

news Briefs

WHOSE STREETS?

It's classic anarchy, organized chaos. Nobody's the leader, and there's no premeditated route. Nobody warns the cars driving down West 11th at rush hour that they are about to be slowed to a maddening 10 mph crawl by a posse of hooting, irreverent bikers spread across all four lanes. It just happens sometimes.

Critical Mass bike rides started in San Francisco in 1992 as "the Commute Clot," a spontaneous reclaiming of the car-choked streets by bicyclists. The idea was simple: once you reach a critical mass of bikers, the cars have to cede to the bikes rather than the other way around. In the decade-plus since, Critical Mass has become a social movement of sorts, spreading to dozens of U.S. cities. The rides have been going on (and off) for years in Eugene, but they seem to be picking up steam in recent months. The past two rides have had close to 75 bikers at their peaks.

The May 27 Critical Mass ride wound

through the busy streets of Eugene, careening down Amazon Parkway and West 11th Ave. Some car drivers waved, but others honked impatiently. One man driving a red pick-up truck drove into the mass of bikers, yelling obscenities. The bikers responded with chants: "Whose streets? Our streets!"

Eugene police finally intervened on 10th and Lawrence, where they asked bikers not to block the entire street. They cited one biker, Zane Taylor, twice: a \$273 ticket for not obeying the stop sign and a \$40 ticket for impeding traffic. Before the police left, a man handed Taylor \$76 in cash and change, collected from the bikers on the spot.

Biker Sam Hediger participates in the rides to make a political statement. "I just think we're consuming far too much oil. People are driving everywhere," he says. "Bikes are just cleaner, they're cheaper, and they're better for a sustainable future than these meta-monstrosities."

Critical Mass rides meet on the last Friday of each month at 5:30 on 17th and Charnelton.

—Kera Abraham

COP SHOP VOTE IGNORED

Eugene voters have rejected a big new police station three times, last Nov. by a 20 percent margin. But that hasn't stopped the city council and managers from moving ahead with plans for a big new cop shop anyway.



May 27 Critical Mass

SLANT

- With their approval ratings in the dumps, Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski and President George Bush both got a lot of Memorial Day publicity for mourning the U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq. We wonder if they feel some guilt when they go to the cemeteries. In the run-up to the unnecessary Iraq war, Kulongoski was a Democratic war monger. "I am very supportive of the president's efforts," Kulongoski told the *Oregonian* after dining at the White House just before the Iraq invasion. Now facing re-election next year with little to show for it, Kulongoski has shamelessly made flag-waving funerals one of his top gubernatorial priorities. Bush, for his part, defended the continued bloody occupation by quoting from a letter from a soldier later killed in Iraq, "My death will mean nothing if you stop now." Where's the logic in that? Someone else's child also has to die to justify this unjustifiable war? And then another, and another? The toll now is approaching 2,000, not to mention the countless tens of thousands of Iraqis. When does it end?

- While ODOT is spending millions widening I-105, Eugene should be thinking about getting rid of the riverfront freeway. Outrageous? Portland jackhammered their

riverfront freeway for a riverfront park; Eugene could do the same. Imagine all the land that would be freed up. How about a return to the river for north Eugene? Imagine Skinner Butte Park and the Whiteaker and Washington-Jefferson neighborhoods free from roaring traffic noise, congestion and light pollution. Sure it would take longer to drive to the mall, but maybe people would shop in a reborn downtown instead. Maybe we wouldn't need a \$150 million new freeway interchange for Gateway Mall. If the idea spread, maybe the West Coast wouldn't need to spend the estimated \$50 billion highway planners want to widen I-5 to subsidize urban sprawl congestion. What's more far fetched?

- The Eugene City Council thankfully put the county's ill-conceived public safety district out of our collective misery last month. The controversial measure for a massive jail/prosecutor/deputy tax increase would have never passed a vote anyway. Because of property tax caps, the county taxes threatened to wring revenue out of Eugene's popular library and school levies. Now, rather than lashing out, the county would do well to listen closely to Eugene's progressive majority. With much of

Springfield and the rural county hard core anti-tax, there's no way for the county to pass a tax measure without the support of progressive Eugene voters who actually believe in government.

- We know western Lane County is a tad conservative, but it was always a mystery to us why voters there have chosen a county commissioner who's way out on the feather-tips of the right wing. Fortunately, a moderate, mainstream bird is coming along to try to boot Anna Morrison out of her nest. We've been following Bill Fleenor's political aspirations for a few years now and we see he has filed for the West Lane commission post in 2006. The feathers will fly in this race, assuming Morrison seeks re-election. "My campaign is active and growing everyday," says Fleenor in an e-mail to supporters, "as more and more disgruntled citizens realize how devastating our current commissioner's judgment and decisions are to the well-being of our community." His website is www.williamfleenor.com

SLANT includes short opinion pieces, observations and rumor-chasing notes compiled by the EW staff. Heard any good rumors lately? Contact Ted Taylor at 484-0519, editor@eugeneweekly.com

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



Last week the council voted 7-1 to proceed with a plan to spend \$800,000 on planning a new police/city hall building, whether voters want it or not.

The plan for the plan will include some public input opportunities, but it's unclear if the city staff and council will be listening. City managers decided a decade ago that their top priority was tearing down the existing city hall and building a lavish new police station. So far, they've shown little interest in opinions or information to the contrary.

The majority of councilors said they should decide to tear down city hall rather than renovating it even before involving the public in the decision. "If seven of eight councilors think absolutely over their dead bodies this way, then why set up the public for failure?" councilor David Kelly said.

Councilors said they want new city buildings to get top certifications for sustainable design. But the environmental impact of a tear down would make top certifications impossible, said

Mike Penwell, city facilities manager. Penwell cautioned the council against "rushing" the tear-down decision. He said the city may be able to expand the existing city hall by building into the courtyard and up on the North side.

Another issue that staff and the council appear intransigent about is what to do with the \$30 million the city has squirreled away over the past decade for big new offices while cutting city services and raising citizen fees.

The November vote indicated citizens didn't agree that a new police station was the top priority for the money, and the city has big unmet needs for school, parks and pothole spending.

With city officials' minds already made up, much of the \$800,000 appears headed for propaganda rather than any real citizen involvement. "It's important, if we are going out for a bond [vote] at some point, that we start that marketing," councilor Gary Papé said.

It's actually illegal for the city to spend public money on election propaganda, but that