

Fresno hopes bikes will save students money and clean the air

By Ellie
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ANTONIO PEREZ — MCT

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will help Fresno, Calif., plan a bike-share system to improve air quality and offer an inexpensive method of transportation as part of the [Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities](#) program.

Besides Fresno, the program awarded grants to 21 other communities – including cities and towns in Mississippi, Texas, North Carolina and Florida – out of more than 100 applicants, to help them develop programs that address local needs. Fresno received the program's [Bikeshare Planning tool](#), which includes planning a bike-share system for the city and the California State University, Fresno.

The university and city officials sent the application letter to the EPA, citing the more than [23,000 students and 2,000 employees](#) at Fresno State who could benefit.

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In addition, about [58 percent](#) of students at the university received [Pell Grants](#) for the 2011-12 academic year, meaning a majority of the student body lives below the poverty line.

“For the folks that live below the poverty line, they will be able to access the transit and the bike-share at a cost they can actually afford, as opposed to the cost to have a car,” Gaffery said. “We know that we have a demand for students that want some convenient access to bike on campus.”

The American Lung Association identified Fresno as having some of the [worst air](#) quality in the nation, which Gil Harootunian, director of university initiatives, said was among the reasons the university and city wanted to apply.

“We need to really develop public transportation. It’s car culture up here,” Harootunian said. “The city and the county and the university are really coming together to improve the air quality in the area.”

Harriet Tregoning, a former city planner for Washington, D.C., said the capital’s bike-share program was “a gateway drug” to bicycling and had led to more people buying bicycles of their own. However, she said safety was a concern as first-time riders used the program.

“I was frankly scared by what I saw sometimes,” said Tregoning, director of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [Office of Economic Resilience](#). “People tottering down U Street, maybe not where I would say they should go.”

About 130 communities in 41 states have received services through the Building Blocks program – a [partnership](#) among the EPA, HUD and the U.S. Department of Transportation – since 2011. EPA officials will hold one- to two-day workshops in each city from February to July to address environmental, housing and transportation benefits each Building Blocks program tool could provide.

“When communities get together, they are thinking about what creates a healthy and sustainable community,” Tregoning said. “This program cuts across our federal agencies.”

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