

# Portland Afoot is getting around

The city's transportation magazine gives consumers a monthly rundown of the controversial and cool

BY ISRAEL BAYER  
STAFF WRITER

Michael Andersen launched Portland Afoot, a print and online magazine about transportation in 2010. Since that time, the publication has grown to a readership of more than 1,000 subscribers engaging them on issues of public transportation, walking and biking in the Portland region.

The publication offers a range of news stories on transportation life, and gives readers information on topics ranging from pedestrian laws in Portland to information about car sharing and the best employers for low-car commuters.

On its Web site, portlandafoot.org, the group describes itself with this declaration: "We bus. We bike. We MAX. We walk. We're fifty thousand families strong, and just by getting around without a car sometimes, we're transforming Portland step by step. We all know Portland's got issues when it comes to getting around. But where's our voice? What's our conversation? And by the way, how can I get my boss to pay for my rail pass?"

Andersen is an Ohio native and has lived and worked as a journalist both in Vancouver, Wash., and Portland. Besides heading up Portland Afoot, Andersen also works with Mercy Corps as an editor and writing coach for their Global Envision project, a blog about market-oriented global solutions.

**Israel Bayer:** Tell us about Portland Afoot.

**Michael Andersen:** The magazine is a 10-minute news publication about low-car life. We come out once a month. It's four pages long and short enough to read in

10-minutes. It's a fun read. We do weird things, we do serious things, and we mix it up.

Last month, we did a cover story about tips and tricks for dealing with cold weather on TriMet. We talked to a bunch of people about things like how TriMet sets the air-pressure higher on the MAX during cold spells, so when the door is open the temperature goes out instead of in. The month before we did a story on the 10 dumbest transportation problems in East Portland. We looked at things like how a specific bike lane would vantage right before a dangerous intersection.

**I.B.:** What was the number one dumbest

transportation problem for East Portland?

**M.A.:** There were a number of very dumb things (laughing). One of the worst ones is the Midland Library. It's a high traffic location with people and kids coming and going all the time. There's a TriMet stop directly across from this colossal 122nd Avenue. The nearest crosswalks are far away and there's no effort to let cars know that there are people sprinting across all of the time. It's par for the course on 122nd Avenue.

**I.B.:** How do you feel the publication is being received?

**M.A.:** We launched on a shoestring budget. Recently, I've been going to events and people have said, you've only been around for two years? It feels like you've been around forever. Who knows, maybe two years is the new forever (laughing). We can't claim the new kid on the block anymore. Really, the entire project has been word of mouth.

We've struggled with this tension. The reason it's in print is we're trying to be universally accessible. We want it to be something people don't have to think about to consume. There are so many groups covering transit issues: Bike Portland, The Oregonian, Street Roots. What we want is to make it super easy, digestible and efficient. We all have so much coming at us and so much on our minds. You can spend 10 minutes with Portland Afoot a month and your minimally informed enough to be engaged as a consumer.

**I.B.:** What are the biggest issues public transportation is facing right now?

**M.A.:** There's so much; budget cuts to fare increases to an all-out disaster brewing over funding in the next few years. The shifts in the fare structure with adding flat fare zones, which will have the biggest impact on central city folks. Both of those things are probably going to happen sooner rather than later. And of course, cutting back on services further.

**I.B.:** So really, poor people are more or less screwed and middle- and upper-income folks may choose to take a different mode of transportation. Are raising the fares the only option?

**M.A.:** If you look at the numbers, you can see why TriMet is into raising fares. The amount of money they can raise in the short-term is so much more rewarding than cutting whatever TriMet thinks is the non-essential services left. We have no idea how that will affect the system over the long-term and if they'll lose that revenue when people stop riding.

There's a lack of creativity to think about other revenue streams. There's also a complete failure at the federal level to think about the funding structures. There's what feels like a bottomless well of money flowing into rail structures at the same time cities are gutting services. Don't get me wrong, I love trains, but federal priorities aren't helping the problem on the ground.

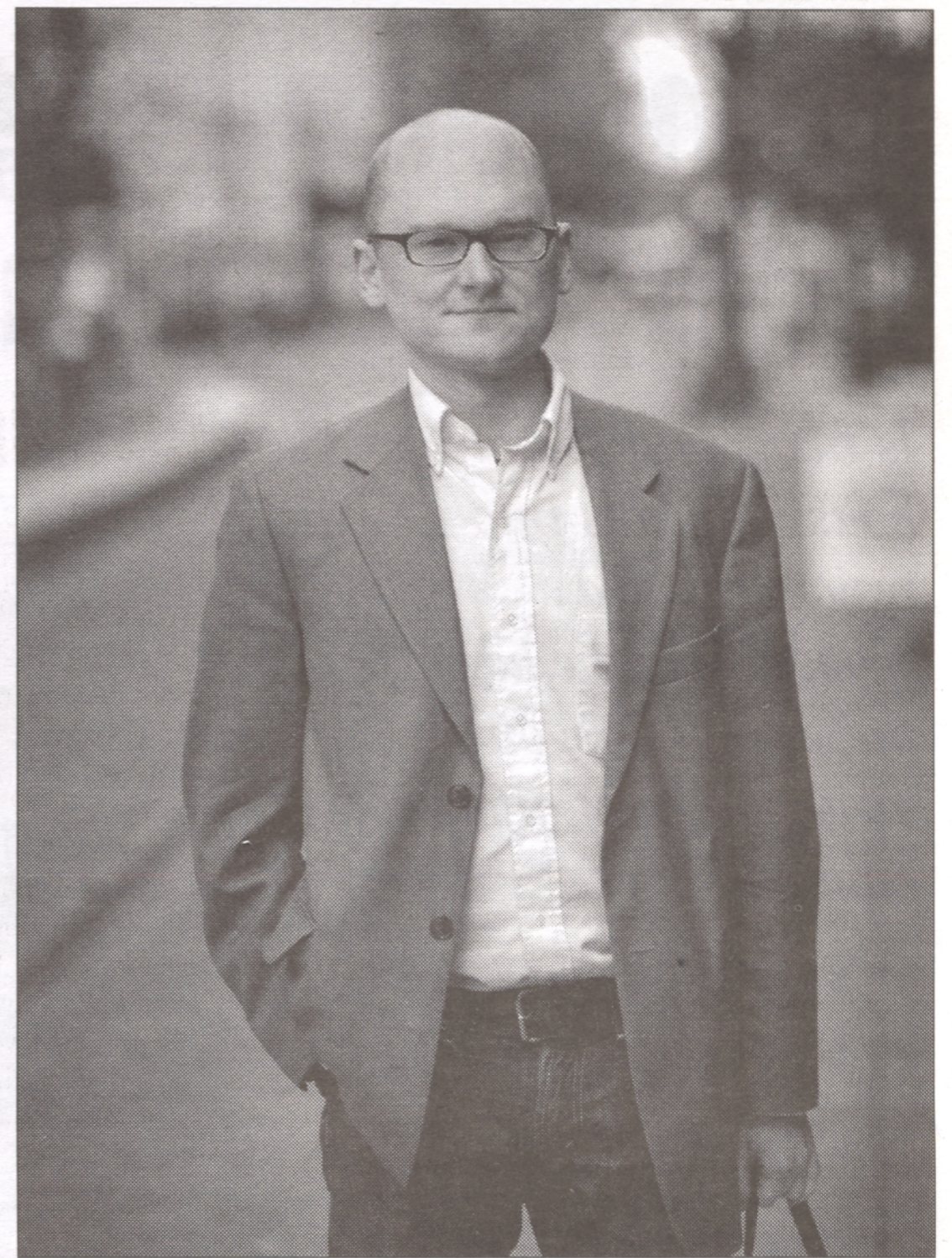


PHOTO BY MICHAEL SCHOENHOLTZ

Michael Andersen, founder of Portland Afoot.

**I.B.:** I don't just want to stay in the doom and gloom surrounding local transportation. What can we be hopeful for and continue to appreciate?

**M.A.:** The fact that cities are becoming more vibrant all of the time is something to be hopeful about. Over the past 20 years, we've seen a cultural shift. Crime is falling in cities, the amount of public investment in cities has risen and people are responding. This is driving the upsurge in biking, public transit, walking and so on. If we can manage that well, that's great for people at all levels. It makes a more class diverse and efficient environment. While we have challenges around all of these things, we also have a great base to work from.

**I.B.:** Portland continues to embrace bike culture?

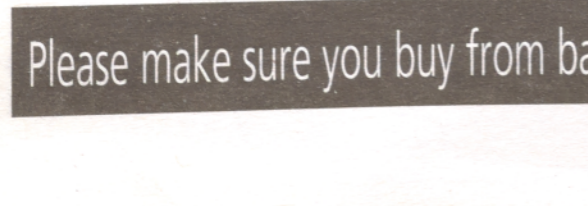
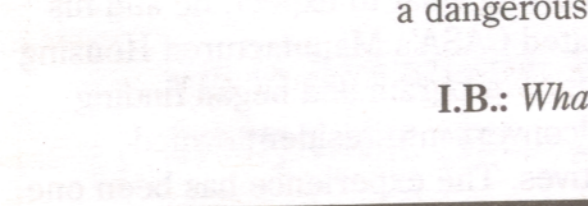
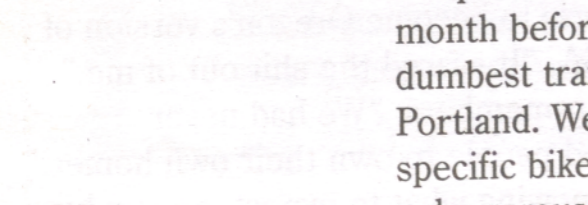
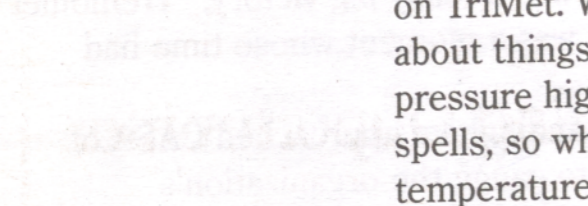
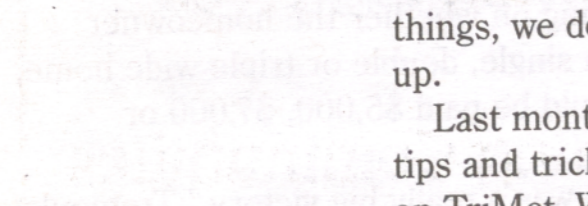
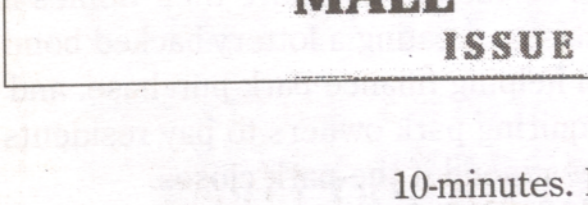
**M.A.:** We have so much momentum in bike culture, and all of the investments we have made over the past decade are paying off. Smart and innovative people, poor people and others are all taking advantage of Portland in one way or another through biking. It's something I believe will continue to grow.

It's important for all of us (advocates) to be noisy and to give politicians cover for projects supporting the bike culture, but it's important to note, that we've had some great leaders and advocates who were the politicians.

**I.B.:** Anything you'd like to add?

**M.A.:** The biggest social challenge of the next five or 10 years for media is how do we serve ordinary and poor people with niche media. General interest media has been on a slow decline that won't be turned around. So we as a community have to find a way to get news and information to the people. That's why Portland Afoot, Street Roots and other media outlets become invaluable. At a local level, everybody wants to do the right thing, but people don't have access to always knowing what the right thing is. There are so many people without power that want to know what's happening, and so many people in power that make decisions that are completely uninformed about the products of their actions. One of Portland Afoot's main goals is to lower the cost of being informed.

To find out more or to subscribe to Portland Afoot either through the mail or on-line, go to [portlandafoot.org](http://portlandafoot.org).



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