

Leaders push for bike lanes to connect Salem

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A group of community leaders are pushing for the addition of 55 miles of protected bike lanes, proposing Salem spend funds from an upcoming \$300 million infrastructure bond.

Those behind the proposal say it would provide unprecedented access to safe, direct bike routes for residents of all skill levels and ages.

Salem City Councilor Virginia Stapleton, Cherritos board president Ian Davidson and Salem Parks and Recreation Advisory Board vice-chair Dylan McDowell have outlined a plan that includes more than 55 miles of protected lanes, including north-south and east-west routes, city-wide connectors, a downtown network and routes outside city limits.

Protected bike lanes use planters, curbs, parked cars or posts to separate cyclists from vehicle traffic.

The plan is designed to accommodate the growth Salem is set to see — 60,000 residents are expected to move to the area by 2035 — and address the increasing number of housing developments designed to encourage people to use public transportation and bikes.

"I constantly hear from residents and neighborhood associations that they want more bike lanes in Salem," Stapleton said. "This plan provides a unified and safe way to connect the entire city."

Salem is currently exploring potential projects for its \$300 million Community Improvement Bond, which will go to voters for consideration in November. The bond will not increase residents' taxes, as it replaces an expiring bond.

Davidson said at best, Salem's bike infrastructure has potential. At worst, he said, it is wildly dangerous, unsafe



A man rides his bike through an intersection in downtown Salem on March 17, 2020. MADELEINE COOK / STATESMAN JOURNAL, STATESMAN JOURNAL

and uninviting.

He said using some of the bond funds to create a network of safe, protected paths presents an opportunity to "place a downpayment on the transportation system of the future."

A similar project in Bend cost about \$2,000 a mile for protected bike lanes.

Those behind the proposal said it coincides with historic increases in gas prices, leaving many residents unable to affordably travel throughout the city. A comprehensive bike system would offer a safe, affordable and carbon-free mode of transportation that is unaffected by fluctuating gas prices, they said.

Davidson pointed to two key proposals in the plan.

East-west and north-south paths would mean that for the first time ever, people would be able to cross the city on protected bike lanes.

A multi-use path in West Salem built alongside transmission lines operated

by the Bonneville Power Administration would be separate from vehicles and be beneficial to both BPA and residents using the route, he said.

Backers said the proposal would provide savings by helping the city avoid costly projects to widen roads and make the streets safer for all modes of travel, including cars.

As an example, Davidson pointed to 17th Street. Officials recently reduced the speed limit on the street from 30 to 25 mph, but people still drive at speeds unsafe for pedestrians, cyclists and other drivers.

By redesigning the road with protected bike lanes, speeds could be naturally reduced, making the road safer for everyone, he said.

"A truly integrated transportation system means we must also invest in bike infrastructure that both an 8-year-old

and an 80-year-old are comfortable

riding in," Davidson said. "This plan achieves that."

Backers of the proposal said it will help the city follow meet goals outline in the Climate Action Plan and Our Salem plan.

"The past two years of the pandemic have shown us the importance of making long-term investments in our community," McDowell said. "Salem has an abundance of parks and green spaces, and a unified bike system will mean that residents can safely go from home to work to natural areas without worrying about traffic or parking."

Those wanting to find out more about the proposal and sign a petition can do so online at salem-bike-vision.mailchimp.com/.

This proposal is just one of many for the funds. Other areas of funding consideration include:

- Fire equipment and fire stations.
- Street and sidewalks improvements.
- Park upgrades.
- Civic Center earthquake safety improvements.
- Sites for affordable housing.
- Technology and cybersecurity improvements.

The Infrastructure Bond Engagement Steering Committee, made up of the mayor and three councilors, will discuss proposals at its meeting at noon Monday. The full City Council will discuss bond funding proposals during a work session on April 18 and during a formal council meeting April 25.

Written comments can be emailed to citycouncil@cityofsalem.net, and sign-up for verbal public comment is available at both meetings.

For questions, comments and news tips, email reporter Whitney Woodworth at wmwoodworth@statesmanjournal.com, call 503-910-6616 or follow on Twitter @wmwoodworth

Labor

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Oregon to train and prepare workers for positions the state's employers need.

"The goal of this legislation is to make sure that folks have access to job training opportunities and sustainable careers in the future," Brown told reporters, standing on the Hillsboro campus of Intel, the famed chipmaker and one of Oregon's largest businesses. "We have businesses across the state that are hungry, that need a diverse skilled workforce, and Future Ready Oregon will help tackle these economic disparities that we see and help our families access economic opportunities."

Salem fared better than some areas during the pandemic

Shut-down orders in the early days of the pandemic in Oregon impacted hotels and restaurants more than any other segment.

Hotels severely cut staff and some closed, restaurants reverted to skeleton crews as they could only offer to-go dining, and movie theaters were forced to close.

Those industries have regained 87% of the jobs lost in the shutdowns, according to the Oregon Employment Department, but still need a lot of workers to return to their pre-pandemic level of 220,000 employees.

"We're expecting those industries to come back," said Pat O'Connor, a regional economist of the Mid-Valley for the Oregon Employment Department. "It's not that we as consumers spontaneously decided we didn't want to go to restaurants anymore."

O'Connor said Salem wasn't hit as hard by job losses as some areas of the state.

In the years leading up to the pandemic, Amazon opened two new facilities in Salem. That helped shield the area from worse job losses as the online giant hired workers at a rapid pace.

"Salem has certainly recovered better than the statewide average," O'Connor said. "Definitely the warehousing in-



Owner Thorin Thacker poses for a portrait at Canyon Cannabis in Mill City, Ore. on Thursday, Feb. 10, 2022. The dispensary's former location was burned to the ground during the 2020 Labor Day wildfires. BRIAN HAYES / STATESMAN JOURNAL

dusty was one that showed real steep growth for all sorts of warehousing during the pandemic with the demand for warehouse workers, delivery drivers."

It's not just the pandemic; lack of housing after 2020 wildfires

Businesses in the Santiam Canyon are still feeling the impacts of the wildfires of 2020.

The reduced workforce in the communities east of Salem — Mill City, Detroit and Gates — that were affected by the fires, is partly due to the lack of housing. That has made it harder to find people for positions in that area.

When Canyon Cannabis, a dispensary, re-opened in Mill City in March, its four full-time employees returned to the store after they held a series of temporary jobs.

Owner Thorin Thacker says that while he was able to get all his old employees back, others are struggling. He points to a nearby burger spot and the dollar store.

"There are stores that I neighbor with that can't find anybody," he said.

Need for employees will remain high

It could be a while until employers find all the workers they want. But the governor said she expects to see the impact of the new job training money immediately.

In the next 10 years, the Mid-Willamette Valley alone is projected to add about 43,700 new jobs — that's about 16% growth, according to the Oregon Employment Department.

The fastest-growing occupations are projected to be manicurists, physical therapist assistants, nurse practitioners, massage therapists and bartenders.

The makeup of the labor force is changing, particularly when it comes to age.

Older workers retired at a significant rate during the pandemic. According to the Pew Research Center, 50.3% of

people over age 55 were retired in the third quarter of 2021, up two percentage points from two years earlier.

At the same time, people are entering the workforce at younger ages.

In 2012, 5% of Oregon workers in leisure and hospitality were between 14 and 18 years old. That share had leaped to 9.6% of workers in 2021.

O'Connor said the pandemic started an uptick in younger people entering the workforce, especially in restaurants. He pointed to a sign he saw at a McDonald's in Salem encouraging 14- and 15-year-olds to apply.

"If you're a high school student, there's never been a better time to find a job," O'Connor said.

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Juanillo

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cides with Mexico's Day of the Dead celebrations in November.

Another strong symbol of Mexican identity, Our Lady of Guadalupe or *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, sits on the ground during our interview. Juanillo is unsure if she'll add an altar as she usually does in most of her installations but the *virgencita*, as she's affectionately called by many in the community, remains present during Juanillo's final brushstrokes.

A piñata made of beans hangs in another corner of the installation, her own take on a traditional decoration.

Together, they create an installation Juanillo hopes is warm, healing and in-

ving.

It was important to do her own healing Juanillo said.

"So that wherever I'm at, I can still feel safe despite being far away from my family," she said.

Joy, grief of immigrant stories

Most of Juanillo's work centers on immigration and how joy and grief coincide within immigrant stories.

She said growing up in Oregon in a community that was predominately white was "really rough." The environment did not grant her many opportunities to explore her identity, she said.

She graduated from Perryville High School in a graduating class of 25 students. Despite the small art departments at both schools, her teachers at the high school and at Linfield have

been extremely encouraging of her art and her themes, she said.

"I feel like through my art practice I've been able to stay more connected to my Mexican roots, despite being in Oregon," Juanillo said.

The butterflies again represent that connection and introspection.

"The monarch butterfly is also very symbolic of transformation," Juanillo said. "Finding home within our bodies demands that we heal our wounds and traumas. The monarch butterfly is resilient and a metaphor for the growth we experience as we heal and accept our body, mind and spirit."

You can find more of Juanillo's art on her Instagram @color.obsessed. *Mi Cuerpo Es Mi Hogar* will be on display until April 23 at Bush Barn Art Center, 600 Mission St. SE.

She said the invitation to be featured

in the gallery is accomplishing a dream that felt unattainable at times but her parent and school support allowed her to see herself in these spaces.

Juanillo said she hopes to do more community work in the future, including community murals and workshops catered to the immigrant community.

"Art has the ability to bring people together and to reconnect people to their culture," she said. "Creating opportunities for that can allow children to see themselves in spaces that normally are for white people."

If you have an idea for someone we should profile for this series, please email Statesman Journal senior news editor Alia Beard Rau at arau@annett.com