

## Bike Racks on Buses: Accelerate program implementation for METRO buses

Since July 2000, Houston METRO has had access to federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funding to cover 80% of the cost of installing bike racks on all METRO buses. However, these **CMAQ dollars expire in August 2006**.

METRO currently plans to implement bike racks in FY2008 (calendar 2009) as part of the MetroSolutions program. We would like METRO to **accelerate implementation into fiscal 2006** to take advantage of the existing federal dollars and begin serving Houstonians sooner than later. We would also like your support of this program.

### Why does Houston need bike racks on buses?

The combination of bikes and buses will take Houstonians to more destinations than either one can alone. Bike racks on buses **encourage genuinely multi-modal trips** and will **help reduce automobile dependence** in Harris County. Bike racks:

- Connect existing bus routes to more destinations by making long walks easy
- Allow METRO to serve transit users at the edge of the service area and beyond
- Support cyclists caught by inclement weather or mechanical problems
- Improve safety by allowing cyclists to travel by bus through hazardous traffic areas
- Help Houston meet air quality goals by increasing use of both transit and cycling

### Reference photos of bike racks in service on Los Angeles local buses



**Houston's peer cities have already implemented bike racks on buses**

% buses with racks	15 largest US cities	Southern or western car-oriented cities
> 90%	Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, Dallas, Washington DC, Atlanta, San Francisco, Phoenix, Seattle	San Diego, Tampa, Denver, San Jose, San Antonio, Orlando, Las Vegas, Charlotte, New Orleans,
>50 %	Miami	Miami, Austin
in process	Boston	Kansas City, Memphis

*Note: Cities in each category are listed from largest population to smallest.*

*Sources:*

*(March 2006). David Loutzenheiser's review of APTA 2005 Vehicle Survey and transit agency websites.*

*(April 2000). US Census Population by Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).*

Of the 15 largest U.S. metropolitan areas, New York and Detroit are the only ones to prohibit bikes on buses. At 18.3 million population and growing, New York actually has *too many* pedestrians to support bikes on buses. It's not clear why Detroit prohibits bikes, but Detroit is hardly a good model of smart urban growth.

Houston should join the vast ranks of cities supporting bicycle-transit commuting.

**Adding bike rack service is consistent with METRO's mission**

METRO's current **top priority is increasing ridership**. Bike racks will increase ridership because they effectively:

- Expand the transit service area,
- Attract new riders to transit, and
- Increase use of transit by existing customers.

In addition, bike racks will improve METRO's image as an all-around "mobility" agency and promote healthy lifestyle options.

**Evidence of existing unmet demand is apparent in many parts of Houston**





Everyday in Houston, someone takes their bike on the train, or locks their bike at a bus stop, transit center, or park and ride to make transit part of their multi-modal trip.

#### **Why should we implement racks now instead of later?**

There are many reasons this program is more important than ever before. We can:

- Leverage \$1.2 million in federal CMAQ grant funds available now, already approved by H-GAC's Transportation Policy Council and already programmed in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). This opportunity expires in August.
- Leverage H-GAC investments underway for special bicycle-pedestrian districts around Houston in Third Ward, Gulfton, Neartown-Montrose, etc.
- Help Houstonians keep commuting costs down despite the rising price of gasoline
- Serve the recent influx of transit-dependent residents post Katrina and Rita

#### **How much will it cost?**

METRO estimates that installing bike racks on 1,500 buses will require \$300,000 in local matching funds with \$1.2 million in federal CMAQ dollars, for a total of \$1.5 million.

#### **What are the challenges to implementation?**

In 1997, METRO started an extremely limited, 13-month pilot program that did not work well for either the bicycling community or the transit agency:

- METRO installed bike racks on a single route: #26/27 Inner/Outer Loop crosstown
- The single route made bus scheduling extremely difficult for the agency, requiring heroic efforts to attempt to keep the buses with racks assigned to the target route
- The pilot was of limited utility to cyclists because racks were neither available consistently on the one route, nor available at all to the other places a rider would go. Further, the short time frame did not allow for widespread recognition and use.

METRO remains concerned over the **maintenance impacts of racks**, especially related to towing disabled buses and washing the fronts of buses manually. However, in the last 18 months, there are new quick-release racks on the market that should help address these concerns.

We would like to work together with the City of Houston, Harris County, and METRO to **identify constructive solutions** to these issues and **ensure successful implementation** of the bike rack program.

#### **Who supports this program?**

In addition to BikeHouston and Citizens' Transportation Coalition, METRO's bike rack program is supported by the Greater Houston Partnership, the Quality of Life Coalition, the Texas Bicycle Coalition, REI, and others.

This photo from Houston METRO's own pilot program in 1997-98 shows a bike on a #50 Heights bus. We would love to see racks on Heights buses, as well as the rest of Houston's local buses, and soon.



Your support can help make this goal a reality.

Thank you for considering our ideas. BikeHouston and CTC leaders **would like to meet with the City, County, and METRO** senior management to discuss this program. Together we can identify constructive solutions to solve any implementation challenges. We look forward to continuing this dialogue.

Thanks and best regards,

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#### **About BikeHouston and CTC**

BikeHouston (<http://bikehouston.org>) is committed to **promoting safe bicycling** and to improving the quality of life in the Houston area. The Citizens' Transportation Coalition (<http://ctchouston.org>) works to ensure that residents and community leaders exercise their **voice in transportation decisions** that affect neighborhoods. Both organizations are committed to forming broad coalitions with groups and individuals to work shared goals.