

## Summary of the League of American Bicyclists' 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Summit Washington DC \* March 9-11 \* 2010

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I know from having lived in Washington DC for several years that March weather there is usually cold, wet and clammy, but this year the skies were crystal blue, the temperature in the 60's and the spirits high (even on the crowded METRO rail!) As I took the METRO last Tuesday to the posh Ronald Reagan International Center, located a few blocks from the home of the Obama family, I had no idea the Annual Summit conference hosted by the League of American Bicyclists (LAB) with over **700 attendees from the US, Canada and Australia**, would be the largest in a decade. North Carolina also had its largest delegation - a total of 17 – representing TREK and other industry reps, road and mountain bike clubs, bike shops, and bike / ped planners. This year **Ken Tippette**, Charlotte's bicycle program manager (dressed in a grey pin-stripe suit!) participated as panelist for the workshop highlighting cycling and mass transit. **Bart Stetler / South Park Cycles** and **Steve Doolittle / Cool Breeze Cycles** (both shops are corporate sponsors of CABA) rounded off the Charlotte group.

This is my fourth year at the conference, and it's also the only chance I have to schmooze face-to-face with our peers in sister advocacy organizations and with staff of our parent organization – the Alliance for Bike and Walking. Mark Wyatt of the Iowa Bicycle Coalition was especially helpful on fund-raising issues. A big “thank-you” to the amiable Sarah Stuart of the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia. She provided valuable suggestions on how CABA can better use social marketing tools to spread the advocacy message to our members and friends. Google people made a big splash with a laptop and large screen setup so anyone could log into the newly released **Google Bike Maps** (<http://maps.google.com/biking>).

As always, attendees gathered in the modern amphitheater, cheered and howled for high octane speakers like Congressman Earl Blumenauer, founder of the **Congressional Bike Caucus**, and a tenacious fighter for bike / ped friendly legislation. The Governor of Delaware Jack Markell added his voice to the chorus. Like my compatriots, I always leave these sessions gripped by an immediate adrenalin rush.

The breakout sessions on Wednesday were particularly informative with panel discussions by experts on larger issues of local, national even international impact. I attended the presentation on climate change as part of a standing room only crowd. Discussion included reactions to the recent Copenhagen Accords. We also got an update on the American College and University Presidents' Climate Change Commitment signed by more than 640 leaders. (Chancellor Phil DuBois of UNCCCharlotte has finally signed on. I had urged him a few years ago to add his name to the list.)

The last day of each conference is spent lobbying on Capitol Hill. For me this is the most enjoyable and potentially productive day of all. Each year the NC delegation splits up onto smaller teams and hops from the House Cannon Building to the Dirksen Senate building and back again, making sure the bicycling message is heard, understood (and supported !) by the politicos from the Tar Heel state. Most of the time we meet with staff, but occasionally we meet directly with the politicians. This year we were especially lucky to get an audience with NC Senator Kay Hagan. She was very enthused when it came to sharing personal anecdotes of her family's love of bicycling, but, like her colleagues, reluctant to make any commitments during this recessionary cycle. Bart, Steve and I took the lead at the meetings in **Congressman Mel Watt** and **Sue Myrick's** offices, since their jobs depend on local Charlotte Mecklenburg voters.

We pleaded the case for Senate bill 1156 for reauthorization of the **Safe Routes to Schools Act**, and I assisted Bart who is former President of the Tar Heel Trailblazers, in pushing for Senate bill 2747 for **\$900 million** to fund keep funding in the pipeline for the **continued building of mountain trails**.

Too bad my camera broke, but **Claudia Nix** of Liberty Cycles in Asheville came to the rescue. I left Thursday evening by plane for the Queen City knowing that my conference duties were not quite over. On Friday I took time to email “thank you's”, put a call into Congressman Watt's office for follow-up, and evaluate the Summit experience in terms of CABA's ongoing efforts to best serve the wider local community.