

IndyCog: Fueling The Civilian Bicycle Revolution
Local bicycle advocacy group gives bikes a place in Indy
By: Anna Turner

It's late afternoon, and the last bits of sunlight are gracing the back patio of Chatham Tap, a local pub on Mass Ave that sits alongside the Indianapolis Cultural Trail. The whirring of gears, cranking of pedals, and grinding of chains of passing bikes is a perfect backdrop for my round of pints with Kevin Whited, Jamison Hutchins, Benjamin Hunt and Molly Trueblood, all IndyCog board members and bicycle enthusiasts.

It isn't hard to tell that they prefer two wheels to four: Jamison's right pant leg is tucked into his sock. Kevin's face is freckled and weathered, a rugged look that he gets from miles of open road bicycling. Benjamin's curly hair is still in the shape of a helmet. Molly's cross-strap backpack and casual attire suggest an active lifestyle. These four individuals are poster children for IndyCog and, more importantly, the transformative effect this not-for-profit organization is having on Indianapolis' bicycle revolution.

From Blog to Cog

IndyCog started out as a blog in fall 2009, written by a few local bicycle riders that wanted to spread the word to fellow bikers about what was going on around Indy in terms of bicycle transportation.

By February 2010, IndyCog had gone from a blog to an advocacy group for bicycle users and bicycle safety. Hutchins aimed to set up a Tweed Ride last June, or a bike ride in which everyone wore tweed. Kind of like a Sherlock Holmes theme party on wheels.

Not wanting to take on too much too soon, they pushed the tweed idea aside in favor of just having a general ride. "We wanted to do two things with the ride," Hutchins said. "Let people know what IndyCog is, and show people how to get around using a bike — break down that barrier of thinking that in order to ride a bicycle you have to be all geared up in spandex."

IndyCog's first ride was a success. An estimated 120 people showed up, a far cry from the 40 they expected, and the group started their ride at Earth House, ending at Union Jack's Pub in Broad Ripple. They stopped by local businesses, including Joe's Cycles in fountain squares, and also went to the bike rodeo at The Project School, an event where old and used bicycles are broken down and recycled to make new bikes.

IndyCog continued to grow, and in September 2010 hosted Two Wheels One City. With help from local businesses like Sun King Brewery (who donated all the event's beer) and City Market (they offered to host the event in their outdoor plaza), Two Wheels One City was a successful celebration of bicycles in Indianapolis.

Following the success of Two Wheels One City was the long-awaited Tweed Ride. It was the highlight of October 2010 for IndyCog, who was inching more and more into the public spotlight with each event they held.

"We had a meeting where we sat down and asked ourselves, 'what have we actually done?'" Hunt said. "We realized we actually had done a lot of things, and we were making an impact."

This realization inspired IndyCog to establish a solid mission statement and articulate their vision. The members knew what their vision was, but they had never formally put it to paper. According to IndyCog's website, "INDYCOG envisions bicycling as a preferred mode of transportation and recreation in the City of Indianapolis. Our collaborations with local businesses, nonprofit organizations, and local government create a network of bicycle infrastructure that is safe, convenient and enjoyable for the whole community."

Whited put it into layman's terms, saying, "Our goal is educate and advocate for bicycle education and transportation." IndyCog puts their words into action not only by being active bike riders, but through community involvement at various levels.

Making Indy Cognizant of IndyCog

IndyCog members are all volunteers, not just with IndyCog but with other organizations. "We all work as volunteers," Whited said. "We're hoping to serve as an example for other bicycle organizations. Hopefully they'll start popping up and doing stuff themselves."

Hunt already sees this kind of copy-cattling on the individual level. "I've been riding my bike for years now," Hunt said. "And every year I see more and more people on their bikes. It shows that, as a city, we're making progress."

This progress is a good start, but it takes more than just a few civilians strapping on a helmet to bring bicycle transportation to the forefront of a city's infrastructure.

"Once we have a stronger infrastructure with more facilities, more trail networks more bike racks, etc., people are going to feel more comfortable riding their bikes," Hunt said. "And people have to realize that riding your bike is enjoyable—it's not just a practical way to get places."

Hutchins agrees with this point, saying that people forget how fun riding a bike is. The bicycle movement is so focused on the financial, environmental, social, and health benefits of bicycles that they forget to mention it's really, really fun.

"Remember why you rode a bicycle when you were young? Because it was freedom, it was fun, and it still is fun," Hutchins said. "I look forward to riding my bike every day."

IndyCog has a huge opportunity to spread this sentiment of bicycle enjoyment with May being national Bike Month. This is the first year IndyCog will officially participate in the nationwide bicycle recognition event, as this is the first year they have funding to host and/or help with events like National Bike to Work Day, Courteous Mass Critical Manners, NeXT Ride, the second Two Wheels One City, and more.

This source of funding comes from the current mayoral administration's pro-bike agenda. With the upcoming election looming, IndyCog members have been working to codify a draft of a bike plan for Indianapolis. "The political reality is that if Mayor Ballard loses the next election, the push behind the bike movement could be lost," Hutchins said. "We want to have a codified plan in place to set a path for us."

Indianapolis has a long way to go before bicycles become a preferred method of transportation, but IndyCog has a lot of good ideas and good energy to make that long way easier, more enjoyable, and less daunting.

"People have to realize that Indianapolis is a perfect city for bicycling: it's flat, it's on a grid, it's easy to get places..." Hutchins said. "We really need to focus on getting

more and more people out there riding, because the more bicycles we have out there, that not only raises a demand, but it also builds that awareness.” IndyCog knows that with an increased awareness comes and increased demand for education. “As more people are getting out and riding, I see a need for education,” Trueblood said. “Education is needed both for riders and also for the motorists.” As we drain the last drops from our Chatham pints, the IndyCog members start chatting about mutual friends and shared memories I know nothing about. I gather my things, thank them for the interview, and walk back to my car, thinking it would have been so much more appropriate for me to ride a bike to this interview.



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