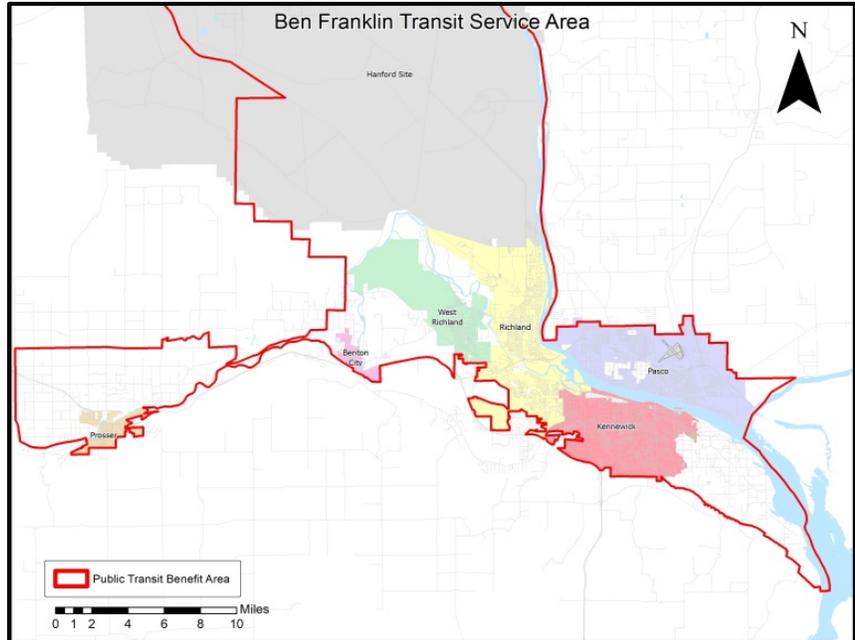


The Bike Buzz with Ben Franklin Transit
June 2018
Carl Berkowitz

Bikes and buses go together. Add pedestrians to the mix and you have the start of a multi-modal transportation System (MMTS), something that many cities across the country are working towards. MMTS' are now part of the Comprehensive Plans for many of our local and regional jurisdictions and a priority item for the Federal Transit Administration. Ben Franklin Transit has and will continue to play a central role in bike-to-bus plans throughout its service area.



Ben Franklin Transit Service Area (courtesy BFT)

Recently, BFT Planning Manager Bill Barlow, Transit Planner Kevin Sliger and Marketing & Communications Director Ali Madison met with Dave Beach and me to talk about the relation between bikes, MMTS and public transit in the Tri-Cities. Our discussion became more wide ranging than just these topics, touching on Complete Streets, how to improve access to underserved communities, new routes for BFT and how to better educate the cycling community about the resources available through BFT.

But first, a Path forward...

Communication Director Ali Madison (amadison@bft.org) is the designated go-to person for cycling issues at BFT. She's plugged into all the agency activities so can work with cyclists in understanding what is and is not possible. In this capacity, she is also knowledgeable about the multitude of federal and state regulations that apply to all transit agencies.

Although BFT has ideas for improving bus/bike interactions, they would like help from the cycling community to better understand what works and what doesn't work. They'd like to improve amenities for bikes at their bus stops but need to know what type of cycling amenities would be best. And at which bus stops should future amenities be deployed? Planning for these additions will require estimates of how often they'd be used and if special needs would be required (e.g., bike lockers). As a

practical matter, identifying resources to support these (and other) amenities will require quantifiable benefits.

Kevin, Ali and Bill all emphasized that bikes have long figured into BFT's plans. It's no accident that 586 of the 982 BFT bus stops are within 200' of official bike lanes or bike/pedestrian trails or that there are 216 bus stops adjacent to the less formal "Caution" bike routes shown in the map at the end of this article. Ease of access between bike/ped lanes and bus stops has been and will continue to be a factor in planning of bus routes.

Planning new routes requires taking into account in-line stops (e.g., those not at the big transit centers) and the deployment of sheltered booths, bike racks and storage facilities. Bike racks on buses are also a factor in BFT planning; presently all the large BFT buses have bike racks on the front; 56 have two on-board racks and three can carry three bikes. Would more triple-racks be worth the investment? Or could more buses get by with just single racks? BFT wants to know!

Hoping to answer these and similar questions, BFT plans to use GPS technology to let their drivers tally the number of bikes (and other types of riders) that get on and off at different locations. While these numbers will help, input from the cycling community is still essential.

How BFT Can Help Cyclists

- The Infamous 'First Mile/Last Mile' Problem

Without the caption in the adjacent figure, would you know what you're looking at?

Bike lockers like those shown in this figure are available for rent at the Knight St. and Three Rivers Transit Centers. But they're largely unused.

"Maybe cyclists don't know what they're for, or if they do, maybe they think it's too expensive," speculates Kevin. These and the bike racks located at each of the Transit Centers were purchased and set up with the hope that riders would use their bikes to solve the 'first mile/ last mile' (FMLM) problem that plagues many transit system riders.



A BFT bike locker.

The FMLM problem refers to issues related to getting transit riders from their house to the transit stop, and from the transit departure point to the rider's final destination. Many European cities have lock-up sites at both points so riders can leave a bike at both ends of their trip. The lockers deployed by BFT were selected to not only provide security, but also keep the bikes in a weather-proof storage locker for bikes left at one end or the other of a bus trip.

But the big question for BFT is, how to get more riders to use these lockers? How can they develop a base of users who make use of them, along with the intersect points between their transit stops? More

lockers might be acquired if BFT knew the lockers would be regularly used. They'd like our assistance in getting word out about these lockers and in developing a larger user community.

- Let BFT Know How they Can Help Cyclists

Another challenge for BFT is getting advance notice of community rides and other events that parallel BFT existing service routes. With adequate advance notice, BFT might be able to deploy their three-rack buses on these routes thus giving stranded riders a bail-out option. Riders would still have to wait for the next scheduled bus arrival but would have a better chance of being able to strap their bike on the rack and make it home safely. If there was a big ride scheduled on a specific day that anticipated filling more than the seats available in one bus, BFT could possibly (possibly!) provide an overload/second bus to carry additional passengers along the same route. This could be a valuable asset for some of out-of-town riders participating in the Inland Empire Century (that goes out to Prosser), or some of our longer fund raising rides (e.g., the Cystic Fibrosis Cycle for Life Ride). BFT buses are also a good tool to help cyclists get to the start of their rides if these meeting places are too far from home.

But BFT can't help if they don't know in advance about these rides. While there is little flexibility in where they send their buses (being limited to existing routes), there is flexibility in which buses (and how many bikes they can carry) they send out, and even the possibility of deploying additional buses. It's worth talking to Ali M. to check out these options before finalizing plans for longer community event bike rides.

How Cyclists Can Help BFT

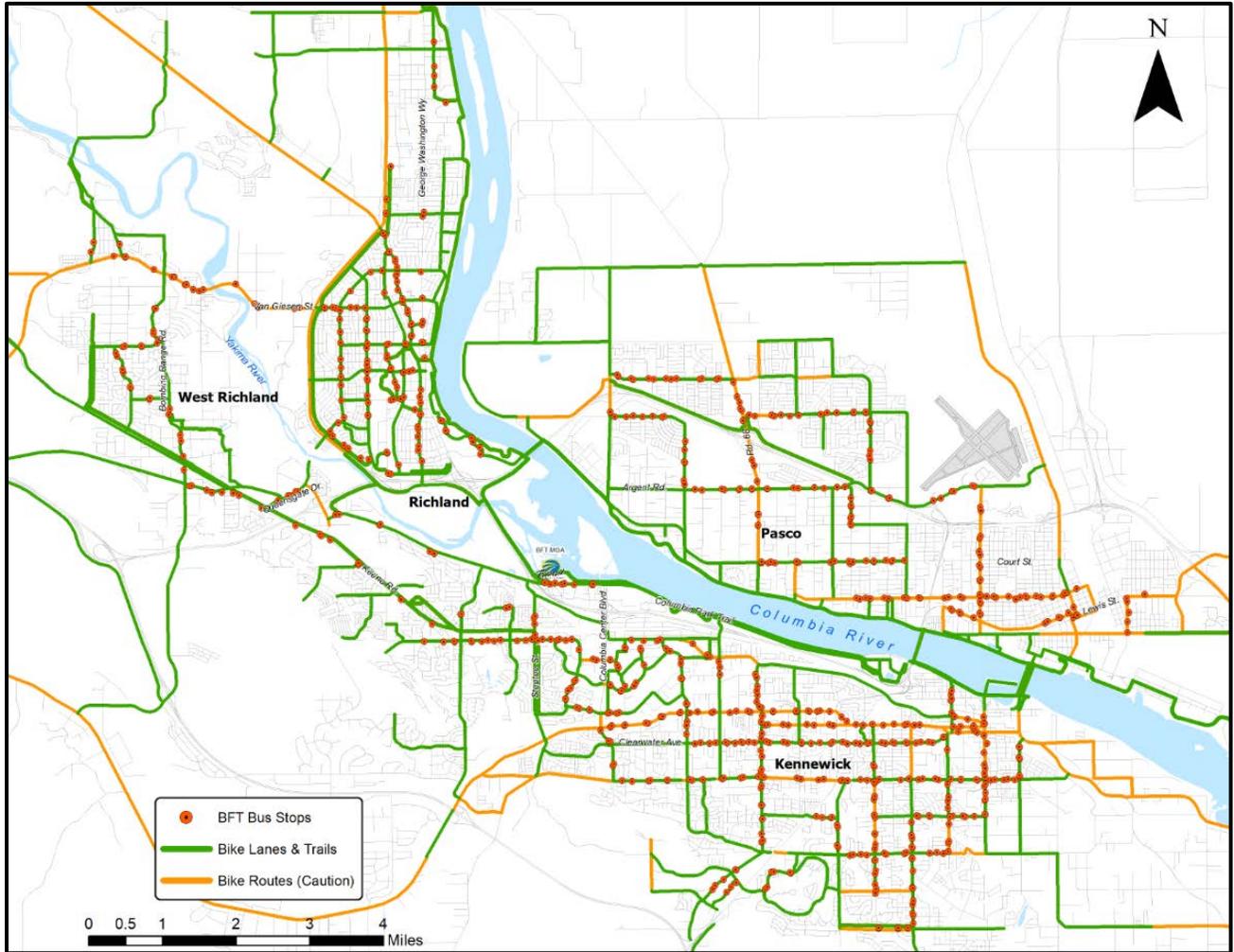
Many cyclists seem fearful of using the on-board bike racks. It's suspected there's a concern that when first learning to use these devices, they will hold up a bus filled with riders. Regular users of these easy to use mobile racks should share their knowledge of their ease-of-use with hesitant riders.

Also, spread the word that the BFT isn't just for commuters. Both local cyclists and out-of-towners can use the bus pickups near our hotels and B&Bs for cross-town adventures without putting all the mileage on their bikes. For example, do you and your visitors want to do some wine tasting from your bike as is popular in the Napa or Sonoma Valleys of California? Then take the bus and your bike out to West Richland or Prosser, hop off feeling fresh, unload your bike and set out to enjoy our local vino. Recreational cyclists can also make good use of the buses; instead of cranking out to Benton City from Tri-Cities, why not start and end your ride to up Weber Canyon and out to Prosser directly at the bus lot in Benton City?

More support from the cycling community via sponsoring and putting together events to demonstrate the multi-modal aspects of bikes and public transport can also help BFT help the community. If you know of such an event, contact BFT; they can bring in portable bus bike racks, maps and other demos to schools or 'bike rodeos' where experienced and novice (and often younger) riders can see how simple it is to use the transit system. BFT Vanpool users should share their cycling needs with Ali, including suggestions about where vanpoolers want to lock their bikes at both ends of their trip.

These are just a few of the cycling oriented topics we talked about with the BFT team. They want to work with cyclists, and cyclists should work with them for the betterment of the entire community.

Or, as noted at the beginning of this article, “Bikes and buses go together.”



BFT bus stops and bike lanes.