

To build support for bicycling, you need to tell a good story

BY MARGAUX MENNESSON
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Lenny Anderson has been working and riding his bike on and around Swan Island for over 20 years. He recently retired from his position as director of the Swan Island Transportation Management

Authority. The first time I met Lenny was when this photo was taken. He went out of his way to arrange for us to be able to enter the shipyard on the island (it's normally closed to

the public) and give me a tour of bike facilities.

Elizabeth Quiroz is the BTA's newest employee. In her position as Bike Commute Challenge Program Coordinator, her job is to encourage people to try riding bikes during the month of September and teach bike commute 101 workshops. She lives in East Portland and had never tried bike commuting until this year.

Lenny and Elizabeth are two people I've only known for a few months, but both have made a big impression on my work as a bike advocate. As the communications director of the Bicycle Transportation Alliance, I know that emotions are far more powerful triggers than facts when it comes to building public support for bicycling. But I also know how comfortable and easy it is to stay safely within the realm of rational arguments and be on message.

That's why SR Executive Director Israel Bayer's column in the Aug. 23 edition of Street Roots struck a chord with me. He wrote:

"It makes more sense to Tweet 100 pictures of people getting an apartment with a key in hand over the course of six months



Lenny Anderson with his bike on Swan Island.

PHOTO BY MARGAUX MENNESSON

than trying to explain to the public in one shot why \$1 million dollars will house 100 people they don't have any connection with."

As advocates, our success comes from understanding the system, knowing the politics, and being able to make a compelling case for funding. Cities need funding to do almost everything we want them to do: build more bikeways, fix unsafe spots on the road, teach bike safety education to kids in schools, support events like Sunday Parkways.

As communicators trying to build a movement for bicycling, the problem with numbers, especially numbers with dollar signs in front of them, is that they never tell the whole story and they are easily taken out of context. It's harder to take a photo or story of a real person who just discovered

she can bike eight miles to work and back and say, "that's not true."

We need help from people who live and ride on the streets every day to tell real stories and make our voice that much stronger.

Bicycling is an amazing way to get connected to the streets you live and travel on every day. September is the best month of the year to try it.

If you have a story about riding your bike this September - good or bad - tell us. Your story will help us make Portland's streets safer and more accessible for everyone who lives here. The BTA is on Twitter @BTAOregon, on Instagram @BTAOregon, and on Facebook at facebook.com/btaoregon. Find us on YouTube at youtube.com/user/btaoregon.



HEALTHY STREETBEAT

Bicycle Transportation Alliance

Healthy Streetbeat is a monthly column for Street Roots written by the Bicycle Transportation Alliance (BTA). Our contributors are Rob Sadowsky, executive director, and Margaux Mennesson, communications director.

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