

## BIKE SAN GABRIEL VALLEY

### Picking Up Wind by Working Together



It's a nice day and you want to get some exercise, so you dust off the old bike to do a few errands. You're cruising along, and then two miles in, you hit the city limits. No more bike lane. Just lots and lots of cars. What now?

Or you'd like to encourage your kid to ride her bike to school, but you know she'd have to cross 3 lanes of traffic to make a left turn. What now?

Until residents, community organizations and city officials started working together to change things, this was the question asked by many residents of El Monte, South El Monte, Baldwin Park, San Gabriel, and Monterey Park, all small cities in Los Angeles County. Only two of these

cities had a single bike lane. Residents were faced with increased rates of childhood obesity, decreased air quality, and streets clogged with cars.

"We knew promoting bicycle riding could be a way to work on all of these issues at once," says Javier Hernandez of the organization Bike San Gabriel Valley.

Organizers knew something else – that working small city by small city was not enough. Each of these cities was strapped for resources and could devote scant staff time to planning and engineering new bike lanes. And an uncoordinated system would defeat the

purpose of making bicycling a viable mode of transportation for the region.

"Typically, cities don't work together on this type of project," explains Javier. "So our work was to facilitate coordination between the cities, and make it clear that none of them had the burden of managing an entire project."

With funding from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Bike San Gabriel Valley and local nonprofit Day One worked with each of the five cities to pass resolutions endorsing the San Gabriel Valley Regional Bicycle Plan. Now, the planning process is underway, and several of the cities are actively engaged in seeking funds for bike infrastructure projects.

Javier attributes part of the project's success to the relationships he was able to make through California Convergence. "The whole project picked up wind through networking," says Javier. "The connections we were provided through the network led to opportunities for us to help educate local community members, city staffers, and elected officials."

One of Javier's earliest converts was Marlen Garcia, then a member of the Baldwin Park City Council. "I hadn't been on a bike in years," says Marlen, "but Bike San Gabriel Valley invited me to go out one Saturday. That's when I realized how scary it can be to cross three lanes of traffic. It was truly an eye opener, and it made me realize why there need to be bike lanes throughout the city."

Thankfully, Marlen was not deterred by her first experience back on a bike. Now she rides her bike to work, and she rides it once a week along the San Gabriel River – something she encourages others to do. "Bike paths along the Rio Hondo and San Gabriel rivers were created many decades ago," explains Javier, "but many people don't know how to access them or don't even know they exist."

To remedy this, Bike San Gabriel Valley now holds monthly rides along the San Gabriel River, with Marlen an active participant. A long term goal is to create useable east-west connections to enable residents to access the river bike paths for everyday use. "Biking for me has become a way

I get to work, and also a way I relax and enjoy nature," says Marlen. "I want it for everyone else too. I want people to see that we have such a beautiful landscape here and it's right in our backyard."



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