

# State pulls big fat 'F' in annual bike report

CELIA STOREY  
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

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The League of American Bicyclists gave Arkansas an F last week in the 2011 ranking of "Bicycle Friendly States."

Flunked.

Flunked worse than Alabama, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Nevada, South Dakota and Georgia, all of which also flunked.

Furthermore, the scorecard dropped Arkansas to 48th out of 50, three places lower than last year. (Last year's 45 had been quite a drop from 38 in 2009 and 39 in 2008.)

This new downer comes in spite of pedestrian-bicycle bridge construction, Safe Routes to School projects, licensed cycling instructor training, two bronze-level Bicycle Friendly Community awards (North Little Rock and Fayetteville), three silver-level Bicycle Friendly Business honors (Bike City of Fayetteville, Garver LLC in North Little Rock, Gearhead Outfitters in Jonesboro) and three bronze-level businesses (The Ride in Conway, Chainwheel in Little Rock, and the city of Fayetteville, which won as a business).

Bronze and silver are not A grades, but they're good.

Cycling appears more popular everywhere you look. Even Little Rock Mayor Mark Stodola bought a bike so he could parade through traffic on Bike to Work Day in May.

And still — flunked. What's up with that?

"This was an extremely critical report, no state received an A," says Randy Ort, public affairs officer for the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department. Only six states (Washington, Maine, Wisconsin, Minnesota, New Jersey and Iowa) scored B's. Twelve got D's, including our old friend Mississippi.

Megan Cahill, communications director for the League, explained that scores were based on a 90-question form developed by the advocacy organization, which is based in Washington. Yes-or-no questions evaluate six areas: legislation; policies and programs; infrastructure; education and encouragement; evaluation and planning; and enforcement.

The state scored an F in all those except legislation, where it eked out a C. (No. 49, North Dakota, made squalid F's and a D in legislation. West Virginia, No. 50 — straight F's.)

Where most states fell down, Cahill says, was in how much money their highway planners agreed to use from the federal kitty of potential reimbursements for Transportation Enhancements — projects like sidewalks, bike trails and the mitigation of water pollution from

highway runoff.

Transportation Enhancements are just one of more than 100 categories of funding reimbursement available from the Federal Highway Trust Fund, Ort says. To get the money, states first spend and then seek reimbursement. But money's tight all over. So state highway departments must report periodically which funds they will not seek from the trust, freeing that money to go where it's wanted. These decisions are termed "rescissions."

Meanwhile, Ort says, the highway department and Arkansas State Highway Commission have identified about \$23 billion in work that should be done on the state system during the next decade. "Yet over that period of time, state and federal dollars combined will have about \$4 billion available. So we've got about a \$19 billion shortfall.

"So when these rescissions come up, the commission and department here have to make tough decisions on what types of things, what categories of funds to rescind from, to send money back."

Tom Ezell, president of Bicycle Advocacy of Central Arkansas, says that "one scathing problem for Arkansas was that [the highway department] allocated only \$53,071 (out of \$12.3 million available) to bike and pedestrian projects. By comparison, the next lowest spender among the 50 states was South Dakota, which spent only \$328,000 (out of \$6 million available) on bikes and pedestrians. With a little less than half the money available to Arkansas, South Dakota still spent six times as much as [Arkansas] did for cyclists."

That explains the F, says Andy Clarke, president of the League of American Bicyclists. But he adds that "a lot of the states find themselves in the same position and not scoring very well, not getting a passing grade. In Arkansas' case there are some other, longer-term issues that haven't gotten any better in the last four or five years, and so the funding issue on top of all that has really, I think, made the state's grade sink a little lower."

For instance? Arkansas has no overarching bike-advocacy group or committee, and its four advocacy groups do not coordinate efforts; the state hasn't adopted a Complete Streets policy ([completestreets.org](http://completestreets.org)); drivers and police aren't trained to know bicyclists' rights or responsibilities, and although several cyclists have been run over by cars, the 4-year-old safe-passing law has never been enforced (that's Arkansas Code 27-51-311, Overtaking a bicycle, which states: "The driver of a motor vehicle overtaking a bicycle proceeding in the same direction on a roadway shall exercise due care and pass to the left at a safe distance of not less than three feet and shall not again drive to the right side of the roadway until safely clear of the overtaken bicycle.")).

Noting the infrequency of joint efforts among advocates, Ezell says, "This lack of organization hurts: If some legislator files a bill that has the words 'motorcycle' and 'helmet' somewhere near each other, within a matter of hours you've got 3,000 motorcycle dudes in full leather sitting outside the Capitol building revving the engines on their Harleys and trying to make the paint flake off the Capitol dome. No such thing for cyclists, though I don't think we'd make the same sort of difference out there in Lycra ringing our bike bells."

But did Arkansas deserve to flunk?

“It’s unfortunate, given that there are some good things happening in communities around the state, and there is actually some exciting stuff happening in Northwest Arkansas and Conway and North Little Rock,” Clarke says.

But he adds, “Especially when budgets are tight and you’re being asked to send money back to Washington for different programs, that’s when you start to discover what stuff really matters to the powers that be. From what we can see from the numbers coming back to us, it isn’t bike-pedestrian issues.”

Ort says, “I hope that bicycle groups will agree that we have attempted to work with them. There’s been bumps along the way, no pun intended, for instance, the rumble strip.” (The highway department changed its design for rumble strips on the edges of state highways after bicyclists complained they posed a hazard.)

“We are not at odds with the bicyclists.”

### ***Additional information on the 2011 Bicycle Friendly State ranking and grades***

*Many of you have asked to learn more about the process behind the League’s Bicycle Friendly State annual Rankings and the associated grades in each of the six categories. Please find the attached spreadsheet with each state’s ranking for the last 4 years, the 2011 ranking and category grades for each state, scores and grades per category for each state, obligation rates for key federal aid funding programs based on state DOT’s FMIS reports to FHWA and information on each state’s contribution to the 2010 transportation rescissions authorized by Congress.*

*For some, this information should answer your questions on your state’s good or poor performance in a given area, particularly under the Infrastructure category which houses many funding related questions. For others, it may bring up new questions which the League is happy to answer, or at the very least create dialogue around. This in fact is the underlying reason for the Bicycle Friendly State program -- to shine a light on the states’ role in creating a more bicycle-friendly America, and work collaboratively to improve any shortcomings.*

*Also creating some confusion is whom this process evaluates- state agencies, state bike coordinators, law enforcement, advocates or legislators. The answer is all of them, but none of them individually. Each of these groups plays a significant role in accommodating and encouraging better bicycling within a state. States that consistently perform well and rank highly have each of these groups working together. This should not be seen simply as an evaluation of a state’s bicycle coordinator despite their role in completing our questionnaire (or State DOT for that matter). These hard-working professionals are too often under-appreciated within their own departments or are the first to be cut in department down-sizing. Poor marks should draw attention to the need for further support of state coordinators, not less.*

*The generally poor grade for infrastructure (very few states got anything better than a F) is disappointing to everyone, including us at the League. The bottom line is that states didn't have high obligation rates for core bicycle funding programs such as Transportation Enhancements and Safe Routes; they spent virtually nothing out of their STP, HSIP and CMAQ programs. Also, states sent a disproportionate percentage of TE and CMAQ funds back to Washington DC as part of the 2010 rescission. That's not good enough, especially now. With cycling rates higher than ever and gas prices continuing to rise, states should be spending more, not less on bicycling. Despite shrinking transportation budgets, the cost-effectiveness and job creation record of bicycling projects means states can't afford not to invest in bicycling.*

*The League is not content to just give states failing grades for poor spending records. Through our partnership with the Alliance for Biking and Walking, the Advocacy Advance program has released best practice reports on many under-utilized funding programs and will be conducting Action 2020 workshops throughout the country, training advocates, agency staff and elected leaders alike how to maximize the federal transportation dollars and the state, regional and local level. If you are interested in hosting one of these workshops, please visit [AdvocacyAdvance.org](http://AdvocacyAdvance.org) for more information.*

*Jeff Peel, BFS Coordinator, League of American Bicyclists*