pricing and allocate these funds to building bike infrastructure. | Example: Create a public-private partnership to secure private and public funds for a multi-use path or bike park |

CASE STUDY: CITY OF DENVER

The City of Denver used multiple tactics to increase funding for safety improvement and active transportation projects:

- *The City created a designated line item in the general fund budget and began to increase the amount of general funds invested in safety improvement and active transportation projects from \$5 million in 2016 to over \$15 million today.*
- *In 2017, Denver voters approved a 10-year general obligation bond that allocated \$65 million to traffic safety improvements and active transportation projects.*
- *In 2020, Denver voters approved a .25% sales tax generating an estimated \$40 million per year to fund climate-related programs, including expanding access to active and public transportation.*
- *In 2021, Denver voters approved a 10-year general obligation bond that allocated \$63 million to safety improvement and active transportation projects.*
- *In 2022, fines for parking violations were increased by \$10 for most violations. The fine for parking in a bike lane increased from \$25 - \$65 dollars. The new fine structure generates approximately an additional \$6.4 million annually, which is invested in mobility and traffic safety projects.*
- *In 2023, Denver votes approved a new sidewalk fee that would generate roughly \$40 million annually and could be bonded to raise \$850 million, enough to upgrade and complete the City's entire sidewalk network in nine years.*

Finally, municipalities should explore opportunities to borrow money to build capital assets such as connected networks of multiuse paths, protected bike lanes, separated commuter bikeways, and sidewalks.

Creating a Proof Point: The North Foothills Parkway

With a bias towards urgency and action and to establish a replicable proof point that transformative active transportation projects can be built quickly, we are asking officials at all levels of government to prioritize the [North Foothills Bikeway](#) project in Boulder. This proposed separated multi-use path along U.S. Highway 36 between Boulder and Lyons, Colorado, will address acute traffic safety concerns and transform the region by creating a viable alternative to vehicle travel.

More specifically, we are asking our partners in federal, state, and local government and partners in the private sector to explore all options for funding this bikeway so that the first five miles are complete by 2027 and the entire eleven miles are complete by 2029.

