

Project: White Paper/ U.S. Bicycle Route 37 IN

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Proposed United States Bicycle Route 37 in Indiana

Overview

United States Bicycle Routes (USBR) are part of a national cycling network across the United States. It consists of long-distance cycling routes that utilize multiple types of corridors sometimes including multi-use path, bicycle lanes, and low-traffic roads. Each USBR is maintained by state and local governments within their jurisdictions and in some cases, local trail organizations. It was established in 1978 by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), the same body that coordinates the numbering of Interstate highways and U.S. Routes. There are over 18,900 USBR miles established in 34 states, including 700 miles of designated USBRs in Indiana.

USBRs are for experienced, long-distance bicycle riders -- generally considered touring cyclists -- who are comfortable riding on most types of facilities, including roads without any special treatments for bicyclists. This group also includes utilitarian and recreational riders who are confident enough to ride on busy roadways and navigate in vehicular traffic.

United States Bicycle Route 37 (USBR 37) is a proposed route covering approximately 182 miles from Griffith, Ind., to Carmel, Ind.. The route's northern terminus connects with USBR 36 and the Erie Lackawanna Trail in northwest Indiana and the route moves south, passing through West Lafayette, Lafayette, and Lebanon, before it reaches its southern terminus and connects with the Monon Trail in Hamilton County. The designation efforts for this route were led by Adventure Cycling Association (ACA) which worked with local and regional bicycling advocates.

USBR 37

The effort for the official state designation of USBR is reaching its final stages. The proposed route, suggested by ACA in 2020, traverses a combination of city streets, trails, county roads, state roads, and U.S. highways. INDOT has received Letters of Support from the jurisdictions that the proposed USBR 37 passes through. These jurisdictions have determined that the designated route and intersections it includes are deemed safe and suitable for long-distance bicycle travel.

In the summer of 2023, INDOT held a 14-day public comment period in accordance with the Planning Public Involvement Plan (PPIP) and a total of 20 public comments were received and documented. Although most showed support for the route, a few highlighted potential safety concerns along the original routings of River Road in West Lafayette, State Road-16 in White County, and US-231 in Jasper County. In response, INDOT staff conducted a field visit to investigate these concerns. River Road was found to have spots with potential for low visibility for both motorists and cyclists. It was found that both SR-16 and US-231 had high traffic volumes with little to no shoulder.

INDOT worked with representatives from ACA and the Area Planning Commission of Tippecanoe County to explore alternatives to these segments. Alternatives were identified in White and Jasper Counties, and county officials have provided letters of support for these changes. In West Lafayette, APCTC identified three alternatives to the River Road segment and gave local cyclists the opportunity to vote on

which route was preferable. INDOT staff, APCTC staff, and city/county officials from West Lafayette, Lafayette, and Tippecanoe County met in early February to discuss the results of this survey and select the final iteration.

USBR 37, like other U.S. Bicycle Routes, is intended for experienced and confident long-distance bicyclists. This includes bicyclists comfortable riding on most types of roads, streets, highways, and trails, including roadways without special treatment for bicycles. This also includes utilitarian and recreational riders of many ages who are skilled enough to ride on busy roadways and navigate in motor vehicle traffic to reach their destination.

There is no cost for implementing a USBR, as signage is not required, however INDOT does intend to further research the benefits and costs of encouraging signage for these routes. There are several ways a route can be designated and guided, including paper/digital maps, downloadable GPS coordinates, signs, pavement markings, and indication of routes on existing state and local maps.

To submit a USBR application to AASHTO, State DOTs must confirm that all relevant local jurisdictions support the proposed route. The application must also include a route-specific map (turn-by-turn listing roads, streets, and trails).

According to Adventure Cycling Association, the designation of a U.S. Bicycle Route signifies that a route is officially recognized with a route number and may be signed or marked accordingly.

Advantages/Disadvantages

Advantages:

- Improve relationships between INDOT and local jurisdictions and bicycle enthusiasts
- Give INDOT insight on how Hoosiers and tourists are using bicycle travel
- Promote active transportation and healthier lifestyles in the state
- Potential to influence future road improvement design standards
- Increase revenue for local jurisdictions due to tourism
- Begin to set a precedent for regional bicycling in the state of Indiana
- Potential to reduce automobile congestion and improve air quality

Disadvantages:

- Potential safety risks
- Implementation cost of signage if desired by INDOT and local jurisdictions
- Uncertainty on how best to educate motorists about road safety and sharing the road