

Nation's No. 2 bicycling city opens one-of-a-kind bridge

The \$5.1 million cable-stayed Midtown Greenway bike and pedestrian bridge is the first of its kind in Minnesota and allows users to avoid traffic on Hiawatha Avenue in Minneapolis.

By [Jim Foti](#), Star Tribune

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Forty degrees and cloudy might not be everyone's idea of bike-friendly weather, but on Thursday afternoon in the No. 2 bicycling city in the country, a couple of hundred people turned out for the grand opening of the Midtown Greenway bike and pedestrian bridge.

The \$5.1 million cable-stayed bridge is the first of its kind in Minnesota and allows users of the popular Greenway to avoid traffic on Hiawatha Avenue in Minneapolis.

Caught up in the festive spirit, Xena Huff of the nearby Seward neighborhood arrived on a bike that had an orange beak extending from its handlebars, while a pair of large magenta wings in back flapped as she pedaled. Riding over the bridge is "kind of exciting because you feel like you're flying," she said.

The bridge takes users about a block north of the old Hiawatha crossing, but bicyclists said it would be worth it to avoid the traffic light.

Jamie McDonald, proprietor of Sunrise Cyclery, said bikers wouldn't be daunted by the extra distance or the long sloping approaches. "Half of it's downhill," he pointed out optimistically.

Among the speakers who addressed the crowd was Mayor R.T. Rybak, who made reference to the Census Bureau's recent ranking of Minneapolis as the No. 2 city in terms of bicycle commuting.

His suggestion of "demanding a recount" drew a round of gloved applause.

Although the bridge is open, it is actually not quite done. Dean Michalko, an engineer for Hennepin County, said the bollard lights -- low lights under the railings to illuminate the pavement -- didn't arrive from Europe in time and so will be installed starting today.

But the blue decorative lights, switched on as sunset approached, bathed the mast and cables in a glow of varied blues.

The mast extends 100 feet above the bridge's deck, which has two lanes for bikes and one for pedestrians.

The deck goes just above the electric lines for the light-rail trains and below some high-tension power lines.

"This really is a case where form follows function," Greg Brown, an engineer with URS Corp., which worked on the bridge, told the crowd.

Although they no longer have to deal with Hiawatha, bicyclists now have to cross 28th Street, where a new pedestrian crossing signal hangs over the roadway.

Hennepin County built the bridge with about \$3 million in federal funds and \$2.2 million of its own money.

Minneapolis will own and maintain the bridge.

The county has a policy of not naming structures after living persons, but the city has no such rule, so once the bridge is in the city's possession, it will be named after Martin Sabo, the retired U.S. representative from Minneapolis who helped secure the money.

A dedication ceremony is planned for the spring.

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