

## Riding momentum, biking group looks to get funds



Spokane resident Cindy Green, who commutes to work by bike, heads home past parked cars along College Avenue on Thursday. Green is a leader in the SmartRoutes group, which is trying to capitalize on a non-motorized transportation boom in the region. The Spokesman-Review (CHRISTOPHER ANDERSON The Spokesman-Review )

### Rally scheduled

*What:* SmartRoutes rally to urge support for increased funding for bicycle and pedestrian trails and routes.

*When:* 1 p.m. Monday. *Where:* Downtown STA Plaza.

### On the Web

[Download a bike map from the Spokane Regional Transportation Council.](#)

*Other resources:* [spokefest.org](http://spokefest.org); [smartroutes.org](http://smartroutes.org); [biketoworkspokane.org](http://biketoworkspokane.org); [railtrails.org/index.html](http://railtrails.org/index.html)

## SmartRoutes aims to capitalize on cycling's popularity

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When the SpokeFest organization held its first community bicycle ride in September, 1,255 people showed up. More than 900 people signed up for the first Bike to Work week in Spokane last May.

That apparent two-wheel zeal has a group called SmartRoutes angling for a share of a potential \$5 billion federal fund to boost non-motorized transportation – otherwise known as walking and bicycling – for Spokane.

SmartRoutes' partners, which include the Spokane Regional Health District, business interests, activists and public officials, believe that promoting walking and biking can help reduce congestion and energy consumption, while shrinking waistlines.

They'll hold a rally Monday in downtown Spokane to build enthusiasm for bicycle and pedestrian routes.

"I would say we are having a bike boom locally," said City Councilman Richard Rush, who commutes by bike and recently won funding for a new bike/pedestrian coordinator to expand the use of non-motorized transportation.

The SmartRoutes 2010 Spokane Initiative is aiming for as much as \$50 million from the six-year, multibillion-dollar U.S. transportation budget, due for adoption in 2010. SmartRoutes wants Spokane to join a national trial on the value of expanding bicycle and pedestrian routes.

The Spokane region is already crisscrossed with bicycle and walking routes, including the Centennial Trail along the Spokane River from Riverside State Park to Coeur d'Alene.

A leading bicycle advocate is Cindy Green, manager for health promotion programs at the Spokane Regional Health District. She regularly bikes to work downtown from her West Central home and is involved through the health district in the SmartRoutes campaign.

"Our goal with SmartRoutes is to increase active transportation in our community," she said.

Green cites a study showing that half of all trips in the United States are three miles or less – a distance suitable for bicycling. A quarter of all trips are one mile or less, short enough for a comfortable walk.

The health district is one of 16 partners in the SmartRoutes project.

"Cyclists are good for drivers because we are one less car between them and their destination," said Barb Chamberlain, chairwoman of Bike to Work Spokane, another SmartRoutes partner.

The public is beginning to see bicycle routes as a necessity in a country dependent on foreign oil and plagued with traffic congestion on its arterials, she said. Replacing vehicles with bicycles and foot traffic also reduces the buildup of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Chamberlain said she's given up driving altogether. "When I can't bike, I take the bus," she said.

For people on low incomes, low-cost transportation is a must, and there's nothing cheaper than bicycling, unless it's walking, she said. At Monday's rally, groups of walkers will converge on the STA Plaza from the county Courthouse, City Hall, health district and Riverpoint campus.

Organizers have identified 18 construction projects, plus planning and education efforts, to enhance non-motorized travel.

The top priority is adding bike lanes in downtown Spokane on Spokane Falls Boulevard, Sherman Street, Fourth Avenue, Jefferson Street and Howard Street.

Other projects involve extending the Ben Burr Trail from Liberty Park to the Centennial Trail by constructing a new pedestrian bridge over a rail line; completing the Fish Lake Trail from downtown Spokane to Fish Lake, again with a bridge over rail lines; and construction of a 5-mile Millwood trail from Felts Field to the Spokane Valley Mall along a sewer easement.

A recent study in Spokane found that bicycles are used less here than in five other cities that conducted the same study. While walkers account for 8.5 percent of trips locally, bicycles are used in only 0.8 percent of trips. That compares with a rate of 1.4 percent for bicycle use in the other cities. Vehicles are used 85 percent of the time in Spokane, the study showed.

SmartRoutes seeks to triple "active" transportation trips in the area, saving 91 million vehicle miles a year – the equivalent of nine days of traffic.

It wants to add 15.2 miles of sidewalk; improve facilities in places such as Cheney, Airway Heights, Spokane Valley, the Gleneden neighborhood and Liberty Lake; and complete gaps and eliminate hazards on the Centennial Trail.

The report concludes that "Spokane is rich with opportunities" to convert abandoned or under-used rights-of-way to non-motorized transportation.