

WHY JOIN A TRAILNET PLANNING COMMITTEE

By Kevin B. McKinney

As Executive Director of St. Louis Association of Community Organizations (SLACO), I am grateful to recently be asked to be a part of the Trailnet Land Use Committee. SLACO has been in the community organizing business for nearly 40 years and was incorporated as a nonpartisan 501 (c) 3 not for profit corporation in 1979. We are a coalition of St. Louis area neighborhood associations with a membership representative of 32 neighborhood associations and 3 community organizations. SLACO is guided by principles of democracy, self-determination, inclusiveness and an undying faith in the goodness and wisdom of people in neighborhoods.



We support neighborhood based organizations and personally feel that a Trailnet Master Plan can enhance and improve the quality of life for our neighborhoods. Connectivity, whether it is community organizations working collectively under an umbrella organization like SLACO or more literally, being connected via walking and bike paths, is good for our neighborhoods. Biking in St. Louis can be better but only by working together to insist that protected bicycling and pedestrian corridors be the norm throughout St. Louis, not the exception. Attractive and functional shared-use paths would not only be a great asset for the St. Louis community, they could help to equalize our neighborhoods through a shared amenity.

I am very proud to serve on the Land Use Committee as a representative of SLACO in this planning effort by Trailnet. Through outreach to our member organizations, I hope that my involvement brings people and voices to the table that may otherwise or either may not be aware of the Trailnet planning effort or who often may not feel heard when it comes to planning.

While I do not rely on biking as part of my everyday commute, I do enjoy a leisurely bike ride with friends or family. For it to be an enjoyable experience, biking needs to be safe and accessible. We need to connect destinations and neighborhoods to expand access and opportunity for all our neighbors. It needs to be just as easy to jump on a bike in North City and ride to your job, the many St. Louis cultural opportunities or recreational areas as it is from the South Side or Central Corridor.

My perspective, from talking to bicycle commuters, observing, and as a city resident is that land use in St. Louis has historically not promoted equitable community development. Disinvested neighborhoods are often the neighborhoods that are least walkable and most dangerous in particular for pedestrians, cyclists and wheelchair users. Often, residents of these neighborhoods are more likely to be walking or using public transit, and yet neighborhoods aren't designed to promote that. At the same time, you'll also often find warehouses and industry in these neighborhoods that both discourage walkable neighborhoods and may also lead to negative environmental impact and stunted economic growth as industry jobs have gone away. Generally, the more affluent neighborhoods have land use policy that makes it safer for pedestrians and cyclists and promotes density and businesses. At the same time, its land use policies and zoning practices may not maintain housing affordability. It's important to integrate transportation, housing affordability, and street design and land use so that all of our neighborhoods provide economic opportunity, healthy living and safety for our residents.

Land use – whether specifically related to bike and walk paths or not – can achieve equitable community development when input and outcomes focus on people regardless of their zip code.