

By Kristin Kinnamon  
Bicycle Alliance of Washington

Every year, literally hundreds of bills are submitted to the Legislature for review and approval. Many are great ideas for great causes, some deserve to die, few make it out for the Governor's signature to become law.

I am proud to say that as of this writing, two bills that we helped create on behalf of cyclists look likely to fall into that last category.

It takes preparation, partnerships and people to get a bill passed in Olympia. With the Bicycle Alliance of Washington, cyclists in our state have all three things working in our favor. The BAW Legislative & Statewide Issues Committee, made up of bicycle advocates from all over the state, first met last spring to plan for the 2009 legislative session. We identified our priorities and researched laws and current practices to build a case for support. Because we've been working in Olympia a long time, we knew what the arguments might be for and against our bills.

So part of our preparation was building partnerships with groups like the Washington State Patrol, which opposed our 3-foot safe passing law last year. We got key cities on board with our traffic signal activation bill. The Obesity Prevention Coalition formed to encourage more kids walking and biking to school brought many groups together to support our shared "Safe Routes to School" legislation.

There are many categories of people behind successful legislation. The volunteers on our committee are backed up by professional staff. The Bicycle Alliance has a long-time professional lobbyist in Olympia, Michael Temple. This year Michael was joined for the first time by a staff member from the Cascade Bicycle Club who also worked on behalf of cycling. Michael's knowledge of the process, the politics and the political people in Olympia is unmatched. It's what gets us bill sponsors, hearings and votes. When our signal bill died, he got it a second chance by inserting the language into legislation that was still alive.

Bike Alliance staff and volunteers are the ones who helped get other people involved in this process. They organized panels of experts to speak to committees, sent out "action alerts" to Bike Alliance members, wrote articles for websites and bike club newsletters. The power of "the people" really does come into play in Olympia, and everyone of you who wrote an email, made a call or met with your legislators on behalf of bicycling helped make a difference.

The legislative session has not ended as I write this, but already we are planning for 2010. One thing we learned this session is that many of our politicians don't understand cycling. If we say "bicycle education" they think only of 10-year-olds. If we say "cars should be required to pass at a minimum of 3-feet," they say "bicyclists should ride on the right side of the bike lane or shoulder or cars don't have to pass safely."

Obviously, part of our preparation this year will involve educating politicians. We'll be seeking partners in local bike clubs and people with a passion for cycling to succeed in that effort. We'll also be working to identify our legislative priorities. What bills that died this year should we revive? What new ideas and approaches should we bring forward? What will make the biggest differences for cyclists' safety and comfort and encouragement?

*Send your ideas and read more about Bicycle Alliance efforts in Olympia at [www.bicyclealliance.org](http://www.bicyclealliance.org). Kristin Kinnamon is the president of the Bicycle Alliance of Washington and past president of BIKES Club of Snohomish County.*