

By: Maria Clark, Reporter May 7, 2014 0

The growing acceptance of cyclists sharing the roads with motorists in major cities has helped spur a new legal focus for those that travel by bike.

Attorney Charles Thomas with the law firm Huber, Slack, Houghtaling, Pandit & Thomas in New Orleans was selected last week as the local contact for Bike Law, a national network of "bike lawyers."

The group was founded in 1998 and has participating lawyers in 12 states, including Louisiana and Mississippi.

As the network has grown, the organization targets attorneys from each participating state that focus their practice on representing cyclists. Thomas is a cyclist who practices commercial litigation and toxic tort with his law firm.

New Orleans has lagged behind more bike-friendly cities such as Portland, Ore., in regards to laws and representation that support cyclists. The situation is changing, however.

"We are seeing such a boom in commuters and athletes around town on their bikes, we are expecting to see more accidents," Thomas said.

His focus will be not only on cycling accidents but also product failure on bicycles and defective roadway cases.

Thomas will also work with lobbyists to implement safety rules for cyclists.

Annual events such as New Orleans Bike to Work Day, which took place in April, are aimed at making the city more bike friendly. Since Hurricane Katrina, the city has also added more than 70 miles of bike lanes.

Jefferson Parish recently unveiled a 92-page road map that would add nearly 460 miles of bikeways. The parish currently has about 42 miles of bike trails.

The New Orleans Regional Planning Commission noted in their New Orleans Pedestrian and Bicycle Count Report from 2013 that the city was 9th in a list with the most number of bike commuters. Portland was the top city for bike commuters.

The number of cyclists in the city has increased by 6.3 percent between 2012 and 2013, according to the report.

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