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Editorial: Officials strive for bike-friendly roads

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A plan to make Lafayette a more bike-friendly city has the potential to affect more than the safety and enjoyment of local cycling enthusiasts.

We applaud the effort on the part of Lafayette Consolidated Government, which will include adding more bike paths, cycling routes and a cycling awareness and education campaign.

This is a prudent move, as the popularity of cycling has been steadily increasing in recent years in the area.

In addition, it could enhance economic development efforts — improving conditions for bicyclists can improve the overall appeal of a city for businesses seeking a place to locate.

A city that is bike-friendly is “better for living,” said Chris Daigle, a cycling instructor for the 133-year-old League of American Bicyclists.

But the “bikeways” plan is not limited to the City of Lafayette or even Lafayette Parish. Jennifer Severson, a planner for Lafayette’s

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Metropolitan Planning Organization, said it will encompass locations around the parish and in parts of four adjacent parishes.

The goal, she said, is to help cyclists feel safer on local roads and to provide more facilities. Most of the plans are in the “draft stages,” she said.

Any significant changes could take a while, as this is part of a 20-year plan. The major obstacle to moving more quickly is money — there is no funding through LCG, so part of Severson’s job is to find and apply for grants. Plans will be implemented as funding becomes available.

Long-term planning might help avoid the kind of mistakes that some cities have made in their rush to try to accommodate cyclists. Daigle said some cities, for example, forged ahead without planning connectivity to other bike lanes, and designated lanes in places that weren’t necessarily safe for cyclists.

It is better to think things through and do it right — although the area could use some quick fixes, as well.

One of the first projects to get off the ground will be on the University of Louisiana at Lafayette campus. The four lanes of St. Mary Boulevard that cut through the heart of the UL campus will be reduced to two, with the outer lanes being designated as bike paths.

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