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# PERSPECTIVES

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## Recreational biking is dying out

Money should be taken from transportation projects and put into parks, which encourage recreation

OPINION



Jonas Allen

**D**on't miss this limited time offer! This weekend, in the Eugene area only, see real North American dinosaurs!

The five-day Tour of Willamette bicycling event that ends this Sunday features some of the best riders on the continent. But while the competition brings life to bicycle enthusiasts, it is part of a dying breed of bicycling hobbyists.

Riding a bike was originally a recreational activity. People, even families, would go out on a sunny afternoon or weekend and "pedal" their wares. Maybe they'd hit the local ice cream parlor or head for the park. Either way, their trusty bikes would get them there. But with the exception of this weekend's competition, it seems that bikes are now used to keep people in the rat race.

Take the Ferry Street Bridge construction, for example. Eugene citizens had expressed concern about the need for better transportation in their ever-growing city. The Ferry Street area, in particular, was developing quickly and was in need of better transportation over the Willamette, according to Diane Bishop, Eugene bicycle and alternative mode coordinator.

Because of these concerns, the community opted to revamp the bridge. Rather than simply widen it, Bishop said, citizens voted to make the bridge safer, especially in terms of its seismic endurance. That face-lift eventually came to include a separate bike path connected to the bridge.

Never mind that construction to improve Eugene's transportation has slowed the commute to a snail's pace. And forget that rush hour has seemingly doubled because of the project. Eventually, we'll have a safer bridge and a new bike path.

But will families headed for Alton Baker Park take the new route with cars speeding by, or will they opt for the old, quieter way?

More to the point, will there even be families using the bikeway? It's doubtful.

The Tour of Willamette represents one of the last groups of recreational bikers. True, they race for points and prestige, but the competition is fun at heart. Even in Eugene, voted one of America's "Ten Best Bike Towns," bicycling for pleasure has become an oxymoron of sorts.

"Probably one of the things that got the bike paths going is that people wanted better access to the parks and outdoors," Bishop said.

But with the change from recreation-

transportation-focused biking, attention to those parks has fallen by the wayside. According to Eugene's 1997 Community Survey, the public has failed to maintain the parks that inspired its bike paths.

According to the survey, while 89 percent of those surveyed felt the city's bike paths were above average, the same mark for parks dropped to its lowest total in six years.

Bishop said it was surprising that the survey showed such a discrepancy when parks got the bikeways started in the first place. Eugene park planner John Etter agrees.

"In the last 20 years, bike paths have been seen as more transportation than recreation. There's almost not a connection between recreation and biking anymore," he said.

So what happened? There isn't a sure-fire answer. Measure 50 hasn't helped; it resulted in a massive lack of funding for Eugene's park system.

"We've had some cutbacks in [park] maintenance," Etter said. "We've browned out parks, downed some trees. Jogging and Ridgeline trails funding was cut..." He could go on for minutes.

Rather than avoid park cutbacks, wouldn't it make sense to divert funding from, say, an already highly rated bike system and put it into city parks? Probably, but that's not possible under the current system.

"The money that went into the Ferry Street Bridge bike path had to be used for transportation," Etter said. "There are all sorts of places that parks should get money from; we're just not able to take from those funds."

I'm neither a politician nor an economist, and I don't even claim to be a good debater. But if approval ratings for something are already high, rerouting a few dollars from that fund to put into the city's parks couldn't hurt.

Although that's not possible currently, the mayor's Parks and Open Spaces Committee is in the process of reviewing outdoor priorities for the city. While the committee is not reviewing Eugene law, its findings could affect funding for the city's outdoor spaces.

Right now, the committee is taking a

good look at what's outside the windows of City Hall. What it won't see are people switching bike gears to slow down rather than hurry to work. It won't see a park system flourishing with sufficient funding.

What it will see are hundreds of people zipping past the parks they once held so dear. It will see residents changing bike lanes as quickly as they forgot to fund the motivation behind those paths.

When all is said and done, the committee needs to realize it's not in Kansas anymore. Dry fields don't happen in Eugene unless there is a drought. Right now, the drought is in funding for Eugene's parks. If anyone on the committee is listening, help show your residents some green.

Jonas Allen is a columnist for the Emerald. His work appears on alternate Fridays. His views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**GTFF editorial flawed**

The editorial (ODE, April 14) about GTFs and Summer Session contains errors of fact and interpretation that require correction.

First, there has been no duplicity in establishment of 1998 summer salaries. The manner for computing them was thoroughly discussed during the collective bargaining process. The GTFF itself instigated the survey in which departments were asked to indicate the number of hours required to provide their summer 1997 courses. The GTFs accepted the survey results without question and participated in negotiations based on those numbers.

Second, hours are not being cut to save money. There are fundamental differences in delivery of classes offered during the summer. This does not make them less rigorous or less valuable; it simply makes them different. It is illogical to assume that one can offer identical patterns of office hours, quizzes or written assignments in

four or eight weeks as in a 10-week academic term. It is simply these differences that the summer GTF contracts address. It should also be pointed out that present estimates for summer GTF salaries are 23 percent above those paid last year for the same number of individuals.

Third, the issue of a tuition freeze upon which the editorial expounds is irrelevant to the current GTF issue described in your commentary. GTFs do not pay their own tuition; it is provided in full by the University along with a portion of their incidental fees and the full cost of their health insurance.

Steadman Upham  
 Vice Provost for Research  
 Dean of the Graduate School

**Act like adults**

"Self-serving." "Conservative." "Spineless." "Suck-up." "White boys." "Kill."

Did I get your attention yet? Well, James Paustian certainly got mine today. That's

some powerful rhetoric. Like all rhetoric, however, the accusations are shallow, designed to hurt people and divert attention away from important issues. Paustian failed in his mission to get my vote for his Progressive ticket.

His statements are sad commentary on the ability of ASUO politicians to act like adults. Calling a pair of candidates "white boys" in the most degrading and pejorative of senses is not the act of an adult. These statements put debate on the same level as children in a sandbox, fighting with shovels over sand.

Selena Brewington  
 Computer Science

**Hunger affects all**

Hunger is an issue that knows every race, age, gender, class and nation. People suffer every day all over the world because they either don't have shelter over their heads or food in their stomachs. However, most upsetting is the fact that the majority

of the victims of hunger and homelessness are children. In the United States alone, 12 million children are hungry. Worldwide, 34,000 children under the age of 5 die from hunger every day!

Hunger is an issue that affects everyone; no one is immune to its destruction. OSPIRG's Hunger and Homelessness Group is doing its part to help combat these problems locally. They have organized a Hunger Clean-up that will take place this Saturday, April 18. Everyone is invited and encouraged to help bring an end to hunger and homelessness. Teams of student organizations, community members, sororities, fraternities and students will go to local shelters and food banks, helping as many people as possible.

For more information, you can call OSPIRG at 346-4377 or just show up at Johnson Hall at 10 a.m. and we will put you with a team of other concerned citizens.

Echo Shumaker-Pruitt  
 Pre-psychology