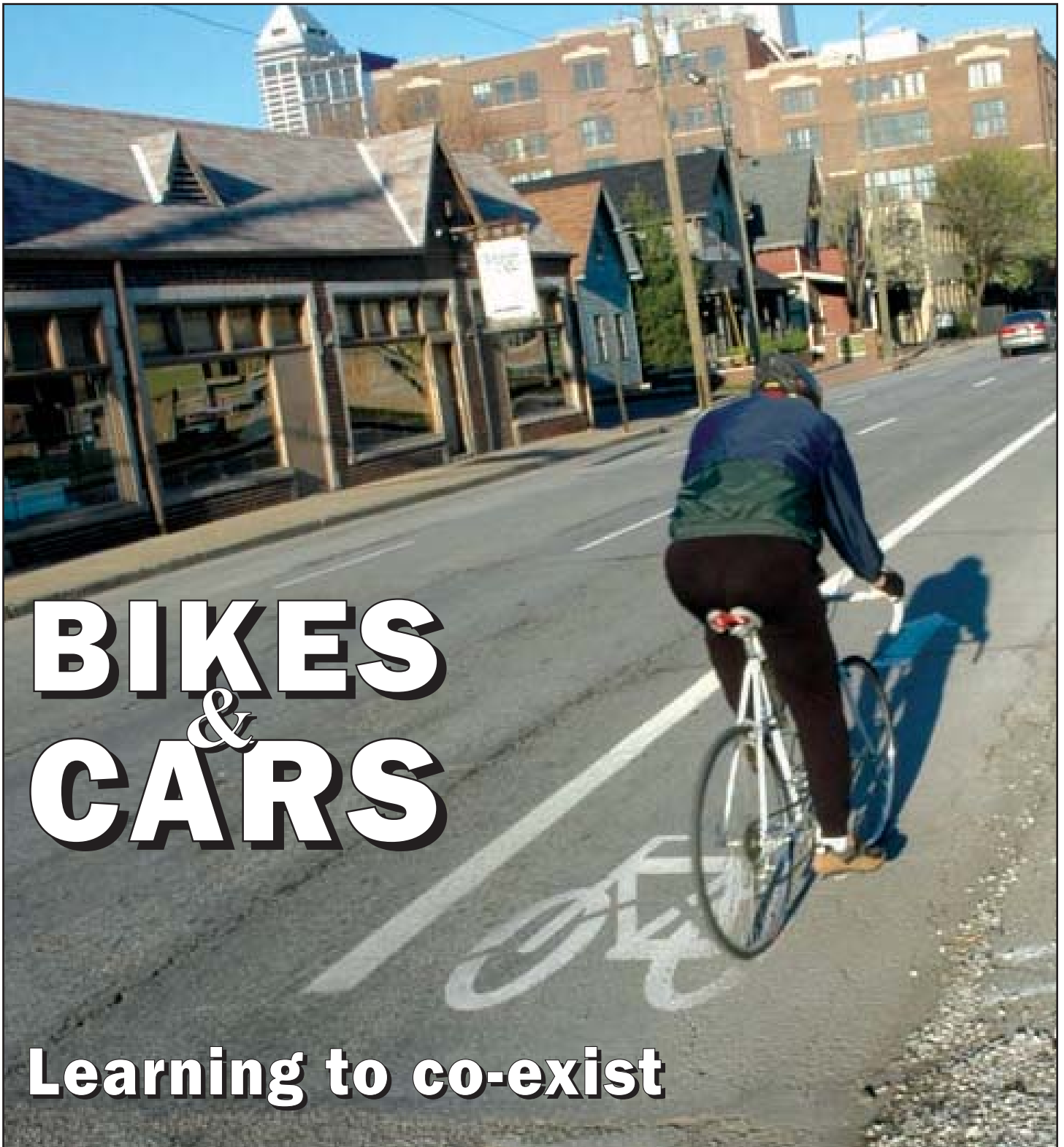


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ARCHIVES



**BIKES
&
CARS**

Learning to co-exist

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THE PLAN HAD BEEN IN THE works for over a year, this idea of creating bicycle lanes on Michigan and New York streets from the White River east through most of the city's Eastside.

For well over a year – but suddenly they were here, and motorists commuting to and from Downtown suddenly found themselves in a different environment. It is an environment in which the car is no longer king, but merely a knight expected to share the road with other knights.

Knights on bicycles.

No longer are Michigan and New York streets, as they ripple through Lockerbie Square and then farther east, three- and four-lane high-speed thoroughfares. Vehicular lanes now share the curb-to-curb right-of-way with a bicycle lane, and – just as importantly – with full-time parking lanes.

Call this, as a result, the spring and summer of learned co-existence. Motorists have to share; bicyclists have to play by the rules.

The most frequent early question, from motorists, is this: How do I turn right, legally, when a bicycle lane is between my driving lane and the right-turn lane? And, if the curbside lane is now a full-time parking lane (as evidenced by that new, solid white line), can I use it for travel if there are no parked cars in the block?

The answer to the first question is easy, said Andy Lutz of the Department of Public Works, and project manager for the bicycle lane project. “Motorists should yield to bicycles, whenever they are present,” he said. “Use your turn signal, look in the rear-view mirror and over the shoulder.”

Motorists will be faced with a decision, he observed: Speed up to create some clearance between the vehicle and the bicycle, or slow down. Lutz said motorists should do the latter: Slow down.

“Some try to speed up, but they misjudge the biker’s speed,” said Lutz, who noted that some cyclists can hit 25 miles per hour on their bicycles.

The answer to the second question, regarding the parking lane: Yes, motorists can use that lane, said Officer Tony Brown, community policing officer for the Downtown District of the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Dept. In fact, Brown said, motorists turning left or right should use the curbside lane (when no cars are parked here) because the law requires them to move into the farthest possible lane when turning.



▲ Yes, the outer lanes (indicated by the yellow arrows) are now full-time parking lanes – but motorists can (and, in fact, should) use them for left- and right-hand turns, according to police. The marked bicycle lane is the second lane from the right curb (red arrow).



▲ More signs are planned along the new bicycle route on Michigan and New York streets, to help motorists understand how to deal with the bicyclists, and when to yield.

Work on the bicycle lanes was not complete as of this writing in mid-April. Lutz explained that more pavement markings are planned to help guide motorists and bicyclists through the new alignment.

At least one block of the Michigan Street bicycle route is incomplete: the 400 block, between the Athenaeum and Barton Towers. That block will have the bicycle lane soon – but not until the parking configuration on the north side of the street has been changed. The plan is this: The

angled spaces will be “reverse-angled,” with the parking slots facing away from oncoming traffic. That will require motorists to back into the spaces – but will leave them facing outward when they exit their parking spaces.

As a result, Lutz explained, motorists will be less likely to pull out in front of oncoming cyclists, since they will be facing outward, with a much larger field of vision. This system has proven effective in cities such as Portland, Ore., where bicycling is much more common.

Lutz said the parking configuration cannot be changed until a city ordinance is approved. He said that change, along with a package of parking changes (such as the elimination of rush-hour restrictions) is moving through the required City-County Council channels. He expected that process to be completed within a few weeks.

(One pleasant side effect of the bicycle-lane program, for Lockerbie residents, is the added parking on New York and

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Michigan streets, now that the rush-hour restrictions have been eliminated. In blocks where they are no residences, there is a likelihood that parking meters will be installed; city officials are watching to see if Downtown office workers begin to capitalize on those now-free spaces, such as those on the south side of the 300 and 400 blocks of Michigan Street.)

Lutz also explained that the office of Mayor Greg Ballard is coordinating a major public relations campaign, as part of the Indianapolis Bicycle Facility Improvement Program. Information aimed at helping motorists and bicyclists understand the new system will be included in newspaper advertisements and radio spots, as well as on the governmental cable television stations, and on posters and flyers.

And while much of the focus might be on how motorists behave, it is equally important that cyclists also understand that – as users of a public right-of-way – they must follow the same rules as motorists.

BICYCLISTS SHOULD:

- Obey all traffic rules, as if they were driving a car – including traffic signals. Cyclists can be ticketed for running red lights.
- Ride *with* traffic (and, especially, *not* the wrong way on one-way streets).
- Allow four feet between themselves and parked cars, to avoid being struck by an opening door.
- Have a bell to announce their presence (it's a state law, actually).
- Have a front headlight and rear taillight, if they are riding a half-hour after sunset or a half-hour before sunrise (another state law). Bicyclists riding at night should also wear reflective clothing.
- Wear a helmet.
- Use hand signals to indicate turns and stops.
- Yield the right-of-way to pedestrians.

MOTORISTS SHOULD:

- Pass bicyclists with care, by slowing down and leaving at least three feet of clearance while passing.
- Not honk their horn, which can startle cyclists and result in an accident.
- Yield to bicyclists when turning, just as they would any other vehicle. Always assume bicyclists are traveling straight, unless they signal otherwise.
- Be careful to check the rear- and side-view mirrors for oncoming bicyclists when leaving a parked vehicle. ■



▲ In addition to the new bicycle lanes, eager riders also have the first leg of the Indianapolis Cultural Trail. This rider, Maddie Brooks, is eagerly awaiting more of the trail to ride.