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# Walmart Is Changing the Way Its Employees Get to Work

The company's new director of workplace mobility is trying to get 10% of its Bentonville, Arkansas, workforce on bikes, scooters and in carpools.



Kourtney Barrett, director of workplace mobility for Walmart, in Bentonville, Arkansas. *Photographer: Terra Fondriest/Bloomberg*

By [Ira Boudway](#)

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In the spring of 2022, [Walmart Inc.](#) created a new position among the roughly 15,000 employees who work at its headquarters in Bentonville, Arkansas. The job, called director of workplace mobility, comes with a very specific task: Figure out how to get 10% of the retailer's local workforce to commute by any means other than driving alone. Walmart originally [set the target](#) in the summer of 2019, a couple months after [unveiling plans](#) for a new 350-acre corporate campus. The goal was to get 10% of the Bentonville staff commuting on bikes by this year, but reaching that mark has proven tougher than expected. So last year the company pushed the deadline back to 2025, when the new campus is set to open, and hired Kourtney Barrett to help hit it.

Barrett, 42, an entrepreneur and avid mountain biker who formerly led Bentonville's chamber of commerce, has been asked to change Walmart's home office from a workplace where the default mode is driving to one where thousands of employees choose active or public transit on a daily basis. "We're building something from the ground up," she says.



The push toward biking and other forms of micromobility is meant to help Walmart not only cut carbon emissions but also make employees healthier, happier and more productive, and alleviate congestion in Bentonville. *Photographer: Terra Fondriest/Bloomberg*

When Walmart reset its deadline, it also broadened the terms to include walking, riding a scooter, busing, carpooling or taking any other form of transit that isn't a single-occupancy automobile. To count toward the 10%, an employee must use alternative modes two or three times a week for a year. Less than 1% of the Bentonville workforce currently meets that standard, according to the company.

“We don't have a strong active-commuting culture at Walmart,” says Cindi Marsiglio, senior vice president for corporate real estate, who manages Barrett and is overseeing the transition to the new offices. “We do not have the infrastructure, the programs or the incentives to encourage you to do that—even on the loveliest days and in the best weather.”

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The push toward biking and other forms of micromobility, Marsiglio says, is meant to help Walmart not only cut carbon emissions but also make employees healthier, happier and more productive, and alleviate congestion in Bentonville. It's also, like the new campus itself, part of an effort to make sure Walmart attracts the best talent with a lifestyle to match what tech

companies on the coasts can offer. The idea is to make the surrounding Ozark countryside—what Marsiglio calls “big nature”—more a part of the daily lives of employees and to show potential employees that thriving outdoor culture.



Barret rides her bike through the parking lot in front of one of the first buildings to be completed and operational on the new Walmart campus in Bentonville. *Photographer: Terra Fondriest/Bloomberg*

Over the past decade the Bentonville area, with its plentiful Ozark trails, including a 36-mile greenway connecting Fayetteville to the new Walmart campus, has become a mountain-biking hotbed. (Before taking the job at Walmart, Barrett helped to form Women of Oz, a group that works to increase biking access for women.) Now the self-declared “Mountain Biking Capital of the World” is looking to build on its recreational cycling to create a culture of bike commuting among its more than 55,000 residents.

In its push for 10%, Walmart has teamed up with People for Bikes, a nationwide trade association that lobbies on behalf of the industry and advocates for riders. In 2020 the Walton Family Foundation helped establish the group’s Bentonville office, which works with the city and businesses to expand bike infrastructure and educate residents. Last year, Bentonville completed its first 2 miles of protected bike lanes on city streets. It also recently passed a bond initiative to fund alterations to some major corridors to make them safer for cyclists. “We’ve got the recreation side more or less dialed in,” says John Paul Shaffer, Northwest Arkansas business innovation director at People for Bikes. “Now how do we start to look at bikes as part of the mobility network connecting people to where they need to go?”



Scooters for rent in Bentonville. *Photographer: Terra Fondriest/Bloomberg*

When the new Walmart campus opens, roughly half its employees will live within 5 miles of their work. The plan is for every employee to have easy access to bike parking, showers and lockers. At the outset, Marsiglio says, there will probably be more spots than bikers, but the company is betting on reaching its 10% target. That confidence has allowed it to cut back on space allocated to cars. “I was able to not build an entire parking garage,” she says.

There are no apparent precedents for a US employer of Walmart’s size creating a target of this kind and hiring a manager to help meet it. The 10% target “seems like a doable, aspirational goal,” says John MacArthur, sustainable transportation program manager at Portland State University’s Transportation Research and Education Center. “It’s not going to be instantaneous, because people are probably very conditioned to using their car. This type of place needs patience.”

In less than a year on the job, Barrett has been experimenting with recruitment tactics. She’s set up a bike ambassadors group (now up to 550 members) on the company’s internal message board, where she shares guides to area bike amenities and how-tos for organizing group rides. She’s hosted “lunch and learn” sessions on topics like navigating road construction around Bentonville. And she’s studying possible incentive programs such as rewarding frequent riders with discounts on bikes and other gear sold by Walmart.



A resident on an e-bike in Bentonville. *Photographer: Terra Fondriest/Bloomberg*

The most successful outreach so far, Barrett says, involves simply getting people on bikes. She's taken to setting up tents full of electric bikes and other rides in company parking lots and intercepting employees on their way into work. "It's just like taking a sample at a Sam's Club. You hadn't thought about trying this chocolate-covered pecan today, but here you are with it," she says. One parking lot ride, she says, is often all it takes to overcome the intimidation factor for people who are afraid of crashing or looking foolish. "If you just try it, then most of the work is done."

Her first convert, she says, was a mother working in global compliance who stopped by a parking lot tent last May to try an e-bike. "She left that demo, went to [walmart.com](https://www.walmart.com), bought an e-bike and emailed me a picture," Barrett says, "Now she's put together a group ride for her whole building and she's the cheerleader."