

## NFBC Article

### Six Megatrends

My bank card finally has a chip in it. Now I can visit my native England without having to apologize as I hand over a credit card that requires swiping – I might as well have been presenting travelers checks. Yes, I can remember travelers checks and life before ATMs. We live in a rapidly changing world, and at the monthly NFBC meeting in May I talked about more big societal shifts ahead and what they might mean for bicycling in North Florida.

1. The death of retail. There are dramatic changes in bricks and mortar retail as on-line shopping and home delivery services continue their explosive growth nationwide. Failing department stores and clothing companies that anchored malls and strip shopping centers for decades are disappearing fast and dragging places like Regency Center Mall with them. There are two big implications for bicycling: first, a lot of developed land is going to be re-purposed and we have a chance to make sure walkable, bike-friendly neighborhoods are a big part of that re-purposing. Second, bike shops – which are essential for repairs, connections, and community – need to know that their future is inextricably tied to two more megatrending words: “amenity” and “experience”. Bike club members need to support, i.e. shop in, their local bike shop and help them become a community center for bicycling where you can also get your bike fixed, while sipping a cappuccino and reading the European racing results on your tablet.
2. The rise of autonomous vehicles. This inevitably makes it onto the list as rapid advances in technology are transforming the motor vehicle world as we speak. The big question here is not when or if change is coming, it's “are we ready to manage autonomous vehicles?” so that change is good. Worst case scenario is that largely unregulated driverless vehicles eliminate “unpredictable things” like pedestrians and bicyclists from the public realm and average vehicle occupancy plummets to well below one person as empty cars circle endlessly on streets using fuel that's cheaper than parking. Best case scenario is that 80-90% of vehicles are eliminated because of shared ownership and use, freeing up all that parking and extra roadway capacity for something much more valuable. Like human beings, possibly on foot or bicycles. These big decisions, and sometimes deeply ethical choices, are ahead of us...we'd better start preparing.
3. Climate change is all around us. Even if the best case scenario for autonomous vehicles comes to pass, we are still going to experience dramatic climatic events in the coming decades that raise sea levels by up to six feet in Jacksonville (flooding Ever Bank Stadium, just as one simple example). The transportation sector accounts for at least one-third of greenhouse gases, so increasing the percentage of trips made by walking and bicycling is going to be an essential strategy for all levels of government. That doesn't mean we're going to try and force everyone to give up their cars and ride 30 miles each way to work – besides, as it turns out, only 16% of all trips nationally are to and from work. What we DO need to do, is make our neighborhoods and important local retail and commercial centers a lot more bike-friendly and walkable so that more shopping, school, recreation and social trips are made by bike or foot.
4. Our greatest health crisis is physical inactivity – and it threatens to overwhelm our health care system. Health experts describe a coming financial tsunami caused by diabetes and cardiovascular disease for which physical activity was recently described as “the closest thing to a magic bullet” in

an editorial in the journal *Cardiology*. We know that biking and walking are two of the best forms of physical activity and can be readily built into our everyday schedules...and yet we singularly fail to do anything to effectively promote them, save for the odd trail like the Baldwin Trail or pleasant river- or board-walk. We continue to build streets that actively discourage walking and biking – hopefully the upcoming Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan can start to change that; stay tuned for ways you can help.

5. Population growth. The Jacksonville area is expecting to add up to 40% more people by 2040. Again, we have choices to make today as to whether that growth is in every-more distant, disconnected and unsustainable new suburban and ex-urban areas – or we transform the city of Jacksonville into a livable, walkable and bike-friendly community that attracts families, tech workers and millennials (I’m coming to them...) while preserving, and even restoring, neighborhoods that have been underserved and underinvested for decades. Most elected officials in most cities around the country are making that transformation happen, and they realize better biking conditions are a big part of the solution; Jacksonville can’t afford to be left behind.
6. Millennials. Love ‘em or hate ‘em, people born between roughly 1980 and 2000 are driving change in America. That’s the demographic every politician, every business leader, and every developer in the nation is chasing. Fortunately, the good news is they like bikes and they aren’t in thrall to the motor vehicle. They want and expect choice and flexibility, on demand, in every aspect of their lives. They also expect instant gratification. Beyond the [hilariously accurate] stereotyping, though, there is deeper lesson to be learned for the North Florida Bike Club. There are four generations in the workplace and today: they are very different from each other, and really don’t realize it. Gen X’ers and Gen Y (millennials) aren’t joiners. They don’t like commitment. They have no sense of loyalty or responsibility even – so they aren’t going to join the Bike Club, and they aren’t going to sign up to serve on the board in the same way that baby boomers do. We have to find a different model for engagement that offers instant results, is entirely based on phone interactions and apps, and yet offers tangible rewards and a real sense of community and connection at a moment’s notice.

That’s not your traditional bike club. And these megatrends are going to change society so quickly and fundamentally that a decade from now you won’t be saying “this isn’t your father’s Jacksonville”, it won’t even be your Jacksonville. Unless, of course, we choose to shape and take advantage of these megatrends to transform North Florida into a wealth of healthy, sustainable, walkable and bike-friendly communities that support physical activity for all ages, are resilient, connected, and equitably serve people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.

Is this the job of a local bike club? You bet it is, unless you are ok driving to Georgia to find a decent place to ride.