

Activate Omaha works to fill bike-rack gaps

BY MICHAEL O'CONNOR WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Kelly Smith picks up groceries and runs other errands in Omaha on his bike, but often there's no rack to lock it on.

Activate Omaha, a nonprofit community health group, knows that's a problem and plans to fix it. The group wants to make sure there's enough racks now that high gas prices have made people more interested in riding.

The group will conduct a survey later this summer of Omaha employers, malls and stores to see where racks are needed. The organization also will check with parks and such destinations as Eppley Airfield and the Henry Doorly Zoo.

"It's to figure out where the gaps are," said Tammie Dodge, project manager for Activate Omaha.

The group intends to seek federal and private grants to pay for more racks in the city.

Dodge said her organization has heard from cyclists who say they often have to lock their bike to a tree or a light pole when racks aren't available.

Smith, a bicycle mechanic, has been commuting and running errands on his bike for years. He attaches a trailer that can carry 75 pounds behind his bike.

He said it's common for grocery stores and other businesses to lack bike racks. "We could do a lot better," he said.

If a store doesn't have a rack, he'll ask if he can pull his bike inside. The stores usually let him, but it's not convenient, he said. Greater availability of racks would encourage more people to run errands and commute on bikes, he said.

He said that in the past year he has noticed that more businesses, such as discount stores, have added racks.

Dodge said the popularity of Activate Omaha's bike route map is one sign that biking is becoming more popular.

The group printed 5,000 copies of the free map in May, and most were gone in several weeks. More will be printed.

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