

# EARTH TALK™

Questions & Answers About Our Environment

**Dear EarthTalk: What are planners and designers doing to solve the so-called “last-mile” problem regarding transit?**  
 – *Ginny R., via e-mail*

Solving the “last mile” problem—that is, getting transit riders from their bus stop, train station or ferry terminal “the last mile” to the doorstep of their home or workplace—has plagued urban planners since the dawn of public transportation.

“Most people in the United States are ‘comfortable’ walking less than a quarter mile to or from public transit stops,” said Alex Gibson of TransLoc, which works on solutions to transit problems using app-based technologies. “The problem arises when a potential rider is further than a ‘comfortable distance’ to the necessary fixed-route stop.”

Widespread suburbanization across the United States is part and parcel of the problem, given that fewer and fewer of us now live within walking distance to public transportation options. The result is more private cars on the road (and the accompanying carbon and air

pollution) and underutilized public transit systems.

So, what can be done to overcome this last-mile hurdle? Some municipalities and counties run feeder buses that circle the suburbs and bring riders right from their homes or a nearby corner to a transit hub. Likewise, Uber, Lyft and other ridesharing services can help transit riders fill in this gap, especially in a pinch. But these are hardly the most cost- or energy-efficient fixes to the last-mile problem.

One time-tested solution is bicycles. Many regions have stepped up their commitment to installing more bike lanes accordingly.

While a bike, either the traditional kind or one of the new battery-assisted models, works fine if you have somewhere safe to lock it up or can bring it inside. Folding bikes may be a better option for “intermodal” commuters (who pair biking with a bus or train or ferry).

London office workers swear by their folding Bromptons. Another increasingly viable option is hopping on a pay-as-you-go share bike which you can pick up in one part of town and drop off in another. Beyond bikes, e-scooters—check the Stigo E-Scooter and Segway’s new MiniPro—are gaining traction and market share across the country.

And let’s not forget about the oldest last mile option of all: walking. Denver, Nashville and Los Angeles have made strides in fixing infrastructure to encourage transit riders to go the extra mile on foot.

“Because most riders in high rid-



**Biketown makes it easier to find, reserve, park and ride around Portland.** (photo by Charles Chesnut, courtesy Travel Portland)

ership systems walk to catch buses and trains, transit stops must be supported by well-designed streets and sidewalks,” according to the Transit Center, a foundation that supports transit reform advocacy.

“Yet many cities in America have built streets without sidewalks, or allowed property owners to encroach on or neglect them.”

Even more important than spiffing up sidewalks would be macro-level changes to how municipalities manage development.

“Transit-oriented development and zoning changes are other highly effective strategies that put more people within walking distance to transit,” said Angie Schmitt of StreetsBlogUSA.

“Removing barriers to walking and transit-oriented development are likely to yield better ridership and financial return on investment than

others designed to draw transit riders from suburban environments—the transportation equivalent of swimming upstream.”

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## Willamette Park

(Continued from Page 1)

neighbors and customers on the west side of the river.

Finally, Willamette Park’s sports fields have received improved irrigation systems to prolong their ability to be used year-round, and to improve the turf playing surfaces.

“Portland Parks & Recreation is proud to have completed the first phase of Willamette Park’s improvements. It’s a regional destination, rather than simply a neighborhood park,” said Mark Ross, public information officer for the park bureau.

“It has a popular boat launch, full-sized sports fields, tennis courts, and the Willamette Greenway path running through it.

“Fishing season greatly elevates the daily visits. Finally, the park is situated adjacent to other regional open space and transportation corridors and assets. To the south are Willamette Moorage Park, Powers Marine Park and the Sellwood Bridge.”

Ross noted that the project went through a 9-month land use process via the Bureau of Development Services. As part of that review, great care was taken in choosing the proper plantings along the river’s edge.

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