

# Heels and wheels

**PedNet encourages the Columbia community to reduce its dependence on cars.**

Story by Kathy Love

Photos by Rob Hill



Fred Schmidt and Corri Flaker, a senior parks, recreation and tourism major, survey a "biker's bottleneck" at Providence and Stewart roads. They hope to unplug it as part of their work for PedNet and the city.

**T**ed Curtis envisions a future when Columbians will reach for their bike locks instead of their car keys. They will venture out on a citywide hiking and biking trail system called PedNet. Need a loaf of bread? Take PedNet. Heading to work? Take PedNet. Off to a movie? Take PedNet.

Curtis leads the city's effort to build PedNet. His vision of the future is made possible by a \$22 million federal grant to encourage nonmotorized transportation. Columbia is one of just four locations in the nation to receive the grant. The others are Marin County, Calif.; Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minn.; and Sheboygan County, Wis.

The purpose, Curtis says, is to provide transportation choices and cultivate a culture change. "Right now, people think they have

one choice — to get in their cars and drive.

"Columbia is basically a demo project," Curtis says. "If we can replace one out of 10 car trips with a nonmotorized trip by

**'When we travel, Columbia's trail system is one of the things we brag about to others.'**

— Todd Shelby

2010, we will have been successful. Then the next grant round may provide funds for 50 communities, using Columbia as a model."

Curtis traces his biking interest to the energy crisis of 1974. Long gas lines

encouraged him to bike 13 miles to his job as an aerospace engineer with McDonnell Douglas in St. Louis. When gas prices dropped, he continued to bike to work for health and recreation.

#### Couchless in Columbia

The PedNet project offers the opportunity to measure how a city's infrastructure affects the activity level of its residents. Steve Sayers, assistant professor of physical therapy in the MU School of Health Professions, says physical activity has been engineered out of our daily lives.

"We have an obesity epidemic in our country," Sayers says. "More than 64 percent of adults are overweight, and 30 percent are obese. Much of the problem can be linked to the sedentary lifestyle of modern society



and our lack of physical activity." His study will use telephone surveys to determine activity levels before construction and after completion of the PedNet project.

"Let's face it, we'll always be a car society in our lifetimes," says Curtis, who helped set up the popular St. Louis walking and biking system known as Trailnet. Our motorized society, which burns fossil fuels and emits carbon dioxide at rates much higher than any other nation, fuels his enthusiasm for pedal power.

#### Incremental habit changes

"How can we hope to make a difference on such huge issues as global warming? By a lot of people doing a little bit — such as not getting in your car and driving," Curtis says.

If PedNet is to replace one in 10 car

trips by 2010 — what Curtis refers to as a "10 percent modal shift" — it will be due to the right combination of infrastructure and education.

PedNet's plan calls for 66 miles of bike lanes spread across the city. There are about 28 miles now. The backbone of the system will be bike lanes on existing roads. These invite users, Curtis says, and ease the fear factor for novice riders.

Other infrastructure changes will include:

- Shared-use paths for bikers and walkers,
- Bike boulevards in areas with little traffic,
- Bike routes designated by signs, and
- Improvements to sidewalks and intersections.

Just building the infrastructure won't ensure its use, though. PedNet plans a series of programs to kick-start behavior changes that will lead to less dependence on cars (See sidebar on Page 44).

"Education is just 10 percent of the budget, but it will create the buzz that gets people involved," Curtis says.

#### Nothing ventured, nothing gained

A fledgling business may benefit from the new infrastructure. Senior engineering major Brady Beckham of Joplin, Mo., hatched a business plan that won first prize in a new venture contest sponsored by MU's College of Business. He used his prize money to turn his plan into reality — a bike-based courier business.

Columbia Courier partners Steve Tinsley,

BA '06, of Liberty, Mo., and junior economics major Jason Key of Warrensburg, Mo., all raced together for Mizzou Cycling. They launched the business in February — not the best month for bikes — but business improved with warmer weather.

Tinsley says they are accustomed to riding long distances fast. "Getting paid for it is even better." They deliver anywhere in Columbia and believe biking is usually faster than driving. PedNet's bike lanes will boost business, Tinsley says.

Don Laird, MA '97, president of the Columbia Chamber of Commerce, says local businesses generally support PedNet's trail system plans. He bikes to work on weekends and enjoys the link from the MKT trail to downtown. Easy access to the MKT and Katy trails is a bonus for prospective home buyers, too, he says.

"Developers are coming around to seeing the advantages," Curtis says. Two new suburban developments, Bear Creek and Bedford Walk, in north and south Columbia, have internal trails that will link with PedNet.

New residents Todd Shelby and Karen Pritchitt decided to move to Columbia in large part because of the trail system. They brought their pottery business here from New Mexico and use their Columbia home as a base from which to travel to art shows throughout the Midwest. "When we travel, Columbia's trail system is one of the things we brag about to others," Shelby says. "What I like most about it is the way it connects you to nature. You can be buying bread downtown one minute, and walking by a creek and woods the next."

When Columbia is mentioned in the pages of *Money* magazine or ranked among the top 10 most livable cities in the U.S., the articles usually cite reasons like lots of green space and places to recreate. "Things sell by word-of-mouth," Curtis says. "When people talk about those cities, they have an image of progressive, dynamic towns that draw young people. Columbia is already in that league." ■

## The low-car diet

You may not have walked 10 miles to school like your parents or grandparents, but there's a 40 percent chance you did walk to school. Today, just 15 percent of children walk; the others hop on a bus or get their personal chauffeurs — mom and dad — to drive them.

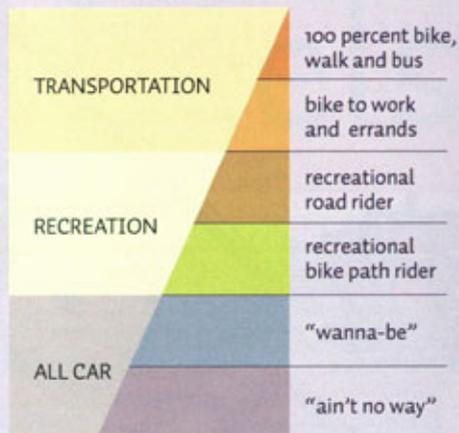
PedNet is using the "walking school bus" concept to reverse that trend. It is simple and safe: Students meet at designated places and walk together — with an adult — to school. The students have nothing to lose but excess calories.

Nearly 20 Columbians went on the Low Car Diet in 2006, swearing off cars for the month of October. Families on the Low Car Diet biked to work, school and stores. Being carless didn't eliminate their travel, though: Tim and Gina Overshiner and their two children went camping on the Katy Trail and canoeing on the Missouri River.

Other planned programs to entice people to leave their gas-guzzlers at home:

- Earn-a-bike program — children learn to fix donated bikes, then get to keep them
- Bike buddy — provides coaching and companionship for new riders
- Bike, walk and wheel week — encourages carless transportation for a week
- Bike rider lottery — gives \$100 to a lucky rider picked at random

Steve Sayers says concepts like the "walking school bus" behind him can help reduce childhood obesity and cultivate good habits in the next generation. Sayers is an assistant professor of physical therapy.



**PedNet boosts riders up the car-dependent pyramid by providing classes and programs to build confidence.**

SCHOOL





## Safety first

Will an increase in bike traffic mean more biking accidents?

In 1990, Portland, Ore., recorded 180 biking accidents. Over the next 15 years, bike traffic quadrupled, but the number of accidents remained about steady.

"Cars and riders learn to deal with each other," says Ted Curtis, director of Columbia PedNet.

Most accidents occur at intersections and turns. Visibility is the key to safe biking. Eight intersections in Columbia will be improved to enhance visibility. Designated lanes and novel street signs will also help bikers and drivers share the road safely.

More: [Bicyclesafe.com](http://Bicyclesafe.com) or [Bicyclinginfo.org](http://Bicyclinginfo.org)

## The PedNet Coalition

Columbia's pedal power started with people power — a coalition of volunteers looking for transportation choices. Chip Cooper, president of the PedNet Coalition Inc., says the group unveiled a plan for a citywide network of bicycle, pedestrian and wheelchair-accessible paths on the first Earth Day of the new millennium.

In 2003, they won a \$200,000 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to jump-start biking education programs like the walking school bus. "We were making progress, but we assumed it would take decades to build the infrastructure," Cooper says. "Then lightning struck in July 2005 when a \$22 million federal grant was awarded to Columbia to build a nonmotorized transportation system."

More: [PedNet.org](http://PedNet.org) or [Gocolumbiamo.com/PedNet\\_project](http://Gocolumbiamo.com/PedNet_project)

The new Columbia Couriers company delivers documents, prescriptions or lunch anywhere in the city limits. They charge \$5 for a downtown delivery and up to \$8 to the far corners of Columbia. Partner Jason Key is a courier and the company accountant.