

The Bicycle Friendly City
Marikina City, Metro Manila, Philippines

By:

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Abstract

Marikina is now being recognized as the Philippines' first bicycle-friendly city due to the local government's continuous and effective programs in integrating the 66-kms. bikeways in its overall transport network complemented by people's education. Dealing with the fact that gasoline prices are shooting up in the country, cycling seems to be well on its way to becoming the "**smart choice**" and Marikina is right on track

Removing the Barriers to Make Marikina a Bicycle Friendly City:

1. **Strong political will of the local leaders** who implemented programs that were unpopular and considered by many as "political suicide" in their pursuance of freeing the city roads and sidewalks from obstructions and relentlessly taken back the public land and waterways easement that were taken illegally by some residents. These efforts resulted in the city's successful and effective management of its streets and sidewalk and pave the way for the inclusion of the bicycle lanes in the city's transport network. This drew the attention of the World Bank who facilitated the granting of the USD 1.3 Million Global Environment Facility for the Marikina Bikeways as demonstration project in the Philippines.
2. **Development of the 66 kilometers of bikeways network** that connects the residential areas to schools, market, work places, government centers and major urban transport such as the light rail transit.
3. **Transforming the people's attitude and preference** for bicycle thru education, beginning with school children and women, by conducting Bicycle Safety Education and Environment Awareness Clinics;
4. **An interest free, 12 months to pay Marikina Bicycle Loan Program** for low income city employees;
5. **Encouraging and Empowering the city's volunteer citizens** to assist in the bikeways maintenance and patrolling.
6. **City sponsored annual cycling events and competitions.** designed to attract more people to cycling and bicycle lanes.

Introduction

The commuting population of the Philippines' leading metropolis, Metro Manila, has a strong preference for taking either car or public utility jeepneys (PUJs) which offer an almost door-to-door transport service. This resulted in severe traffic congestion, air pollution caused by gas emissions, with its related negative environmental impacts, that made them one of the most pressing problems in the Philippines.

A report made by the Asian Development Bank in 1999 states that 16 people die daily in Metro Manila due to air pollution – 78% of which is caused by motorized transport. The Philippine Clean Air Act of 1999 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations specify compliance requirements to control toxicity of motor vehicle emissions but totally overlook the very important role of non-motorized transport in improving air quality in urban areas.

In 1999 Marikina, one of the 17 cities of Metro Manila, has embarked herself on the most efficient, economical and ingenious way of easing perennial road problems: Cycling.

The City of Marikina is a medium sized city of about 407,732 people situated at the eastern border of the Metro Manila administrative area. Located somewhat of the periphery of Metro Manila, the level of congestion in the city have not yet reached the intolerable levels experienced in the inner Metro Manila. Within the City of Marikina, about 2.9% of all trips are bicycles vs. 1.7% in Metro Manila.

The Philippines' Department of Public Works and Highways proposed relative to the Metro Manila Urban Transport Integration Project (MMURTRIP) a pilot component for a non motorized pedestrian and bicycle path in Marikina to connect communities with employment centers and Light Rail Transport stations. The World Bank Global Environment Facility (GEF) provided the funding support. The project made a strategic choice to limit the bicycle network intervention to one city for a demonstration effect. Since political commitment is crucial for the success of such initiatives, the City of Marikina was chosen for the exceptional commitment to non motorized transport and related environmental issues shown by its current administration.

Now, Marikina is being recognized as the Philippines' first bicycle-friendly city due to the local government's continuous and effective programs in integrating the 66-kms. bikeways in its overall transport network, complemented by bicycle safety education and promotion efforts that are designed to promote public acceptance for the emerging culture of urban cycling. Dealing with the fact that gasoline prices are shooting up in the country, cycling seems to be well on its way to becoming the “**smart choice**” for the growing commuting population and the bicycle is now regarded as holding the key to fuel savings.

Hereunder, made Marikina a Bicycle Friendly City:

1. **Strong political will of the local leaders** (Mayor Bayani F. Fernando, 1992-2001 and Mayor Marides C. Fernando , 2001 to Present) who implemented programs and projects that were unpopular and considered by many as “political suicide” in their pursuance of freeing the city roads and sidewalks from obstructions and relentlessly taken back the public land and waterways easement that were taken illegally by some residents. These efforts pave the way for the city’s successful and effective management of its streets and sidewalk and the inclusion of the bicycle lanes in the city’s transport network. This drew the attention of the World Bank who facilitated the granting of the USD 1.3 Million Global Environment Facility for the Marikina Bikeways as demonstration project in the Philippines.
2. **Development of the 66 kilometers of bikeways network** that are well paved, lighted, complete with parking and lighting facilities, traffic and informative signages.

The City of Marikina has modified since 1999 its transport development program to actively promote greater use of bicycles and walking as alternatives to motorized transport, and thereby encourage commuters to shift from motorized transport to bicycles. The gradual construction and operation of the 66 kms of bikeways system has seen positive results in terms of the increasing modal share of bicycles in total traffic volume, i.e., from an average share of 4.25% in 1999 to 7.56% share in 2005. To date, Marikina has already constructed 31 kms of bikeways and 14 kms more are due for completion in March 2006. The city’s bikeways network offers a direct and safe connection from residential areas to major transport terminals, markets, schools, employment centers, commercial and industrial establishments. Projects are now underway to install more lighting facilities, parking racks, traffic and informative signages along well-traveled routes where there are bikeways adjacent to the existing roads and public access areas. The table below shows the positive result of developing a system of bicycle facility in the city:

Table 1: Marikina Bikeways Program Performance Indicators

Key Indicators	1999	2002	2005
Length of bikeways constructed (kms) –Total	12	19	31
Length of bikeways 100% funded by Marikina	12	18.5	25.4
Length of bikeways supported by the WB-GEF Grant	0	0.5	5.6
Modal share of NMT to total traffic volume (%)	4.25%	5.56%	7.56%
Sales of Bicycles in Marikina (Php Million)	1.1	2.5	10.6
Number of Registered Bicycle Shops in Marikina	5	9	19

3. **Transforming the people's perception** of bicycle as a "*poor man's vehicle*" to the transport of "healthy lifestyle" thru education.

As the city continuously built more bikeways, educating our people on safe cycling become a requirement. Beginning with school children, ages 10 years old and above, the Marikina Bikeways Office initiated free weekend and summer workshops on safe cycling and bicycle maintenance. Cycling helmets and bicycles are being lent out for free to the students. The cycling clinics, participated by almost 4,000 children since January 2003, include trainings on bicycle maintenance and repair, bicycle handling and riding with traffic and practical education on traffic rules and regulations. City tours on bike to appreciate interesting places in Marikina and nearby cities and municipalities are also part of the program to let the youth experience the "*joy of cycling*". This education program has successfully gained the participation of the parents and community leaders because of the safety aspect of the bicycle program.

The program also found support from the Japan's Municipal Coordinating Committee for Overseas Bicycle Assistance wherein they donated 150 units of training bicycles and stationeries for the participating students. Another round of donation is forthcoming. In total, the city has 500 units of training bicycles to carry out its educational campaigns.

4. **Marikina Bicycle Loan Program.**

An interest free, 6 to 12 months payment scheme bicycle loan program was launched last May 2004 for city hall officials and employees to enable them to acquire bicycle in going to and from their work. To date, there were 78 employees who availed the loan and many more are applying, influenced in part by the high transport fares and increased price commodities. This is currently managed by the city government.

5. **Mobilizing and Empowering the city's volunteer workers** to assist the City Bikeways Officers, in the bikeways maintenance and patrolling. People's concern and feedback on bicycle-related incidents are being communicated to Marikina Bikeways Office through the *Bantay Bayan* (city's volunteer workers) peace keeping operations and surveillance. To boost the said cooperative effort of the *Bantay Bayans*, the city government has issued 150 units of bicycles to improve the mobility of the peace keeping corps.
6. **Encouraging women and children** to learn to bike by conducting Bike Night at the Marikina Sports Park's Oval and/or during Saturday Cycling Tour of the City. They were given rent free training bicycles and volunteer bicycle trainers from the city's volunteer cycling clubs. A tour of Marikina is given as incentive for their learning to bike.

7. **Organizing and Holding of Annual Summer Cycling Events and Competitions.** Sponsored mainly by the city government, the promotion activities aim to attract more people to cycling and to use the bicycle lanes.

- SILAKBO (Cycling, Walking and Jogging/Running fun activities)
- BMX Extreme Challenge
- Inter-School Bicycle Competition participated in by the different public elementary (17) and high schools (8) in the city
- Bike Week. A summer weeklong activity composed of bicycle bazaar, community outreach projects and bicycle competitions

Once a month, a group composing of the Marikina Bikeways Office, support groups from various Marikina cycling clubs and students visit subdivisions and depressed communities to hold bicycle maintenance clinic to promote mechanical self-sufficiency among bike owners. The group bring their tools and expertise and teach the bike owners on the proper maintenance of their bicycles to ensure its sustainability.

Kapihan sa Bikeways (Sunday Cyclists' Forum) was also being held occasionally in various strategic locations in the city wherein there is an existing or soon to have a bikeway. The Bikeways officers offer free drinks and bike repair in exchange to cyclists' information regarding the safety monitoring of bicycle facility, planning and holding bicycle events and competitions to further promote the program. Information regarding the city's bicycle program is disseminated more effectively during these community outreach encounters.

The communities' response to these efforts is encouraging. Community bike tours, including the usual sport cycling competitions, are now included in their fiesta / community activities and more children and women are now encouraged to join the city's bicycle educational and sports activities.

8. **State of Governance**

The project is being managed by the Marikina City Bikeways Office. This office was created pursuant to the requirement of the World Bank and in line with our vision of sustained monitoring and maintenance of the project. This office receives an annual budget that is duly approved by the executive branch and ratified by the Council.

The project is being implemented by contract (for World Bank-assisted component) and by local administration (for locally-funded component). Awarding of project to contractors follows the rules and regulations of the local Bids and Awards Committee subject to the final approval of the World Bank.

Report on the status of project implementation is periodically provided to the city government as well as to the financial donor. The public are kept abreast about the progress of the project through various means including the publication of Marikina Digest, Annual Accomplishment Report and State of the City Address.

9. Sustainability

The bicycle network is a facility that is designed for a long-term operation. The benefits accruing from the program and the people's acceptability and sense of ownership assure its sustainability. The basic need for an alternative and practical infrastructure, built with the use of financial grant and local funds will keep the project in place in the same breadth with the roads and sidewalks. Maintaining its worthiness shall be the result of good local governance, one that is able to enforce the National Building Code, particularly on setback requirements, without fear or favor.

To encourage the populace to take on bicycles, the city will be coming out with a users-friendly Bicycle Guidebook to be disseminated to our 87,000 households. The guidebook will highlight the advantages of using bicycle; the location of bicycle path and bicycle parking racks; safety measures, signages among others.

10. Empowerment

The project basically empowers the people, particularly the marginalized ones, in terms of providing them with an alternative mode of transportation using bicycle as a form of transportation for internal trips. Consider this scenario: A local residents living in the far end of Marikina and who is working elsewhere in Metro Manila. All he needs to do is to ride a bike and take the bicycle path that connects the different barangays along the riverbanks. When he reaches the tip of the city, he will park his bicycle in a secured parking area and then proceed to the MRT Station that will bring him to his workplace. When he returns, all he needs to do is leisurely pedal his way to his residence. This is the kind of scenario that we are looking at and will, in fact, become a reality when the project is completed in 2006.