Published May 23rd, 2012

GoLafayette! A New Commute Planning Tool

By Sophie Braccini

Screen shot from Golafayette.org

Have you ever wondered how long it would take you to bike rather than to drive your car to go shopping downtown, or how many calories you would burn if you'd decide to walk instead? Now all these questions, along with the carbon impact for each of your traveling options, are easily answered by a new commute tool developed by Sustainable Lafayette members and Conflare, which also designed the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce's site.

How does it work? Simply go to golafayette.org, enter your destination and point of departure, and choose your best traveling option.

"One of the main issues in Lafayette is transportation in the downtown area," said Mike Dawson, a Sustainable Lafayette board member. "If you develop the habit, you can just as easily jump on your bike rather than grab the keys to your car. Taking your bike is not a solution for everyone, but there are tons of people living in houses along the trail and in the downtown area who can."

The project led by Sustainable Lafayette volunteers is supported by the community. The group applied for a grant from the Lafayette Community Foundation and received $400 from the City of Lafayette. Sustainable Lafayette also pitched in, and the group hopes to sell four ad slots on the GoLafayette website to businesses like local bicycle shops. The tool was presented to the Circulation Commission at the end of April.

"We have created this site with Lafayette residents in mind," said Dawson, "but since it incorporates Google tools, it can be used from anywhere." As an example, Dawson input a trip from downtown Moraga to La Fiesta Square in Lafayette, and GoLafayette calculated the different transportation options. By car, the distance was 4.7 miles, the time was 10 minutes, and the cost was $2.74, an SUV costing more and a hybrid less. "The cost includes the gas and published average for amortization," said Dawson. It also listed the CO2 emission of the trip.

What if you used your bike instead? Automatically, the site redirected the user to taking the Moraga-Lafayette trails, it showed how much longer it will take (28 minutes), the cost went down to $0.68, and the CO2 emissions went to zero. Additionally, it indicated how many calories would be burned. "This is such a health-conscious community," said Dawson, "we thought people would like that." The site also showed the impact of using a scooter instead of a car, or walking.

People can also share their trips and experiences with other site users. "We are creating a database of trips that people will populate with their experience," said Dawson. "If I want to know what it is like to bike to Burton Valley, or about using the bike path downtown, I can search the database with these criteria."

GoLafayette is also an information point for "everything transportation" in the area. "This is the only place where all the commute resources are centralized," said Dawson. It links to resources that can plan a commute to work, to school or to downtown, and also provides a list of online maps, some of them not so well known such as where to park a bike in downtown Lafayette.

"This project was the brainchild of me, Bart Carr, Mike Dawson and Brad Crane, Chair of the Lafayette Bicycle-Pedestrian Advisory Committee," said Sustainable Lafayette founder Steve Richards, "but Mike really made it happen." The site was first presented to the public during the Lafayette Earth Day celebration.

Dawson is an online consultant who used to work for Google. "We want Lafayette to be a better place for our families and we hope that everything we do (with Sustainable Lafayette) will attract more like-minded people here," he said.

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