



CITY OF MUENSTER, GERMANY

This 1991 triptych illustrates the space required for each of three modes of transportation for the same-size group of people.

Streets are for everyone – car or no car

Protected bike lanes in Portland could build on the legacy of the Transit Mall to make the city more humane



Michael Andersen is staff writer for the PeopleForBikes Green Lane Project. He was primary writer of a new "idea book for fairer cities" that features 10 people of color around the United States who are advocating for protected bike lanes as part of their work to improve their communities. Read more at bit.ly/BuildingEquity.

BY MICHAEL ANDERSEN
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

It's one of the most famous images in modern urban planning: three simple photos showing how much city space 80 people take up when they get around by bike, by bus and by car.

The poster was made in Muenster, Germany, in 1991. Here in Portland and around the world, it's been used to show how you can reduce congestion by getting more people to ride bikes or mass transit. In cities, where no resource is more precious than space, that's a powerful gift.

But keep looking at the photos and you might see another idea embedded in them, too: one about human rights.

It's an idea that may have been best phrased by Enrique Peñalosa, who served as mayor of Bogotá, Colombia, in the early 2000s.

"The first article in every constitution states that all citizens are equal before the law," Peñalosa said. "If this is true, a bus with 80 passengers has a right to 80 times more road space than a car with one."

Although Portland didn't use those words when it created downtown's Transit Mall in 1977, they might be the unofficial motto for Southwest Fifth and Sixth avenues, where trainfuls and busloads of people roll smoothly through rush hour even as auto congestion clogs the other streets nearby.

The rush-hour congestion was there before 1977, too. The difference today is that thousands more people are moving in and out of downtown Portland quickly – because on two of our streets, public transportation has been given the space its riders deserve.

Now, Portland is preparing to do something similar with bikes.

The spread of protected bike lanes

The idea of dedicating road space to bikes



PHOTO BY JONATHAN MAUS/BIKEPORTLAND

In Copenhagen, Denmark, wide sidewalks accommodate pedestrians, and wide bicycle lanes are physically separated from lanes for motorized vehicles.

isn't new, of course. A few California cities started painting bike lanes in the late 1960s, and today Portland has quite a few: North Williams, East Burnside, Southwest Stark, Southeast 122nd.

But what many Americans don't know is that the first painted bike lanes were just imitations of something more substantial: protected bike lanes.

By the 1960s, some European cities started becoming alarmed at the rising price of gasoline, the danger of fast-moving traffic and the injustice of shutting off huge areas of the city – public streets – to anyone who didn't own a car.

So, just as they'd started building sidewalks that made it comfortable to walk, they began building wide, physically separated bike lanes that made it comfortable to bike.

In the decades that followed, cities like Utrecht, Netherlands; Hamburg, Germany; and Copenhagen, Denmark, started taking significant space on the road and dedicating it to protected bike lanes. Raised or separated from car traffic by curbs, fences or planters, the bike lanes ran behind bus and rail stops so bike users and bus drivers didn't have to leapfrog awkwardly with one

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