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Why Aren't More Women Serving on Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committees?
Mineta Transportation Institute's free report examines women's experiences, offers policy recommendations.

San Jose, Calif., April 26, 2012 – The Mineta Transportation Institute (transweb.sjsu.edu) has released its newest research report, [*An Examination of Women's Representation and Participation in Bicycle Advisory Committees in California*](#), which examines women's experiences serving on California bicycle advisory committees and bicycle/pedestrian advisory committees. In addition, it explores some barriers to involvement that women face. The peer-reviewed report offers several recommendations for increasing the number of women who serve on committees. Principal investigators were Hilary Nixon, PhD, and Cathy DeLuca, MUP. The free 116-page report is available for PDF download from transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1034.html.

“In the United States, women bicycle at significantly lower rates than men,” said Dr. Nixon. “One way to remedy this disparity is to ensure that women are engaged in bicycle planning and policy making. Bicycle advisory committees are one type of group that undertakes such work. These bodies are formed by governments and planning agencies to provide input on bicycle planning and policy decisions. No research has been conducted on women's representation and participation on these committees. This study attempts to fill that gap and to offer insight about how to attract more women.”

The study found that, in the spring of 2011, women made up 24% of the members on an average bicycle and bicycle/pedestrian advisory committees in California. This is significantly lower than the proportion of women in the general population, which is about 50%. Women made up approximately 19% of members on bicycle advisory committees and approximately 27% on combined bicycle and pedestrian committees.

In the summer of 2011, women from ten bicycle and bicycle/pedestrian advisory committees in California were interviewed in an effort to understand women's experiences on these committees. The interviews revealed that these women and their female colleagues were more likely than men to bring up women's issues, children's issues, and issues related to other user groups.

In addition, several aspects related to these particular committees might be unappealing to women, including the steep learning curve for new members, the high proportion of male members, and male members' unsupportive behavior, their tendency to dominate the floor, and their likelihood of having a technical background.

According to the report, several characteristics related to the women themselves might act as barriers to participation, including the need to feel knowledgeable before speaking, the lack of confidence in their contributions, and women's tendency to be responsible for child care.

The study also surveyed 565 women bicyclists in California to determine what barriers were keeping women from seeking membership on bicycle advisory committees. Unawareness of the committees did not seem to be a barrier: 67% of respondents were aware of their local committee. Instead, the top five barriers identified by the women included lack of time, lack of qualifications, lack of specific information about the committee, family and household responsibilities, and lack

of interest in politics. A number of survey respondents explicitly named the male-dominated nature of their local committee as a barrier to their involvement.

The report recommended several approaches to remedy the situation, including education about the committees so women feel more confident about their qualifications; targeted recruitment and outreach; and policy and procedural changes so, for example, committee chairs ensure that all members are heard from.

The complete report includes a literature review, an analysis of the gender composition of California committees; interviews with females serving on these committees; and a survey of women in bicycle clubs and advocacy programs. The report also includes more than 25 figures and tables to illustrate key points. It is available for free download at transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1034.html.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Hilary Nixon, PhD, is an associate professor of urban and regional planning at San José State University. Her research and teaching interests in environmental planning and policy focus on the relationship between environmental attitudes and behavior, particularly with respect to waste management and linkages between transportation and the environment. She earned a BA from the University of Rochester in environmental management and a PhD in planning, policy, and design from the University of California, Irvine.

Cathy DeLuca, MUP, holds a Master's degree from the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at San José State University. Her research and professional planning interests are in transportation planning with an emphasis on bicycle and pedestrian planning. She earned a BA from the University of Delaware in psychology.

ABOUT THE MINETA TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE

The Mineta Transportation Institute (MTI) conducts research, education, and information and technology transfer, focusing on multimodal surface transportation policy and management issues, especially as they relate to transit. MTI was established by Congress in 1991 as part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and was reauthorized under TEA-21 and again under SAFETEA-LU. The Institute has been funded by Congress through the US Department of Transportation's (DOT) Research and Innovative Technology Administration, by the California Legislature through the Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and by other public and private grants and donations, including grants from the US Department of Homeland Security. DOT selected MTI as a National Center of Excellence following competitions in 2002 and 2006. The internationally respected members of the MTI Board of Trustees represent all major surface transportation modes. MTI's focus on policy and management resulted from the Board's assessment of the transportation industry's unmet needs. That led directly to choosing the San José State University College of Business as the Institute's home. Visit transweb.sjsu.edu or Twitter @minetatrans.

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