



18 in the U.P.

POSSIBLY THE SAFEST PLACE IN AMERICA TO RIDE A BIKE

The Upper Peninsula is a Bikers' Paradise

There were only 18 bikes to vehicle accidents in the U.P. in 2020. Compare that to 1,210 in the lower peninsula of Michigan. I have more research to confirm this idea, but the U.P. is quite possibly the safest place to ride a bike in the entire country.

That badge of honor is the result of the dedication and hard work by safety planners throughout the U.P. It's true, the U.P. is much less populated than the lower peninsula. However, the U.P. gets millions of tourists a year. According to the Mackinac Bridge Authority, 4.4 million people crossed the bridge in 2021, and that's not considering access through Wisconsin and Canada.

Much of the safety success for road bikes is the access to low trafficked rural roads. Most bike accidents in the U.P. have happened in and around towns. As bike popularity and tourism continue to increase, maintaining or even improving bike safety will rely on some key strategies.

- Connectivity - the Roads Between
- Towns – Riding In and Out of Them
- Mumble Strip Management

Connectivity – the Roads Between

Bikers don't think about boundaries and who's responsible for what portion of road. They just want to ride their bike in a loop or connect communities in serene safety. They don't know why the nice road they started on suddenly turns to sandy gravel, which they abort in defeat and head back to town. Therefore, they stick to the surest routes, the same busy highways they drive their cars on. In doing so they have no idea the biking paradise they almost had.

We (Tour Da Yoop, Eh) have thousands of miles of bike routes identified throughout the U.P. that help bikers get from one community to another, avoiding the highways as much as possible. The primary focus is to discover routes that keep bikers away from vehicles.

The Upper Peninsula is surprisingly well connected via pavement while still avoiding the main highways most of the time. However, there are small areas of improvement that would yield massive miles off the highways and magnificent safe rides for bikers (and incidentally be safer for motorized vehicles with biking off highways).

For example, the U.P. has two main paved roads traveling East and West from Manistique/Munising to the Soo/St. Ignace - US2 and M28. Both are a biker's nightmare, but at least US2 has wide shoulders. M28 has narrow shoulders with mumble strips, which effectively eliminate the shoulder for bike use. Both highways have alternate roads that travel for stretches, allowing bikers some solace.

Grand Marais Truck Trail is a road with about 11 miles of sandy gravel just west of Deer Park and east of Grand Marais. I believe this is the single most important stretch of road improvement for bike safety and connectivity in the entire Upper Peninsula. Bikers can stay off M28 all the way from the Soo to Newberry. However, the sandy Grand Marais Truck Trail is not road bike worthy for most people, so they instead go south, and take M28 to Seney. At that point they could head north on M77, but most would probably continue on M28 to Munising not knowing the extra miles are way worth the journey.

Paving the 11 miles of gravel from Deer Park to just east of Grand Marais eliminates 22 to 57 miles of M28 major highway. It completely transforms the biking experience, creating a route that would rival the popularity of M22 downstate. Because bikers on M28 can't use the shoulder (due to the mumble strips), it also eliminates the disruption and potential deadly accidents caused on that incredibly busy road. This improvement gets a 10 out of 10 in my book for importance in commerce, aesthetics, and safety.

On the south side of the U.P., bikers have various routes - including Hiawatha Trail - to help them avoid US2. Unlike the Grand Marais Truck Trail improvement, there is no single improvement that would eliminate US2 entirely. But bikers need only be on US2 for short stretches of miles at a time. One of the larger stretches is from Engadine to Curtis. The Hiawatha Trail turns to soft gravel just west of Engadine. You can see via Strava heat maps (a system that tracks bikers actual riding routes) that bikers prefer and intend to stay off US2, traveling the gravel road for a short distance. They eventually realize it's too difficult on their road bike, abort, and take 117 south to US2. Paving about 5 miles of the Hiawatha Trail (or bike path alongside the road) would keep bikers off US2 for another 5 miles. This improvement is highly valuable, but clearly not as much a necessity as the Grand Marais Truck Trail.

Throughout the UP there are similar connectivity opportunities. All can be measured and prioritized as to the most impact for commerce, aesthetics, and safety.

The second most important improvement in the UP I believe is the AAA road from Eagle Mine and 6.5 miles to the west. That road is very sandy and impossible to ride on a road bike without occasionally hiking it. Once past the sandy part, there's another 11 miles of gravel that can be a bit treacherous on a road bike, but it's passable. To be sure, most road bikers would never consider taking their bike down that 17-mile section. But I do because I know the alternative is much worse.

There is 52 miles of US41 between L'Anse and Ishpeming. You can avoid it from time to time but patching a route together would also include some gravel, and what I consider to be the worst paved road I've ever been on, along the Greenwood Reservoir. Most people would not patch together that route, and even if they did, would have a torturous experience.

Putting a bike path alongside the 6.5 miles of sandy gravel west of Eagle Mine and doing some patchwork to clean up the 11 miles of gravel that follows would keep people off over

50 miles of highway and create a tremendous connection between the greater Marquette area and the Western UP into Copper Harbor.

Connectivity focuses on moving bikers (non-motorized) from one community to another, safely while also providing world class experiences. As the world continues to embrace the biking resurgence, the more bikers you can keep away from cars, the more people you'll keep alive. This is especially true with the development of e-bikes – bringing even more people into the sport of biking.

James' Top 10 “Connectivity” Areas for Improvement.

1 - Grand Marais Truck Trail



Paving this road allows bikers to avoid anywhere from 22 to 57 miles of very busy, little to no shoulder, dangerous M28.

In the future, provided the mumble strip shoulder problems are fixed on 123 between Newberry north to Paradise and then back south to Lake Superior Shoreline Road, the biking between Munising and the Soo could become world known. For world class status, it would also require some safety clean up on 6 mile road between Bay Mills and S. White Road (about 8 miles of wide and clean shoulders or continuous paved bike path).

2 - AAA Road East of Eagle Mine



This improvement is easy to overlook as it travels through some of the least populated land in the U.P. However, a short bike path alongside AAA road opens a connection between all of the Greater Marquette communities and the entire Western U.P. into Copper Harbor and beyond. It opens the door for bike travel that people currently don't consider because of the hazards and stressful biking alongside 41 to L'Anse. To really attract bikers of all skill levels, it would also require some clean up along the 11 miles of gravel west of this improvement. However, just the 6.5 miles of bike path alone would be a phenomenal start and get people off over 50 miles of Highway 41. Mile for mile, I can't think a bigger bang for the buck. The bike path would be just 13% of the distance of the highway it averts.



3 - County Road 551/366 along Cedar River

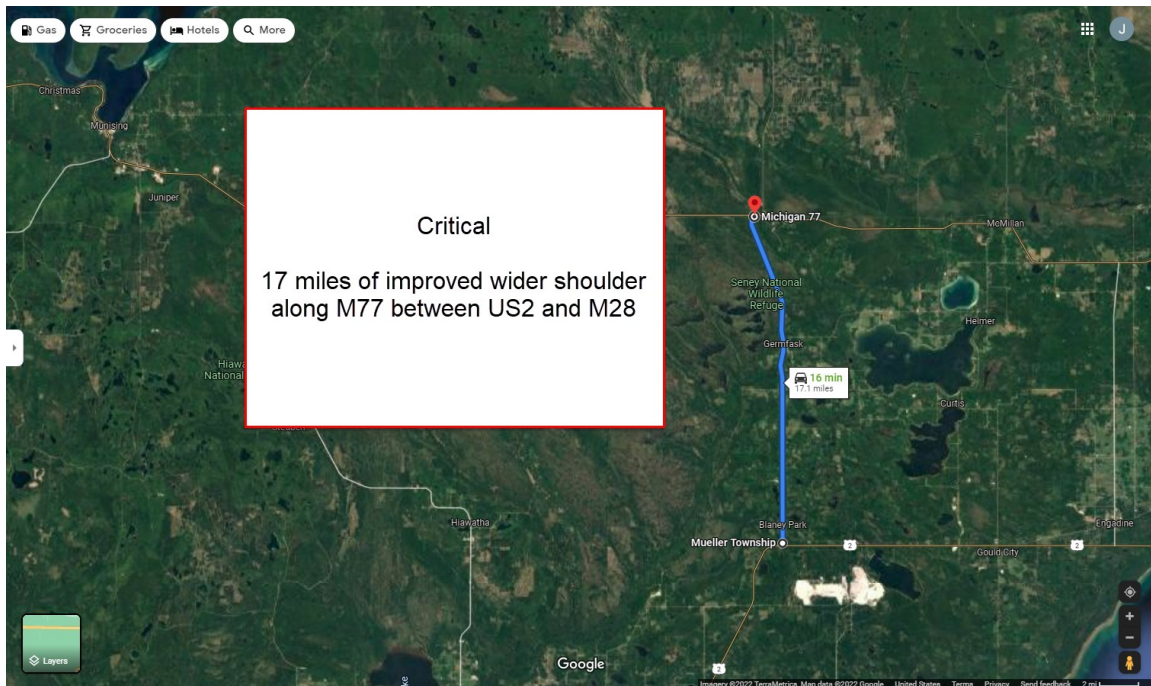


Another tremendous improvement opportunity, this short 4.3 miles of pavement opens the door to the entire peninsula to Marinette. Highway 35 is busy, windy, and stressful. I know effort has been done to improve the shoulder, and it helps to make things safer. But bikers don't want to ride alongside highways. Improving the gravel along the Cedar River opens a connection to country roads for bikers to enjoy safely to Marinette. Or travel west for lunch at Zoom Inn on their way to Iron Mountain. Without this improvement there is no quiet biking passage for conventional road bikers between Escanaba and Marinette.

An alternative would be to continue to improve County Road 551 all the way to Highway 35. Bikers would have to travel 35 for a little way before they can explore country roads again. That would require about 12 miles of pavement.



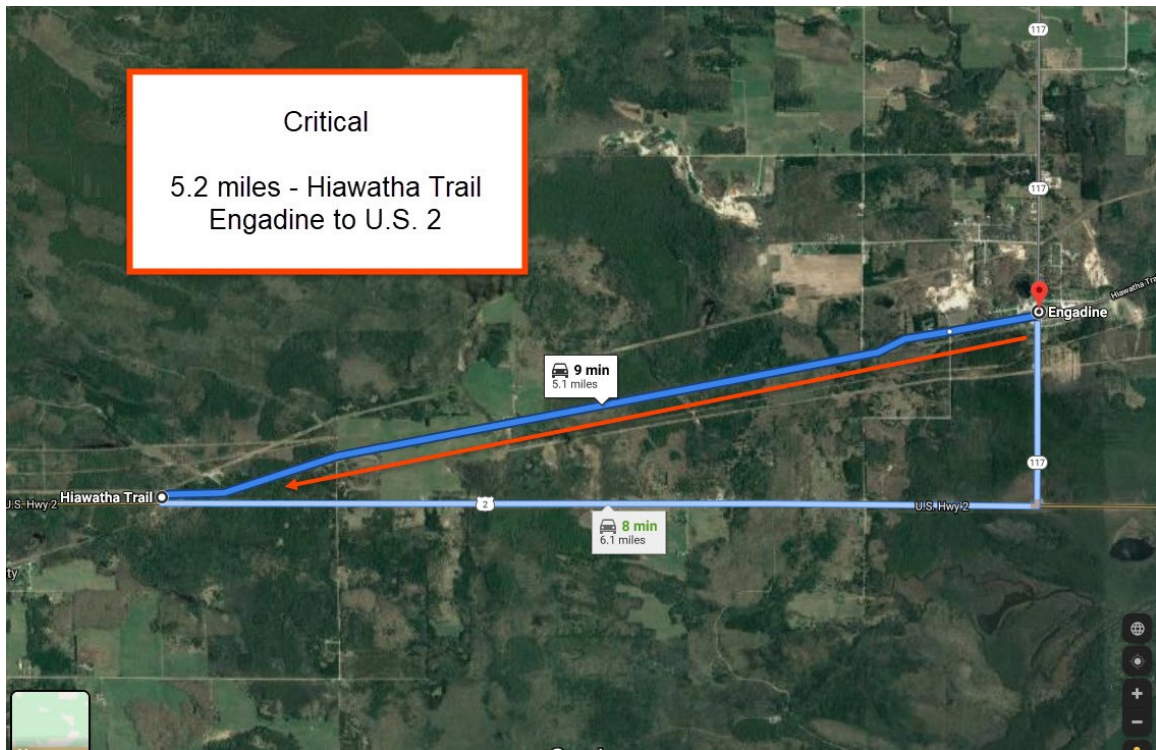
4 - Shoulder of M77 south of M28



This is a major north/south traffic artery between the Lake Superior and Lake Michigan communities and provides access to Grand Marais and Manistique Lakes. Traffic between M28 and US2 is much busier than north of M28, so this is the critical portion. It's a straight road and might mistakenly appear less dangerous because of that. However, that's not the case. It's full of large trucks and people flying to get home. People pass at all the wrong times and there's very little safety leeway for bikers. The shoulder widens near Blaney Park, and the biking experience from there to US2 is wonderful comparatively.



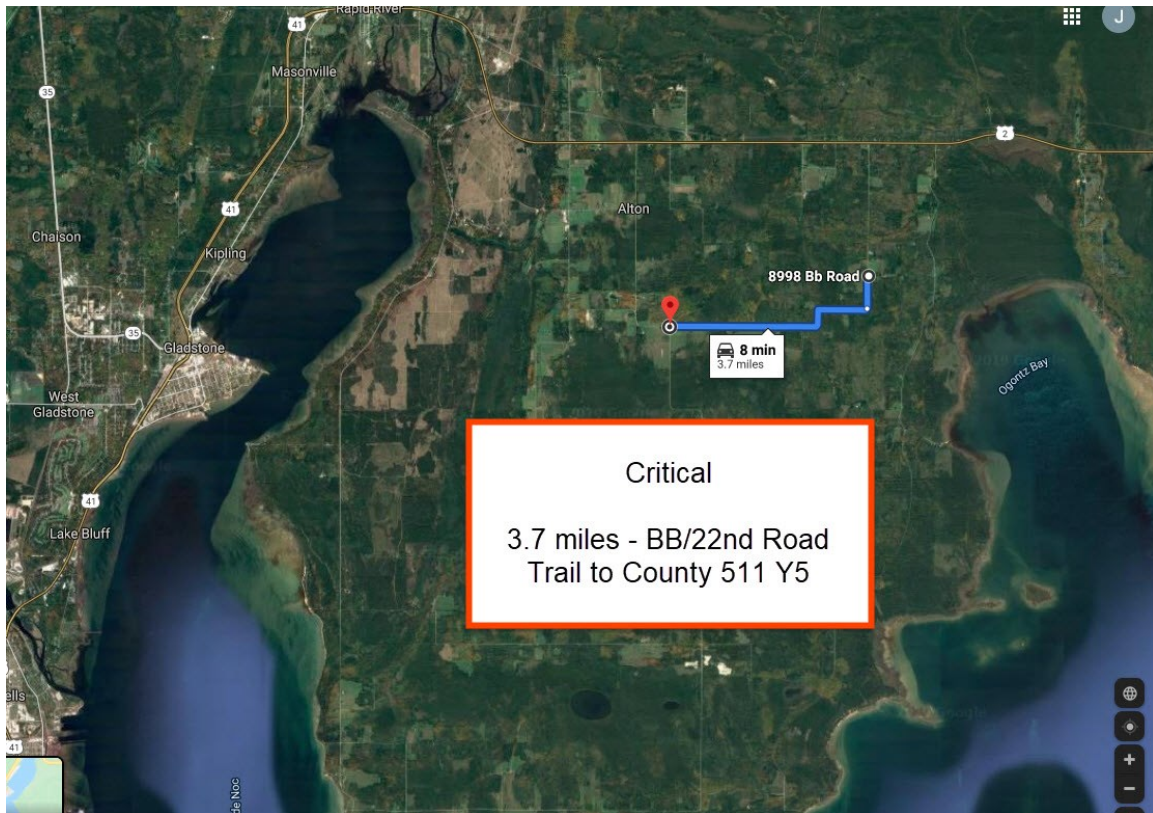
5 - Hiawatha Trail by Engadine



Bikers can pretty much avoid US2 from St. Ignace to Engadine, arriving on a paved Hiawatha Trail from the east. But then it turns to soft gravel, and they quickly abort, head south on 117 to US2. The shoulder is wide on US2, so at least bikers are probably safe. But it's not a nice bike experience. Bikers tuck in a line and power through the highway section as quickly as they can before finding solace on H33 north to Curtis.



6 - BB/22nd Road or County Road 503 Peninsula Point

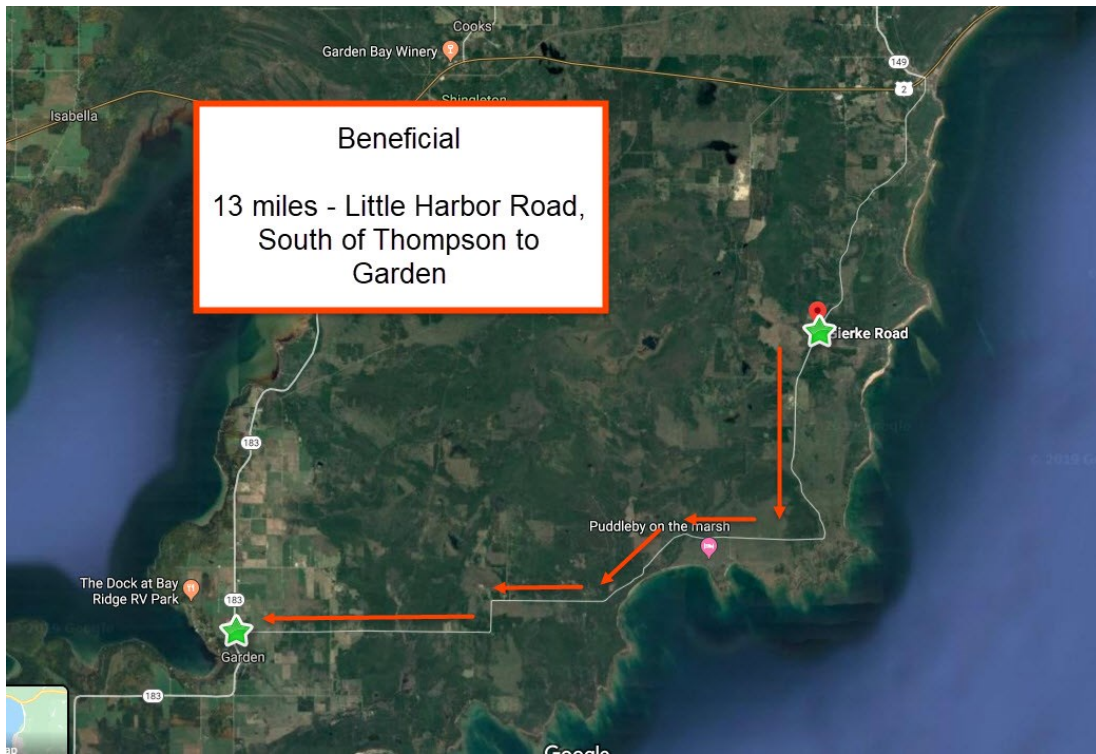


Similar to the improvement suggestion on Hiawatha Trail, this is almost another mile for mile trade off. About 3.7 miles of converting gravel to pavement gets you off US2 for 3 miles. Or, for a very cool curvy wooded biking experience, paving about 9.5 miles of County Road 503 alongside Ogontz Bay.

49.3 Miles of Critical Improvement Yield 183 Miles Non-Highway Riding

These 6 improvement recommendations total 49.3 miles and keep bikers off main highways for 183 miles. That's a return of 371% of mile improvement for non-highway mile gained. Not only do those 49.3 miles create world class biking experiences, but I also firmly believe those improvements will save lives. It's a short distance to pay for connecting just about every single community throughout the entire UP via road bike. They connect thousands of miles of biking routes throughout the UP. They allow all communities – big or small, regardless of their current tourism geographic attractions, to participate in the friendly, quiet sport, worldwide biking tourism explosion.

7 - Little Harbor Road by Thompson

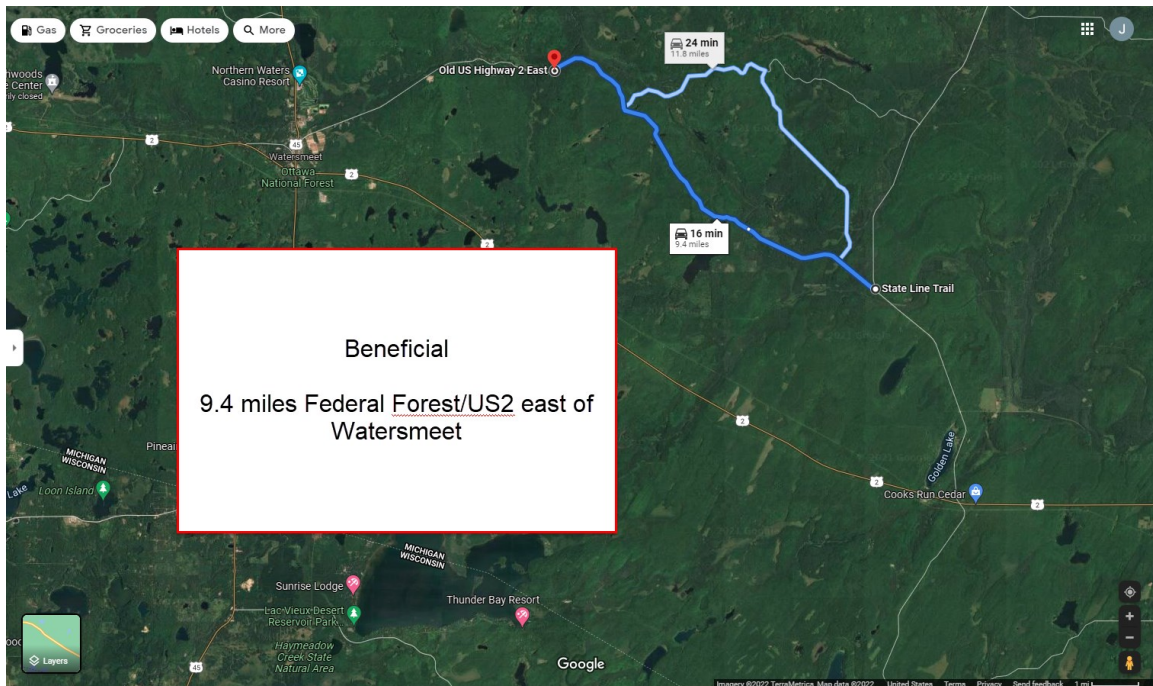


This is marked as beneficial rather than critical on a lifesaving scale. While it does help keep people away from US2, bikers can exit Manistique west and travel to Cooks before riding on US2. So, it probably only saves about 3 miles of large shoulder highway, but requires 13 miles of gravel conversion or bike path.

However – providing a biking path/paving the Little Harbor Road opens biking possibilities to the entire Garden Peninsula. According to Strava heat maps, very few people bike down to Garden or Fayette Park. Growing up in Manistique, I know it's a gorgeous place! Finding a solution for the soft gravel on Little Harbor Road would open a fantastic biking loop for that entire Greater Manistique area and all the people that visit/camp/stay there.



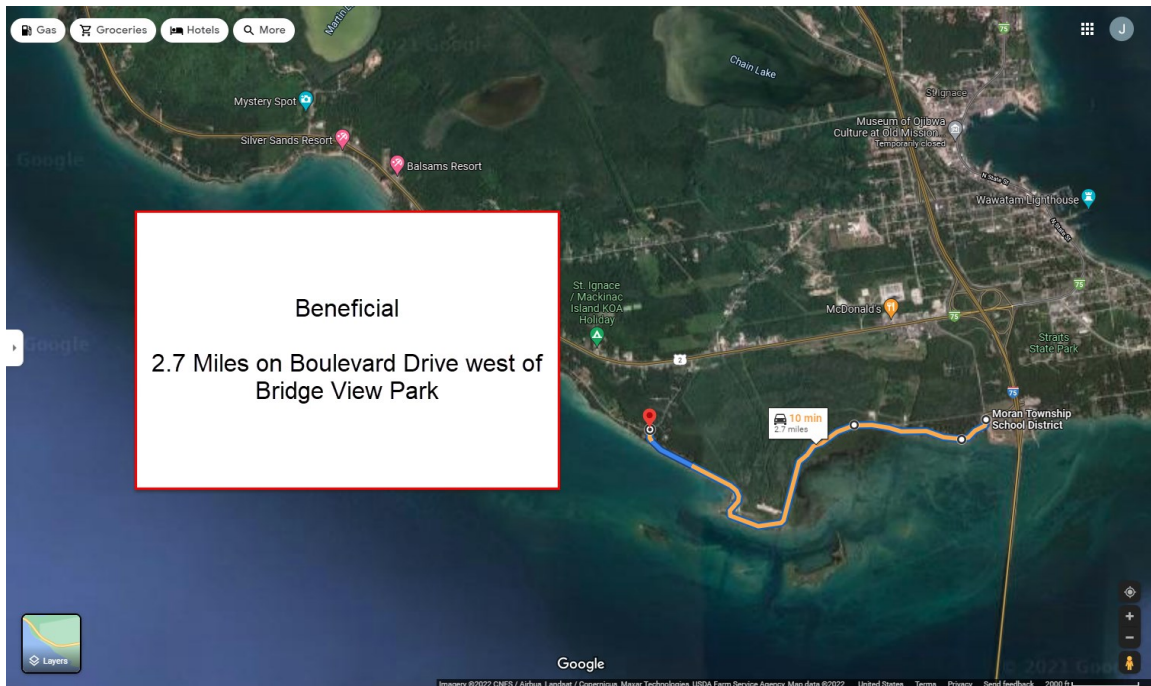
8 - Old US2 east of Watersmeet



This is marked as beneficial rather than critical because US2 is not as busy on that side of the state as it is further east. However, it would be an amazing improvement! Paving or bike path on those 9.4 miles gets bikers off 16.4 miles of US2. It's not just the distance that would matter either. It would turn that portion of a bike ride from stressful highway to picturesque peaceful remote riding.



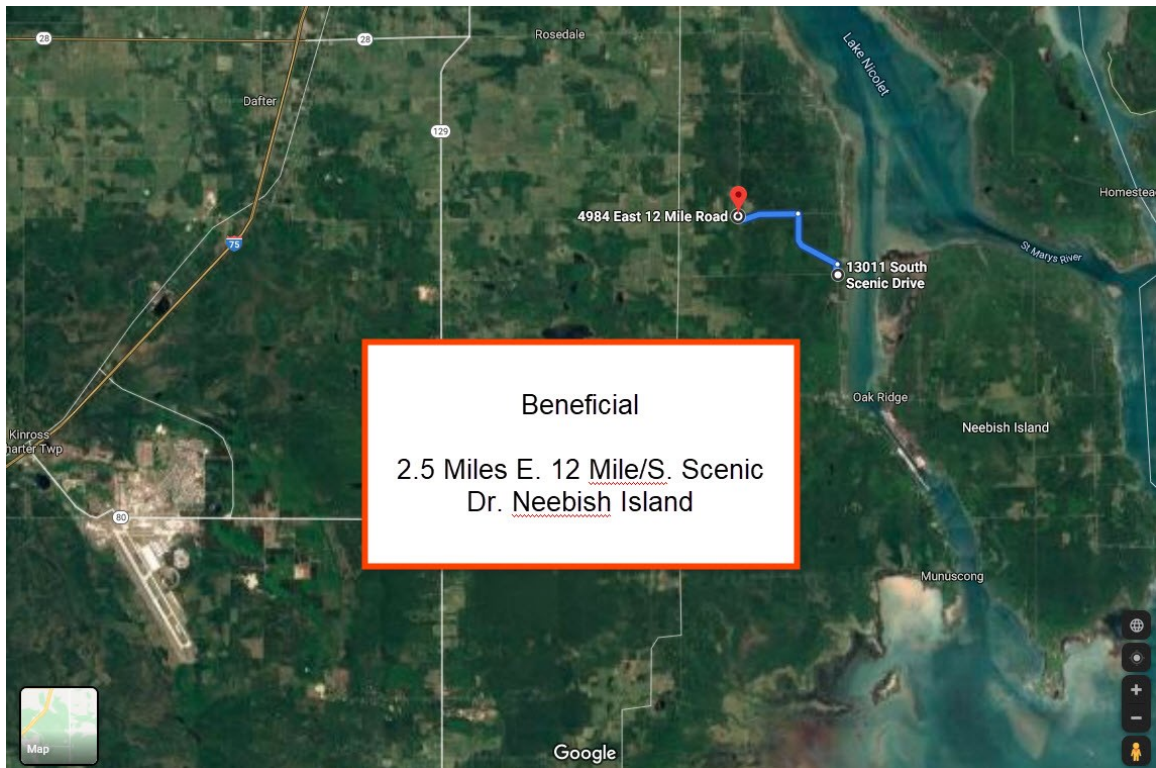
9 - Boulevard Drive St. Ignace



It's less than 3 miles and usually hard packed gravel. But the potholes are hazardous. However, the scenery is incredible. The Mackinac Bridge and surrounding lakeshore is a tremendous asset for St. Ignace. Paving or bike path alongside this road opens that resource for all to enjoy.



10 - Scenic Dr. Near Neebish Island



Paving the 2.5 miles toward Neebish Island would probably make the difference between bikers riding to the Island, or never riding to the island. The only alternative is E. 15 mile road. If bikers were specifically traveling to Neebish, they would take that road. But if bikers were traveling between communities, they would most likely never venture the 3 miles (6 mile round trip) on E. 15 mile Road to check out Cozy Corners Tavern. They just would never know what they were missing.

27.6 Miles of Beneficial Improvements Creating World Class Biking Experiences

It's possible that the four suggested "beneficial" improvements will save lives, but it's less likely, which is why I don't label them as critical. They do however create world class road biking experiences – most specifically Little Harbor Rd. and Old US2 east of Watersmeet. Both amazing places, rarely if ever visited by a biker because of the soft gravel.

Towns - Riding In and Out of Them

Over the years, I've personally biked through just about every community in the Upper Peninsula. Some towns are clearly much safer to enter/exit than others. Some towns got lucky, others took a dedicated effort, and some towns seem like they don't have a plan.

I'd recommend every community that wants to attract bikers to design biking strategies to safely route bikers in and out of their towns.

Escanaba is a great example. They improved the East entry from Gladstone and over the Escanaba River. The pedestrian path on the south side of the bridge leads bikers to N 3rd Street which they can then follow safely into Downtown. The pathway from Gladstone is magnificent and the path along the bridge turned an incredibly dangerous stretch into a dream.

I have one suggestion for Escanaba to perfect what's already done, and second suggestion to open a new dynamic that would making cycling the area a safety dream come true.

First, to perfect what's done. The bike path from Gladstone ends prior to reaching the bridge. People traveling west that are not familiar with the area (all tourists), will wait anxiously to cross the highway and take the shoulder across the bridge, then cross the extremely busy highway yet again if they know of N 3rd Street. The simple fix is to clearly and frequently put bike path signs routing bikers down P Rd, past Grain and Grape and then to stay on the south side of the highway where they eventually see the beautiful bike path going over the bridge. Iron Mountain does a fabulous job of frequent bike signs into town.

Second suggestion, to open a whole new dynamic. Gladstone is a great town to bike through and Bay Shore Drive is a fantastic quiet road. It takes you all the way north to the Truck Stop just west of Rapid River. That's where the fun ends. The shoulder of US2 from there to east of Rapid River Knifework's is dirty, busy, and treacherous. It's only about 1 mile and might seem insignificant. But letting bikers have safe passage through Rapid River opens up a spectacular 22-mile route all the way to Peninsula Point Lighthouse. That's a full 100 miles of riding from Ludington Park and back.

Small improvement yielding huge results. Once done, you just need to show it off and bikers will come. The key to biker use is signs and information. If you look at Strava heat maps, just about as many bikers travel along US2 between Rapid River and Gladstone as do ride Bay Shore Drive. That's insane as Bay Shore Drive is tremendous! It only means one thing; bikers don't know the road exists.

In other towns, examples for improvement are (St. Ignace) a pedestrian bridge over I75 near the Mighty Mac bridge. In Manistique, improve the pathway from downtown under the US2 bridge to the Harbor and across the river to the Campground.

My suggestion is for bike and safety planners to look at their communities and outline what their intended non-motorized routes are to get people safely in and out of their towns. Then discuss that information with people that bike and see how effective the routes work. Are they getting the most results from their effort, or is there a final mile that is holding their town back from biking greatness?

Mumble Strip Management

Michigan went through a design testing period with mumble strips on shoulders. Unfortunately, the learning curve has created some great safety hazards.

Even now that a decent design has been decided, the real world will sometimes make a theoretical wide enough shoulder unusable. Here's a brief description of the hazards created by the mumble strips, and strategies to minimize the ongoing risks before permanent solutions can be implemented.

A clean and stable narrow shoulder, even if it's only a couple of feet wide, can do much to separate bikers from vehicles. Michigan law requires vehicles keep 3 feet of distance from bikers. A person can't ride a bike in a straight line of inches. They look ahead, and ride along a corridor a foot wide or so. Riders body and bike bags can be a few feet wide. Even if a bike wheel was only 6 inches into the road, the edge of the biker and gear would be 2 feet or more into the road. A vehicle by law needs to give 3 feet of space. That's 5 feet. An RV with side mirrors is about 9 feet. Then there's the RV (logging truck, semi, large pickup truck...) in the opposite direction, also 9 feet wide, giving, hopefully, at least 4 feet of space to a vehicle traveling 50+ miles per hour. That's $5 + 9 + 4 + 9 = 27$ feet of space, on a standard 24-foot road in near perfect spacing conditions. Someone is getting run off the road. We bikers see it happen way too often.



A couple of TDY riders from the Smoky Mountains that explored the UP on a 1,500-mile three-month journey around the perimeter of the U.P. This husband-and-wife team were the first to earn the Green Plaid jersey!

There are plenty of quiet roads in the Upper Peninsula, but sometimes the only options are roads millions of people travel to see the U.P.'s natural wonders. 134, 123, M28, M94, US41, US2, and M26 are some of the unavoidable roads that are heavily trafficked and have mumble strips that have in many places (with exception to US2) eliminated the use of the shoulder.



Mumble strip shoulder on 123 north of Newberry. Notice the oncoming car and how far the white SUV is into the other lane even though I'm standing on the mumble strip. If I were a line of bikers on the road the oncoming car would be pushed well into the soft shoulder/grass. If there were bikers on both sides of the road, someone will probably get hit.

Mumble strips vary in width, layout, breaks between, road surface and shoulder quality. The design can become consistent moving forward. But I strongly suggest something needs to be done to improve the safety on the existing mumble strip roads. Mumble strips aren't always seen by vehicles, and therefore they don't expect to see bikers in the road and don't know why they are there. They take their impatience and frustration out on the bikers. Even the bikers don't always see the upcoming mumble strips, especially in bad weather. And bad weather is always the condition that must be considered with safety planning. The intent of mumble strips is to save vehicle passenger lives. The unintended consequence at some locations could have the opposite impact. It can be fixed.

Realities of Existing Mumble Strips Problems



Even though there is possibly enough remaining shoulder to the right of the mumble strip, it's incredibly dirty with tire popping pebbles and offers no break to allow bikers to weave in and out when there's a hazard or crumbled shoulder. This forces bikers to use the road instead of the shoulder. This section is on 123 south of Paradise. It's busy, and there are numerous times vehicles come very close to accidents. This area gets quite a bit of biking. It's here I saw a group of 12 teenage girls riding bikes to Whitefish Point. The lead biker was carrying a bag of groceries in her lap and vehicles were zipping past running opposing traffic off the road.

- The mumble strip shoulders are not three feet wide.
- Mumble strips weren't sufficiently cleaned upon installation and continue to collect tire popping pebbles and debris. Bikers carry a limited supply of tubes.
- Most roads with mumble strips (excluding large shoulder highways like US2) have eliminated the use of the shoulder. Forcing bikers onto the road.
- There is more bike to vehicle close call accidents because of these mumble strips (I have witnessed) than without them. It's possible in the future an accident is caused that is more deadly than what the mumble strip hoped to have averted.
- Some mumble strips have been put on roads that offer the ONLY path for non-motorized people to ride between communities.
- The laying and implementation of mumble strips was not done with the intent of "what finished product will make motorized AND non-motorized use safer" than before.

James's Top Six Solutions for Existing Mumble Strips

Mumble strips are not unique to Michigan or the U.P. They are being used throughout the country and creating the same problems everywhere. But the U.P. can do something about it and separate itself from the rest of the states.

1 – Warning Signs

Give bikers and vehicles a heads up so they aren't surprised by their sudden encounter. Mumble strips aren't always seen by the biker in the lead and certainly not by the bikes that are following. Especially in poor weather. Again, all planning needs to consider the worst weather conditions for visibility and handling of bikers and vehicles.

2 – Safety Signs

Vehicles are frustrated by bikers on the road and drive recklessly to pass them, sometimes intentionally being unsafe. Use signs on roads where bikers are forced onto the road to let vehicles know bikers are ahead, pass with care, give three feet etc. Create an awareness and culture of respect and safety for one another.

3 – Passing Lanes

I understand there are complications with widening the entire length of 123. In areas where money or other obstacles exist, put down bicycle “passing lanes”, like the vehicle passing lanes on US2. Put a sign letting vehicles and bikers know of upcoming bike passing lanes. This will encourage vehicles to have patience knowing they will have a safe opportunity to pass bikers ahead. The passing lane is a section of shoulder that is much wider than normal, maybe as wide as six or eight feet, for as long as is possible, at least a quarter mile, that allows bikers to move off the road onto a shoulder and a line of vehicles to pass.

4- Clean

Sweep the mumble strip shoulders more than once and inspect to make sure the tire popping gravel created by cutting the strips has been thoroughly removed. It does not go away on its own and one uninspected sweep is far from sufficient. The leftover pebbles collect more debris and makes what could be a wide enough shoulder not bikeable. In some areas I'd consider annual sweeping of the shoulder, or at least annual inspection.

One great example of this is on 134 from Port Dolomite at least well past Hessel. Even though the shoulder is of decent size, most bikers will be unable to use it because it's full of gravel and hazards. From De Tour to the quarry the shoulder is much cleaner and hence, more bikers use it.

5 – Repair

Improve the shoulder to a true three foot or wider where mumble strips are laid. I don't believe a mumble strip should be placed on a shoulder that has eroded. In my opinion, before laying mumble strips, shoulder assessment would be done to determine which portions of the shoulder need to be repaired first. Otherwise, shoulders stated for a three foot or wider shoulder are assumed to carry the shoulder throughout, when in reality they do not.

6 – Consistency

Once the optimal mumble strip method is achieved, go back, and fix the “other ones”. Create consistency throughout the UP in the mumble strips so bikers and vehicles learn how to navigate them. Make them all the same. Consistency and real-world design not only apply to method, but surface as well. Mumble strips in chip seal are dramatically different than ones in asphalt. I realize this will take years. The continued effort is well worth it, and I believe will truly save lives.

Thank You



Only having 18 accidents is an amazing milestone that doesn't happen on its own. Thank you for all that you do to keep people safe. As tourism and biking activity continues to increase, I hope you find my suggestions helpful to keeping non-motorized sport in the Upper Peninsula incredibly safe and maybe even better that it already is.

Tour Da Yoop, Eh has partnered with U.P. Lions Serve and Childhood Cancer for a dual mission of improving biking safety and helping families in the Upper Peninsula with children battling cancer.

Our main event for 2022 is the 1,200-mile annual ride, now in its 5th year, starting Friday July 29th in Manistique and ending Sunday, August 7th back in Manistique. We anticipate capping the ride at 60 riders per day, with an estimated total of around 100 to 150 riders. Those that finish all 10 days will be awarded the coveted Plaid Jersey for their 10th and final days ride into Manistique. Some riders have been “[Chasing Plaid](#)” for years and will receive their jersey for their final ride.

We currently have 31 Plaid Jersey wearers who rode a collective 40,000+ miles! And, there are many more riders who have yet to complete the entire loop, but are working toward it and have collectively ridden countless thousands of miles.

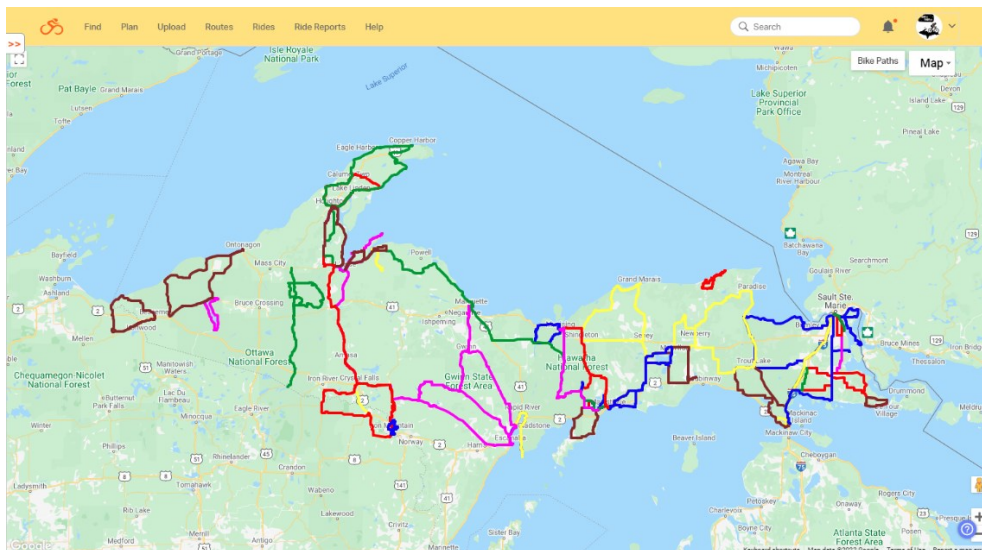


Route image of the entire 1,200-mile Tour Da Yoop, Eh annual ride.

This year TDY is also making available self-supported rides. Bikers can form their own groups/support and enjoy riding all or any portion of the 1,200-mile ride throughout the year. Those that finish all 10 sections are eligible for the Plaid Jersey and wall of fame.

We also have “The Journey”, a longer ride that allows bikers to break the 100+ mile sections down into multiple days. Riders that complete this entire ride (around 1,500 miles in total) earn the Green Plaid jersey.

Loop Da Yoop is a new adventure that encourages bikers to get to know a community for a few days. They have access to thousands of miles of bike routes to explore.



Finally, BiKE UP. This is 6 (or 7) routes that spell out an invitation for bikers around the world to come explore Michigan's Upper Peninsula by bike.



I would be honored to work with anyone from your community to discuss your strategies to help make biking safer and offer my on the road biking experiences to evaluate real world applications.

Thank you for all you do!

James Studinger - founder, www.tourdayoopen.com

