

# Broward plans bike-friendly transformation

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**B**roward County, where cars are king, is about to be transformed.

The county plans to expand its bike lane network by 91 miles in a dozen cities over the next five years, officials announced Tuesday. The current system includes 150 miles of bike lanes plus another 75 miles of roads with wider outside lanes and paved shoulders that can accommodate bikes.

The new \$100 million project will add buffered bike lanes, which are separated from travel lanes, in some stretches, with standard bike lanes adjacent to cars in other stretches. Still, gaps will continue to exist on some roads.

None of the stretches of roads targeted have any bike lanes now, so the projects are seen as a huge safety improvement. Existing travel lanes will be narrowed from 11 to 12 feet to 10 feet in order to accommodate the bike lanes.

In the first phase of construction, \$15 million will be spent on projects that will get built over the next three years. They include:

- Adding bike lanes on a 6-mile stretch of 31<sup>st</sup> Avenue from Riverland Road to Commercial Boulevard. The road passes through portions of Fort Lauderdale, Lauderdale Lakes, Lauderhill and Oakland Park.
- Adding bike lanes on Pine Island Road from State Road 84 to Broward Boulevard in Plantation.
- Building sidewalks on nearly three dozen streets in Fort Lauderdale, Hollywood, Lauderdale Lakes, Lauderhill, Pembroke Pines and Plantation.

Officials kicked off the program Tuesday in Hollywood, where a six-block stretch of Sheridan Street between 66th and 72nd avenues will get sidewalks on the south side of the street.

A mix of federal, state, county and local funds are being used to pay for the work.

"The first projects are low hanging fruit because they can be built quickly and easily," said bike and pedestrian coordinator Ricardo Gutierrez.

Design on the next phase of projects, which are bigger and involve more construction, will begin later this year.

Among those projects:

- In Hollywood, a stretch of Hollywood Boulevard from City Hall to Dixie Highway will get larger sidewalks. Angled parking will be replaced with parallel parking. And 5-foot bike lanes in each direction will have a 3-foot buffer from cars.

- In Sunrise, the four-lane Sunset Strip will lose a lane in each direction between Northwest 72nd Avenue and Northwest 19th Street to accommodate eight-foot sidewalks and buffered bike lanes.

In cases where lanes are reduced, Gutierrez said planners will conduct traffic studies to make sure congestion isn't worsened.

"We are trying to make sure our roads are built for all users," he said.

For almost two decades, national safety advocate groups such as the Washington D.C.-based think tank Transportation for America have listed the South Florida region -- from Miami to West Palm Beach -- as among the nation's most dangerous for pedestrians. In 2011, the most recent listing, it ranked fourth. Officials hope the planned enhancements can stop that trend.

Michael DeLucca, president and CEO of the Broward Regional Health Planning Council, said the projects will help people lead healthier lifestyles by giving them more options to bike or walk.

"There is a lot of money spent on chronic conditions and health-related issues," DeLucca said. "We need to get people more active."

The projects are part of what's called Complete Streets, a national program that rebuilds or retrofits roads to make it easier for people to cross the street and walk to shops, ride their bikes to work or catch a bus.

Evidence of Complete Streets can be found on Sistrunk Boulevard, which was recently redesigned with narrower lanes and widened sidewalks. Even redeveloped stretches of U.S. 1 north of Broward Boulevard boast wider sidewalks, a sign of what's to come in the rest of the neighborhood.

But the system will not be perfect, even after the massive investment.

Hollywood Commissioner Dick Blattner said officials will continue pushing to complete gaps in bike lanes and sidewalks that remain beyond the next five years.

"This has to be a complete Complete Streets project. We have to have linkages. We have to be able to get from Hollywood to Deerfield Beach," Blattner said. "It may take a while and you may have to meander a bit. But if it's going to be successful, those gaps have to be filled."

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