



Renewable Communities

Massachusetts cities and towns leading the way to 100% renewable energy

Cambridge: Cycling Safety Ordinance

Cambridge has long been at the cutting edge of municipal efforts to fight climate change and protect the environment. In 2015, the city released a plan to reach net zero emissions, targeting a 70% reduction in greenhouse gas pollution by 2040. The plan includes a detailed timeline for incentivizing highly efficient net zero construction in new buildings, requiring existing buildings to reduce their use of energy, and increasing the percentage of renewable electricity supplied to residents and businesses. Since releasing the plan, city officials have moved toward implementation, including working with stakeholders to propose updates to the city's Building Energy Use Disclosure Ordinance.¹

The Net Zero Action Plan focuses primarily on reducing carbon emissions from the heating and electricity used in buildings.² Transportation is also a significant source of emissions and city officials have begun to take steps to reduce fossil fuel consumption from vehicles, including encouraging residents to travel by bicycle instead of by car.

In 2015, municipal officials worked with residents and other stakeholders to create the Cambridge Bicycle Plan. The plan identifies a network of priority routes, including existing off-street paths and bike lanes as well as new infrastructure required to make traveling by bike safer.³

In April 2019, the city council passed an ordinance requiring streets undergoing significant roadwork to include protected bike lanes in their design if they are part of the 20-mile network of priority bicycle routes. This new law, known as the Cycling Safety Ordinance, is believed to be the first such requirement in the United States.⁴

While standard bike lanes require bikers to ride adjacent to automobile traffic, protected bike lanes separate riders from drivers. In some protected bike lanes, the edge of the lane is marked with cones or flex-posts, while in others, the lane is separated from traffic by a row of parked cars.⁵ Protected bike lanes greatly improve rider safety, making it a more appealing form of commuting.⁶

Advocates and city officials expect that the ordinance will help speed the development of bike infrastructure by making protected bike lanes a default element of major road projects. The policy will still allow for community input on the design of specific projects. In rare circumstances, the city manager could allow exceptions to this requirement if physical or financial constraints make it impossible to install protected bike lanes.⁷

1. "Net Zero Action Plan," City of Cambridge, <<https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/Projects/Climate/NetZeroTaskForce>>.

2. Ibid.

3. "Cambridge Bicycle Plan," City of Cambridge, <<https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/Transportation/gettingaroundcambridge/bikesincambridge/bicyclenetworkplan>>.

4. "Cambridge Becomes First U.S. City to Make Protected Bike Lanes Mandatory," Angie Schmitt, Streetsblog USA, 9 April 2019, <<https://usa.streetsblog.org/2019/04/09/cambridge-becomes-first-u-s-city-to-make-protected-bike-lanes-mandatory/>>. "Cambridge's New Bike Lane Law is 'Bikelash'-Proof," Laura Bliss, CityLab, 11 April 2019, <<https://www.citylab.com/transportation/2019/04/protected-bike-lanes-traffic-safety-cambridge-bicycle-plan/586876/>>.

5. "Better Bike Lanes," City of Boston, <<https://www.boston.gov/departments/boston-bikes/better-bike-lanes>>.

6. "Cambridge passes 'first-of-its-kind' law to add protected bike lanes when reconstructing roads," Steve Annear, Boston Globe, 9 April 2019, <<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2019/04/09/cambridge-passes-first-its-kind-law-add-protected-bike-lanes-when-reconstructing-roads/d0sEjcEkDbbP8RyB3wATZN/story.html>>.

7. Ibid.