

Biking in the land of the car

- clashes of mobility cultures in the USA

Paper for the Conference

Trafikdage

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Prolouge

‘To ride 3,000 miles on a bicycle is one thing; to ride 3,000 miles on a bike in a society that worships the automobile is quite another’ (Pesses 2007:16)

Plan of Presentation

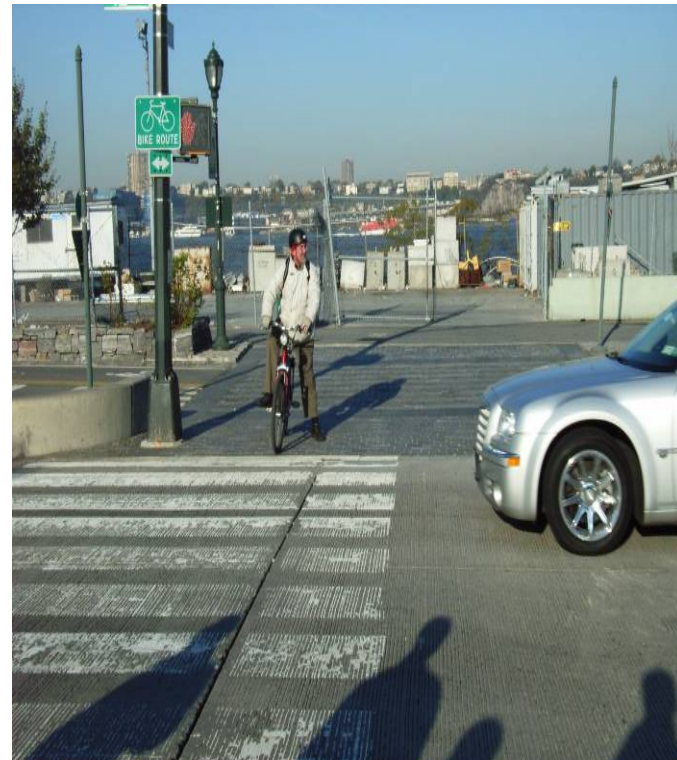
1. Introduction
2. Thinking Mobilities
 - Urban Mobility Cultures
 - Urban Mobility Experiences
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3. The *East Coast Greenway* (ECG)
4. *Transportation Alternatives* (TA)
5. *Critical Mass* (CM)
6. Discussion and concluding remarks

Point of departure

- Until very recently the practice of cycling in the US has mostly been considered either a recreational activity or a political statement. This may be changing these years and is one of the reasons why the study of cycling practices in the US is such a fascinating topic. What is at stake is not only new ways of moving in the city, but also new ways of perceiving the city, new ways of producing and re-producing the city and ultimately new ways of constructing identities and meaning

Thinking mobilities

As humans interact bodily in time-space relations (where stasis and flow are the two basic modes of experience) it is the mobile sense-making, experiencing and meaningful engagement with the environment that 'makes mobility'



Urban Mobility Cultures

- Multiple modes of mobility and ‘corporeal travel’
- To each mobility domain there belong a set of practices and normative regulating principles
- ‘Communities of practices’
- The underpinning of these mobility practices are a set of (often) competing rationalities
- ‘Walking-codes’, ‘cycling-codes’ etc.
- Official and legal sanctions and mobility regulations
- Embedded in the body as tacit mobility cultures

Urban Mobility Experiences

- ‘... city design can focus on the journeys by which people actually experience cities. City trips are enjoyed or suffered, but they are remembered. The pleasures of motion, and its connotation of energy and life, are, perhaps, especially meaningful to us today [1984]’ (Lynch 1990:503)

Bike Phenomenology

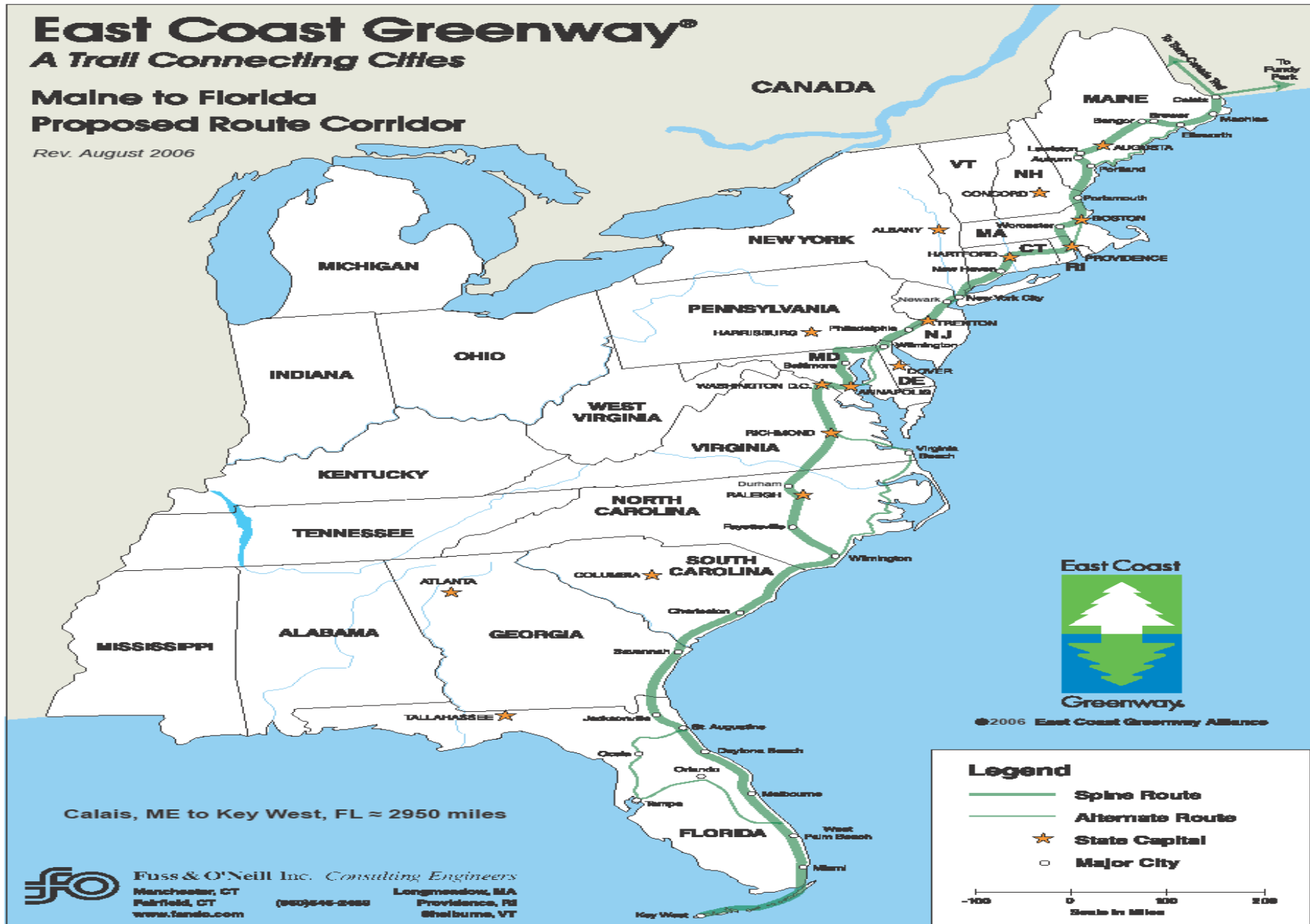
- ‘Bicycling provides us with an unbuffered range of sensory experiences of the monumental urbanity we have created, and a view into the spaces of hope in its cracks, fissures, and contradictions. To bicycle through frenetic and congested cities is a work of beauty, one that can redraw the often discriminatory boundaries of neighbourhoods, redeem strained social relations, and rehabilitate a suffocating natural environment, together with the ways urban inhabitants become crippled by it. Inherently human-scaled, it is one path to an alternative understanding of the urban’ (Petersen 2007:37)

East Coast Greenway®

A Trail Connecting Cities

Maine to Florida Proposed Route Corridor

Rev. August 2006



Explicit ECG policy agendas

Expanding transportation choice
Improving air quality
Reducing roadway congestion
Facilitating healthy activities
Encourage more car-free excursions
Increase options for short distance travels

State	Total Route (miles)	% Completed (Constructed)	Miles Completed (Constructed)	Miles in Development	Miles Pending Development (in public control)	Route Miles defined but not in public control	Gap Miles (Off-road route not defined)
ME	390,8	7%	26,9	30	129,8	35,3	168,8
NH	17,2	0%	0	0,5	4,5	11,5	0,7
MA	143,2	14%	19,6	32,5	62,55	0,5	28
RI	48,4	40%	21	19	0	0,85	7,55
CT	194,9	23%	44,8	62,85	60,8	0	26,4
NY	41,58	49%	24,9	6,1	1,3	6,7	2,58
NJ	91,9	52%	43,35	19,85	5,4	10	13,3
PA	75,7	9%	1,7	29	4	12	29
DE	37	54%	20	3	0	8	6
MD	163,3	39%	63,6	23	0	0	76,65
DC	8	44%	3,95	2,4	0	0	1,65
VA	254,4	7%	3,4	0	0	119,3	131,7
NC	380,1	12%	31,2	26,8	11,5	59	251,6
SC	295,5	6%	13,1	98,9	48,4	0	135,05
GA	161,3	1%	2,4	15,25	50,2	30,5	62,95
FL	595,9	44%	263,1	256	30,3	23,5	23
Total	2899		583	630,4	418,15	305,5	948,3

Recreation of Communities

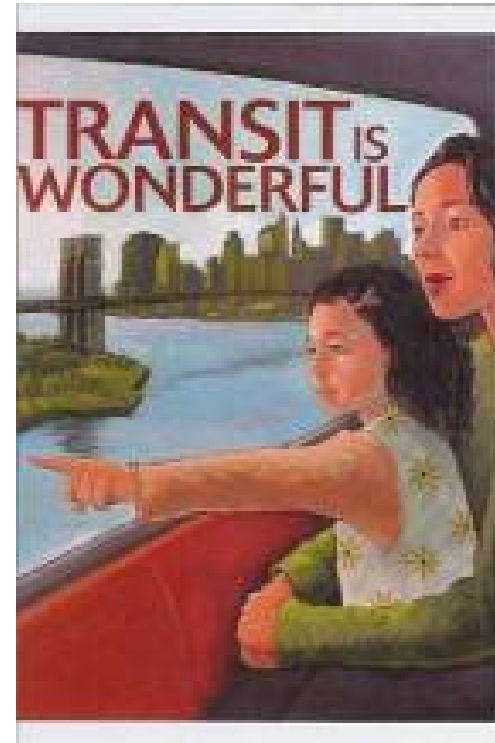
- ‘Working through 16 ECG state committees, in collaboration with state and local governments, they [the ECG] are transforming that vision into reality. And they are doing more than just building a trail; through their efforts they are helping to ‘recreate’ community, linking places together by foot and bicycle and connecting people of all ages, backgrounds and interests in a way that brings new meaning to our busy, stress-filled lives’ (ECG 2001:1)

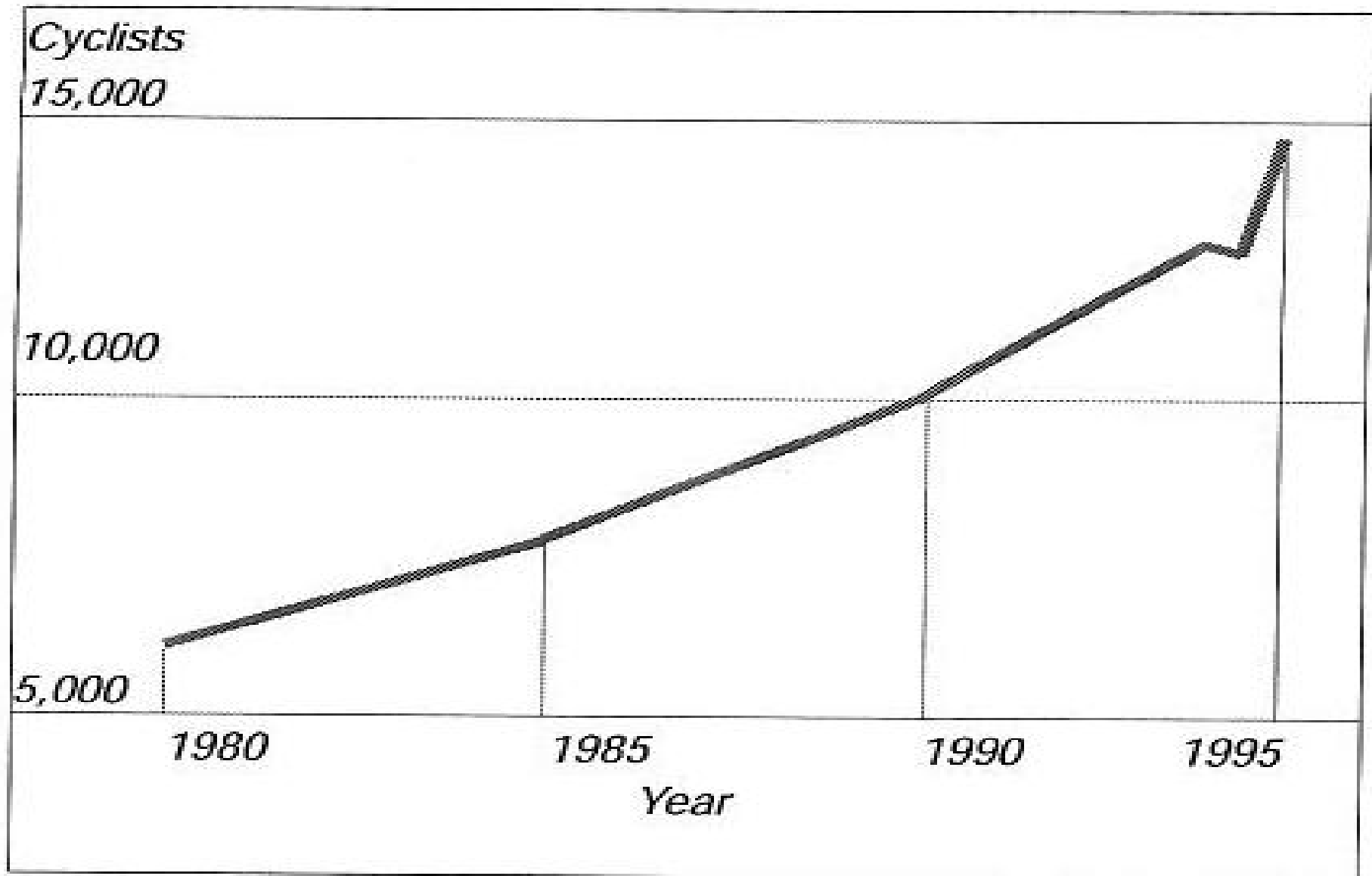
A new mobility practice

- ‘Unlike the Appalachian Trail, the East Coast Greenway would go right through the central business district of every big city on the coast. Thousands of visitors would use it for recreation, for exercise, to see the sites – ecotourism – but perhaps its more important purpose would be as practical transportation by pedestrians and bicyclists who resides in places like New York City’ (Lutz 2003:1)

Transportation Alternatives

- *‘Our mission is to reclaim New York City’s streets from the automobile, and to advocate for bicycling, walking and public transit at the best transportation alternatives’ (TA 2006)*





*Bicycle use in New York City 1980 - 1995
Manhattan 50th Street Screenline*

Source: NYC DOT

The public perception

- ‘The public perception of cycling in the US is recreational ... So for most Americans cycling does not come to mind as an everyday mode of transport. It is not like taking the car or even the bus ... In the US ... this is the home of the automobile ... Even in cities like New York where car ownership is less than 50% we are just so wedded with the concept of the auto and to challenge that is very difficult ... In suburban America where the land use and the urban design ... its not an everyday option for people’ (Noah Budnick, Deputy Director Transportation Alternatives, New York, Interview on April 26th 2007)

Biking as become cool

- ‘Biking has become cool ... so you have this slow cultural shift, where biking is just a normal thing ... you are going out and you say ‘OK let me just grab my bike’ and it’s automatic ... Culturally it has been interesting to watch how the coolness of biking in the fashion has become more common’ (Noah Budnick, Deputy Director Transportation Alternatives, New York, Interview on April 26th 2007)

Critical Mass (CM)

We aren't blocking traffic; we are traffic!



Spontaneous action

- ‘Critical Mass is an event that began in San Francisco in the early 1990s and has since spread to hundreds of cities around the world. It usually occurs monthly (sometimes weekly). As bicyclists spontaneously come together to ride the ordinarily car-clogged streets of their cities. Critical Mass focuses on the rights of bicyclists and the rights of pedestrians on our own streets. It also brings attention to the deteriorating quality of life -- starting with the toxic levels of air and noise pollution -- that cars create for cities. It is a leaderless ride, free and open to all, where bicyclists take to the streets to promote bicycling as the best means of urban transit’ (<http://www.critical-mass.org/>)

Friday night in New York

- April 27 2007,
NYC
- Cat and mouse
- Massive policing
- Towards a new
tactics of bikes on
the subway?



Discussion and concluding remarks

- Four rationales for biking
 - Recreational practice
 - Everyday life mobility (e.g. Commute)
 - Identity marker
 - Political statement

Towards a Culture Shift?

