

Work on What You Love...

George G. Kinney, AICP, Director of Transportation Planning

The Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC) staff did exactly that on Friday, May 20 when they took to the streets of the Lehigh Valley for National Bike to Work Day. Becky Bradley, Executive Director, and George Kinney, Transportation Planning Director, began their two-wheel trek to work in west Allentown led by Scott Slingerland, Coalition for Appropriate Transportation (CAT)¹ Director, and his colleague Jennifer Swann.

The six-mile journey ended 45 minutes later at the LVPC office near the Lehigh Valley Airport. Fellow LVPC colleagues, Tracy Oscavich and Brian Hite, were also along for the ride. Geoff Reese, Environmental Planning Director, also participated in the event, commuting more than 11 miles from his home in Bethlehem Township. Eric McAfee, Community Planning Director, walked nearly two miles from his home in Hanover Township.



The month of May is National Bike Month, which includes an ever-expanding diversity of events in communities nationwide—but the biggest day of the month is Bike to Work Day. Approximately 40% of all trips in the Lehigh Valley are less than two miles, making bicycling a feasible and fun way to get to work. That said, the experience has to be enjoyable, convenient, and most importantly, safe.

Based on our collective Bike to Work experiences, the Lehigh Valley has a long way to go from both an education and infrastructure perspective. Despite ample rights-of-way in most areas, modern bikeway design was not available, including a lack of grade-separated bike trails, protected bike lanes and bicycle boulevards. This made the ride or walk uncomfortable in spots, particularly where corridors narrowed, where speed limits were higher and at bridge crossings.

The League of American Bicyclists' Bicycle-Friendly Business Program now lists more than 1,090 bicycle-friendly businesses in 49 states. That said, Rodale in Emmaus is the only Lehigh Valley Company on the Pennsylvania listing. The League also recognizes bicycle-friendly communities and bicycle-friendly universities for which there is no Lehigh Valley representation.

With increased interest in healthy, sustainable and economic transportation options, it is not surprising that, from 2008 to 2012, the number of bicycle commuters in the United States grew by more than 62%, which is the largest percentage increase of any commuting mode by far. In addition, the implications of active transportation

on economic development, public health, air quality, community design and real estate investment are undeniable.

It is time for the Lehigh Valley to take advantage of the opportunities presented by active transportation and to provide safe, alternative mode choices for all Lehigh Valley residents. Studies clearly show that when investments are made on bicycle infrastructure, residents and visitors begin to use bicycles at rates that far exceed the national average. This is regardless of climate, and in fact, Philadelphia led the way in 2014 with one of the highest commuting rates in the country.

As part of a long term action strategy to become bicycle-friendly, the LVPC has already set out to develop a regional sidewalk inventory to be followed by a regional bicycle and pedestrian plan. Let's work together as a region to make next year's Bike to Work Day an even more pleasurable experience and continue to improve our quality of life here in the Lehigh Valley.

¹ The Coalition for *Appropriate Transportation (CAT)* is a nonprofit organization that strives to improve mobility and the environment through education about safe pedestrian access, bicycling, public transportation and trail systems. Their focus on education is aimed at awareness for motorists, cyclists, pedestrians and such that drivers are conscious, calm and informed.