# Trip Report: State College PA, September 11, 2009

by Frank Gmeindl & Bill Austin

See photos at <http://s935.photobucket.com/albums/ad193/cyclm8/State_College/?albumview=slideshow>

On 9/11, a day when the DA proclaimed, “Morgantown named 19th best college town in the nation”, Frank Gmeindl and Bill Austin traveled to the 2nd best college town, State College Pennsylvania to review their bike lanes and bicycle parking.

## Participants

* Frank Gmeindl - Chairman of the Morgantown Municipal Bicycle Board
* Bill Austin - Director Greater Morgantown Metropolitan Planning Organization
* Chuck Anderson - President of the Centre County Bicycle Coalition, PSU geology professor, League of American Bicyclists Certified Bicycling instructor.
* Tom Flynn – PSU Landscape Architect, WVU grad. Developed PSU comprehensive bicycle plan.
* Mark Whitfield – State College Public Works Director. Developed State College comprehensive bicycle plan. Commutes to work by bike.

## State College compared with Morgantown

State College has a population of approximately 40K students and 40K permanent residents, similar to Morgantown. However, most of State College appears to have been recently constructed and therefore appears to be newer and more prosperous. Penn State University seems to be a more prominent part of the city. State College does not have Morgantown’s steep hills and most of the streets are much wider.

## Agenda

We met Chuck and walked a bit around downtown on our way to lunch with Tom at the Corner restaurant.

After lunch, we walked the few blocks to the Public Works building where Mark joined us for two hours while we reviewed plans and maps for bicycle routes, lanes and paths and discussed parking.

Then, Chuck gave Frank and Bill a tour of downtown, the suburbs and a little bit of the campus to show us planned bike lane locations, current bike paths, current bike routes and bicycle parking.

## Bicycle Use

It rained continuously while we were there. Despite the rain, everywhere we looked around town and on campus, people were riding bikes. State College has 6 bike shops. Most cyclists we saw were student age. Most were riding in everyday clothes and without helmets. Downtown, most cyclists were riding on the streets in the same direction as traffic and outside of the door zone. We saw a few cyclists riding on sidewalks. Most of the bike paths and bike routes are multi-use. In some cases, the bike paths were essentially sidewalks with many traffic crossings.

## Plans

PSU has a bicycle master plan http://www.opp.psu.edu/about-opp/divisions/cpd/images/Bicycle%20Master%20Plan.pdf that is essentially a map of the campus and surrounding area showing existing roadways, bike routes, bike lanes and shared pathways. The plan also shows 17 proposed route improvements and 4 proposed covered bike parking areas. The route improvements include 2 climbing lanes (Burrowes Road and Shortlidge Road), 1 bike lane, 3 bike paths, and other improvements including a greenway, 6 connectors and a by-pass.

In 2008, State College hired a consultant to complete a two part Comprehensive Pedestrian and Bicycle Program for the Borough. Part I provides background information on pedestrian safety. It identifies the areas of concern based upon crash analysis techniques, and it provides recommendations to improve safety at the top five sites based on a detailed engineering study. Part II of the Comprehensive Pedestrian and Bicycle program includes the development of a comprehensive educational, engineering, and enforcement program to address pedestrian and bicycle safety in the Borough.

The Borough of State College capital improvement plan (<http://www.statecollegepa.us/DocumentView.aspx?DID=1665>) pp. 45-48 that includes plans for 2 bike lanes (striping $500), additional downtown bike racks ($7,000) and construction of a bike path connector ($30,000). The plan also includes $100/year for bike lane striping repainting and $50/mile/snowfall for bike path snow removal!

## Bike Lanes

State College does not have Morgantown’s steep hills and most of the streets are much wider. Our main reason for travelling to State College was to observe the climbing lane bike lane that we understood from their web site was installed and operational. We learned that State College is actually planning to put climbing side bike lanes on three streets: S. Allen St., Waupelani Dr. and Sparks St. Unfortunately, the lanes have only been designed and haven’t been installed yet. We drove over those two streets. Their situation is quite different from any in Morgantown. Both streets are very wide: 32 feet with 16 foot lanes. The speed limit is 25 mph. When I questioned why they want to install bike lanes when the lanes are plenty wide for bicycles and motor vehicles to travel safely side by side, Mark said they were more for traffic calming and to raise awareness that bicycles would be on those roads. To accommodate bicycles on certain narrower streets, the Public Works Dept. has already eliminated on-street parking. The Public Works Dept. plans to install “sharrows” (shared lane markings) using a stencil. They will paint them rather than use retro-reflective vinyl that is melted into the asphalt. Mark was not sure of where exactly they will be installed or the principles for selecting locations for installation.

## Bike Paths

Penn State has numerous segregated 10-foot wide paved bike paths that connect high-density campus locations such as multi-family dwellings.

## Bicycle Parking

Bicycles are parked everywhere in State College. Most official bike racks are heavily used. Bikes are also locked to trash cans, trees, light poles and parking meters. In State College, parking meters are attached to the light poles. Apparently, cyclists park their bicycles as close as they can to their destination.

The parking garages have bicycle racks that are hardly used. Even though the parking garages are only a few blocks from main street they are apparently far enough away that cyclists don’t use the bike racks in them.

State College has approximately 100 post-and-loop bicycle racks. They are very simple: loop welded to post. The Borough has them manufactured by Dumar in Carlyle PA.

They also have 12-18 “Cora” racks .

State College also has a bike corral in arguably the premier parking spot in town at the corner of College Ave. and Allen St. right beside the front entrance of The Corner Room restaurant, a State College landmark. Mike Desmond, the owner of the Corner Room loves the corral and bike racks.

The Borough removes the corral in the winter to ease snowplowing. The corral bollards are removable. The bike corral has two Cora racks. The long range plan is to elevate the corral to the same grade as the sidewalk so that it can be permanent. The Borough has the Cora racks manufactured by Spicer Welding in Bellefonte PA at a cost of $650/each for 5 or more. The racks are also somewhat easily removable.

Mark Whitfield advised only putting bike racks where they will be used. In one case, they installed a post-and-loop rack in front of an upscale ladies clothing store and the owner asked them to remove it, which they did. On the other hand, they currently have merchants who operate businesses such as restaurants cyclists are more likely to frequent requesting racks in front of their stores.

## Bicycle Parking Enforcement

Parking at racks on the Burough streets is limited to 72 hours. Parking at the racks in the parking garages is limited to 30 days. The police department controls the bike parking. When a bicycle is observed to have been parked longer than the maximum allowed time, an officer tags the bike with a tag indicating the date and time. If the bike is not removed in a reasonable time, the police cut the lock and impound the bike.

Students on campus are required to register their bikes. Easy on-line registrations is available at the PSU Transportation Services web site. Student auxiliary to the campus police patrol bicycle parking on campus. Overnight parking is not allowed outside of classroom buildings. Police may impound a bicycle if they observe that it is parked repeatedly overnight. Outside of residences a bicycle can be left parked for the whole year. The police do not have space to store impounded bicycles. They have an annual auction of impounded bicycles. The proceeds are used to support the patrolling effort.

## Conclusions

State College has established very impressive bicycle parking in just a few years and they seem to have a logical plan to keep improving it. Through cooperation between the City and the University they seem to be able to quickly establish bike routes, bike lanes and bike paths. However, their planning and analysis of these facilities doesn’t appear to be very rigorous. On the other hand, they seem to have good communication among key stakeholders to ensure consensus before changing the infrastructure and they seem to be willing to quickly rework mistakes when they make them. Having experienced cyclists leading facility design, installation and maintenance ensures that the facilities meet the needs of cyclists. The fact that these experienced cyclists are also leaders in the community, good communicators and good consensus builders also ensures that the community understands and is committed to the facilities.

State College has experienced cyclists in key Borough and University positions. The Public Works Director who commutes to work by bike is enthusiastic about making State College a bicycle friendly community. He is very experienced and has a good understanding of bicyclist needs as well as the needs in his Borough. Most of his bicycle facility accomplishments did not require PennDOT approval. When PennDOT must be involved they appear to be very cooperative.

The PSU Landscape Architect who is also a cyclist developed the PSU bicycle master plan and got buy-in from all key stakeholders. Since the roadways on campus are private, he can implement the master plan without requiring PennDOT or Borough approval.

Most State College cyclists don’t lock their bikes properly: they don’t lock both wheels and frame to rack.

Cora racks don’t seem like the greatest idea. PSU has standardized on Cora racks. Locking the frame and both wheels to it seems difficult. They appear to damage head tubes and forks. (On the University of Pittsburgh campus, practically everywhere you look, you see Cora racks. Some locked bikes have missing wheels.)

Post-and-loop racks seem to work well in the right locations but have limited capacity for high use locations.

The rationale and justification for bike lanes and bike paths, particularly their impact on cyclist safety are not clear. The University has installed numerous bike paths and has plans for bike lanes and more bike paths. The Borough plans to install additional bike lanes for traffic calming and to raise awareness of bicycles. Bicycling is obviously far more prevalent in State College than in Morgantown and these facilities will probably get more people cycling. Whether they will decrease the crash rate/mile ridden still needs to be determined.