Facebook App Keeps Danish Cyclists Green and In Touch

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Just in time for next year’s U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, MIT’s SENSEable City Laboratory has unveiled Smart Biking -- a project that will allow bike riders in the city of Hans Christian Andersen to log how many miles they have traveled and connect with fellow cyclists on Facebook.

According to Boston.com’s Green Blog, Smart Biking relies on "smart tags" which work similarly to RFID technology. In bike-friendly Copenhagen (shown above), bikers are rewarded by traveling without the benefit of internal combustion, and the smart tag would help cyclists track how many "frequent pedaler points" they’ve earned. "The very act of sharing this information and showing individuals the environmental impact of their actions could be very powerful," SENSEable City Lab Associate Director Assaf Biderman said in a statement.

For those with smartphones or Facebook, the smart tags would let cyclists know where and when any of their friends crossed their path through an application appropriately named "I Crossed Your Path." According to principal research assistant Christine Outram, the app "creates a social network for cyclists, allowing them to link up with people they may have ridden past during the day and potentially establish new connections."

We expect this technology to lead to creepy missed connections posts on Craigslist, with lonely bikers begging to be friended by that beauty on the blue Bianchi who almost got doored by a Corolla.

Copenhagen is a particularly friendly test-bed for the program, as nearly 40 percent of residents use a bicycle as a primary form of transportation. SENSEable City Laboratory Director Carlo Ratti suggested to Boston.com that tracking just how many carbon-free miles are pedaled could benefit the city in the long run, as it could enter into a carbon-trading agreement in exchange for monies for sustainable city
services.

Tracking could also benefit riders if all those points they accumulate can be redeemed for something more valuable than eco-friendly bragging rights. A tax credit or an employer incentive would be a lot easier to implement if riders track how many miles they're traveling on two wheels. Plus, cyclists and city planners alike could also benefit from real-time information on where the bikes are -- which could clue city governments in to where bike paths and bike lanes should be built.

We like any incentive for urban drivers to exchange four wheels for two, though we expect conspiracy-minded cyclists to begin covering their helmets in tinfoil at the very mention of tracking devices.

*Photo courtesy flickr user cxxox.*
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