

## **Bike Infrastructure and Gentrification**

### **Katie Draeger, Class of 2024**

Last summer, I worked as an intern with the Bicycle Coalition of Maine. I developed an independent project to explore the relationship between bike infrastructure and gentrification—the widened economic inequity and raised cost-of-living in the regions where certain infrastructure is installed. This summer, I had the opportunity to more deeply explore this relationship with funding provided through the Bowdoin Student Fellowships and Research office. I continued and expanded upon my initial project, focusing my investigation on people’s perception of the relationship between bicycle facilities and gentrifying impacts.

The research questions which guided my study are as follows: how do bicycle advocates, urban planners, and members of community organizations define the relationship between bicycle infrastructure and gentrification? How does their understanding of this relationship relate to how they envision, plan for, and implement new infrastructure? I hoped to gain insight into how people with various positionalities experience the implementation of new bicycle infrastructure, focusing on the perception of such infrastructure increasing or impeding equity in their community.

I began my research in June by crafting a literature review to illuminate the current discourses around bicycle infrastructure and gentrification. Then, starting in July, I began interviewing bicycle advocates, urban planners, and community members who had experience with bicycle infrastructure projects in various cities across the United States. In the interviews, I asked respondents about how they define gentrification, whether they consider there to be a correlation or causality between bike infrastructure and gentrification, what discourses and concerns they had heard from or held with community members relating to such infrastructure, and their opinions on the engagement of community members in placing new bike facilities.

From my review of the literature, many researchers have determined a correlation between bike infrastructure and gentrification. Existing studies, however, present no evidence that bike facilities actively cause gentrifying impacts.

From my interviews to date, many community members, planners, and bike advocates agree that bike infrastructure and gentrification are correlated. For the question of potential causality, most interviewees cite that new bike infrastructure is a visual signal that a community is already experiencing gentrification rather than arguing that this infrastructure is directly causing gentrification.

Moreover, one of the dilemmas cited by many planners, bike advocates, and community leaders is backlash from community members who have been left out of the planning process. Interviewees offer potential solutions to this struggle. One suggestion is to place temporary bicycle infrastructure or create realistic models of how new infrastructure may look in a community. With temporary infrastructure and digital modeling, which residents can experience the street changes and offer their feedback to planners before the alterations are— or are not— made permanent. Another interviewee describes a neighborhood analysis tool that she is developing for the Portland (OR) Bureau of Transportation which planners could use to identify areas most vulnerable to gentrification and/or most in need of infrastructural improvements. The planners would then implement new infrastructure, including bike facilities, according to guidelines set forth by the analysis tool, dictating community engagement, the project’s scale, and resources provided to the community alongside the new infrastructure.

I look forward to continuing my interviews and building a greater understanding of how different stakeholders define the relationship between bicycle infrastructure and gentrification in an honors project or independent study. I plan to synthesize my findings in a research paper and discuss my findings with bike advocacy organizations and transportation planning agencies.

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