



STRAVA | METRO

Rapides Parish, Louisiana Case Study

Background

Rapides Parish is located in the geographical center of Louisiana and has a population of 131,613. Alexandria, the largest city in Rapides Parish, is a high-density urban area of 27 square miles. Much of the rest of the parish consists of rural, low-density development and single-family homes. Eighty-three percent of the people in Rapides Parish drive to work in their own car. In 2015, Louisiana passed Complete Streets legislation, paving the way for more progressive and inclusive infrastructure planning.

The Rapides Area Planning Commission, which conducts transportation planning for the parish and advises cities and towns within the parish on transportation issues, recognized that the region is heavily car dependent, and wanted to give residents and visitors better options for cycling and walking. Local advocacy organizations were also pushing for additional bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

So when the planning commission began working on the parish's new long-range transportation plan and a separate bicycle and pedestrian plan, it partnered with Strava Metro to better understand cycling and pedestrian behavior in the region. "For us, we feel a plan is a starting point that can go a long way in terms of getting people more active on the roads and providing more options rather than making people drive to work," said Youwen Hou, a transportation planner at RAPC who specializes in bicycle and pedestrian planning.

Objectives

While many metropolitan regions have transportation plans in place that draw from bicycle count data, when Rapides Parish decided to draft its first bicycle and pedestrian plan, it was starting from scratch. The parish had never conducted bicycle or pedestrian counts, and it didn't have an inventory of its bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Furthermore, instead of outsourcing the creation of the plans to a private consultant, the planning commission decided to do the project in-house.

Youwen Hou received the Metro data directly and found it easy to work with, and the [accompanying user guide](#) answered the questions that came up. She immediately saw the value of the activity and athlete counts on the road segments in the parish, as it gave her the first comprehensive view of bicyclist behavior in the region.

“I think that’s one of the highlights for Metro data,” she said. “It’s very helpful for us to get to understand our region to the best of our capacity. It is among the first sources of data we’ve been able to acquire, and it’s a very direct visual of basically where the bicyclists and pedestrians are, and which segments of the roads they use. We don’t have any inventories of bike/ped facilities, so having this is definitely a crucial starting point. And we’re able to use this throughout the analysis, as part of the demand index, and to interact with other GIS data we’ve acquired or created.”.

Outcomes

In early 2016, Rapides Parish unveiled its new Long Range Transportation Plan, which includes an entire chapter on bicycle and pedestrian planning. The bike/ped chapter is informed by Metro data in numerous ways. It contains maps of the planning commission region with bicycle and pedestrian counts indicated by different colors according to segment use (Figure 7.5 and 7.6). Another map shows the existing and proposed bicycle networks, based on where people are riding and where the networks need to connect (Figure 7.8). A third map provides recommendations for bicycle and pedestrian improvements on state routes, ranging from shared lanes to separated bike lanes (Figure 7.9).

RAPC is currently working on its bicycle and pedestrian plan, and expects to have it completed by the end of 2016. That document will have much more detailed goals and strategies, and it will include a unique bike/ped suitability index based on Metro data and other criteria. The index will assign a score ranging from one to five for each road segment. The more users on the segment, the higher the score.

Once the bicycle and pedestrian plan is complete, it will be up to the local towns to implement it, but the planning commission will promote the plan through educational programs, participation in state and national campaigns, and through social media.

“We think that, as a planning organization, it’s our responsibility and obligation to make these recommendations and promote this document as much as we can,” said Hou. “As soon as it’s finished and adopted, it will be our guideline for the next steps.”



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About Strava Metro

Strava Metro makes riding, running and walking in cities better. Millions of people upload their rides and runs to Strava every week via their smartphone or GPS device. Metro anonymizes and aggregates this data and then partners with departments of transportation and city planning groups to improve infrastructure for bicyclists and pedestrians.

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