

## First Place: Patty Soong

### If I Were a Bicycle-Pedestrian Coordinator, What a Difference I Would Make

**Smogged**, *adj.*: bogged down with polluted fog.

A word not yet in the dictionary would be the only adjective necessary to describe Houston in the not-so-distant future. No longer a melting pot of cultures. No longer a city of refinement, art, museums and culture. Houston will fall into the pitfalls of pollution. However, my contributions as a bicycle-pedestrian coordinator would deter such a future. The city needs to educate and encourage enough Houstonians to become more environmentally friendly.

As a bicycle-pedestrian coordinator, I would first ensure the city has a bikeway network that provides bicyclists and pedestrians safe routes to their destinations. From there, I would implement several programs promoting cycling in place of driving around hulking Hummers and V8 grumbling sport sedans.

The primary program would be iRide: Individuals Resisting Idiots Destroying the Environment. iRide's mission to convert drivers to riders would start from the bottom up. The youth program or "Tykes on Bikes" would have cyclist enthusiasts traveling to elementary schools throughout the city. The speakers would hold workshops covering bicycle maintenance, safety & traffic rules, and the fun in cycling. Kids would bring in their own bicycles to get a hands-on experience. Bicycle road simulation games would provide practice for kids to transition from neighborhood streets to bike routes through the city. Parents would be encouraged to give bikes as gifts, rather than television sets. Families that could not afford bicycles would not have to worry, because iRide would have fundraisers and bicycle donations to provide for those less fortunate. Hopefully, a youth revolutionized by the thoughts of cycling as the primary mode of transportation would become adults in the future with the same mindsets.

My goal as a bicycle-pedestrian coordinator would not necessarily be for everyone to ride their bikes, but for everyone to make an effort to swap their SUV for a bike every once in a while. Y-Drive (You Don't Ride In Vehicles Everyday), another program under iRide, would arrange for participants to find others with similar routes to work and therefore establish cycling or walking companions. These same companions can carpool to work on those less than suitable days for riding. The networking of Y-Drive would not only create eco-friendly people, but also forge new bonds.

iRide would also inform the public about the money saving benefits of not driving. Gas prices are not dropping anytime soon, so start saving your money and the environment. Also, Houston has had its fair share of bad press earning a spot more than once in the "top fattest cities" list. iRide would inform citizens about all the health benefits of cycling and walking. Working with other cities, I would love to have statewide ride your bike day or weeks.

If I were a bicycle-pedestrian coordinator, my beneficial program iRide and its counterparts that promote cycling and walking would not only lead to Houston becoming less polluted, but also happier, healthier citizens.