

October 10, 2011

Dear Metropolitan Planning Commission,

As you review the proposed Regional Transportation Plan, I urge you to recognize the role bicycling can play not only in sustainability and health, but also in stretching our transportation infrastructure dollars.

Eugene's Draft Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan proposes to double the percentage of trips made by bicycle over the next 20 years, and to make bicycling and walking more attractive than driving for short trips. Achieving these goals would make it possible to accommodate the transportation needs of our growing population with minimal new infrastructure. While fully funding the Ped/Bike Plan would require increasing our investment in bike/ped infrastructure, the entire plan could be built for \$60 million—roughly the cost of fixing a single 2-mile stretch of Belt Line. Moreover, building bike infrastructure creates more jobs than building roads does, because most of the cost is for construction workers and engineering, rather than for materials. In this era of tight budgets, we simply can't afford NOT to invest in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

But simply building bikeways isn't enough: We need to build the right KIND of bikeways. Striped bike lanes on arterials are inexpensive and very helpful, but everyone who would take advantage of striped bike lanes is probably already travelling by bike. We need to get more people on bikes. Survey after survey has shown that the number one reason people don't ride bicycles is that they are afraid of motor vehicles. These potential bicyclists find bike lanes frightening-- but they might well bike to work or to school if they could ride on buffered bike lanes, cycle tracks, bicycle boulevards, or off-street paths. Once they have gotten on a bike and developed some skill and confidence, they'll probably feel comfortable riding in bike lanes, as well—but first they need to overcome their fear.

Cycle tracks, bike boulevards and buffered bike lanes are more expensive than striped lanes, and focusing on them will result in fewer total miles of new bikeways—but it's also likely to result in more bicyclists using those bikeways. The specific type of facility that is best will vary with the location, but the bikeways we build need to feel safe to inexperienced bicyclists of all ages.

Moreover, the fact that we can't afford to build a lot of these new bike facilities all at once might actually be an advantage. One of the things that can make a bike boulevard or cycle track feel safe is the sheer number of bicyclists using it. The more people are surrounded by "people like me" riding bicycles, the more comfortable they will feel. To create this "strength in numbers" effect, we don't necessarily want bicyclists scattered over a large number of quiet streets. Instead, we need a smaller group of bike boulevards that are so effective and

desirable that most bicyclists will choose to ride on those streets. This effect already happen on Alder Street south of 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue—a street that works well for everyone who rides a bike.

To attract more bicyclists, we need to put our money into bikeways that really work. This means that they:

1. connect well to destinations, paths, and to other similar bikeways
2. have infrastructure that discourages through auto traffic
3. have very few stop signs or stop lights
4. have accessways or “cut throughs” as necessary to provide direct travel
5. are clearly signed as priority bikeways.

A network of such great bikeways will help make bicycling feel safe, “normal” and enjoyable to the many people who do not currently travel by bike, but would give it a try if they dared. Riding a bike should not require bravery. We need to take the fear out of bicycling.

This is NOT to say that we don’t need the other projects identified in the Draft Ped/Bike plan, and similar facilities throughout Springfield. We need a complete bikeway system, with a variety of facilities. No arterial or collector should be built or improved without adding a bike lane or comparable bike facility, and we should pursue every opportunity to build all of the projects. But I would recommend starting with the important, high-quality bikeways that will be most effective in attracting the people who are not currently riding bikes.

The economic and environmental challenges we face are daunting, but may also offer an opportunity to try doing things differently. The Draft Ped/Bike Master Plan offers a way to start building for a future that we can both afford and enjoy. Please feel free to contact me with questions, or if you’d like a tour by bicycle of some of the facilities I’ve described.

Thank you for your hard work for this community we all cherish.

Sincerely,  
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