



Portland's annual Bridge Pedal clogs streets and gives biking a huge boost

BLURRY BIKE PLAN VISION

Eugene's bike commuting rate dropped from 8 percent in 1990 to 5.5 percent in 2007. The city now trails Davis, Calif., with a 17 percent bike commuting, Corvallis with 7.5 percent rate and Portland, where the biking rate has almost doubled in the last decade. The city's TransPlan predicts bike commuting here will continue to drop and devotes hundreds of millions of dollars to more freeways while giving only about 1 percent of funds to cycling. Bike theft and bike accidents are both increasing, and the city has abandoned adding new bike lanes downtown.

Into this grim picture for local cycling comes a new "Pedestrian and Bicycling Strategic Plan" from the city. The draft plan "presents a dynamic, compelling and exciting vision," the plan states about itself. But the plan does not acknowledge the decline in bicycle commuting and funding in Eugene or call for reversing the trend.

Rather than calling for specifics, such as a targeted increase in the bike commuting rate, increasing bike funding to 5.5 percent to match its mode share or adding a certain number of miles of additional bike lanes or paths, the vague five-year plan focuses on education and promotion.

Top plan priorities include: creating a new advisory committee, a "share the road" media campaign, bike boulevards where the city puts up signs on quieter streets, safe routes to school, more bike parking, improved lighting, clearing bike paths of leaves, efforts to "develop" more funding and applying for grants.

Unlike previous plans and city efforts, the new plan mixes bike and pedestrian modes. The mix dilutes the focus on bicycling in previous plans and creates conflicts. For example, the plan calls for enforcement against cyclists using sidewalks downtown, often to avoid dangerous streets.

The plan calls for integrating the city's bike efforts with its sustainability focus. The city has focused on reducing power use to combat global warming, but with most local power produced by dams, cycling may offer much bigger carbon reductions. The average local person here generates almost 10 times more global warming per day by driving alone than by using energy in the home, based on carbon accounting and local data.

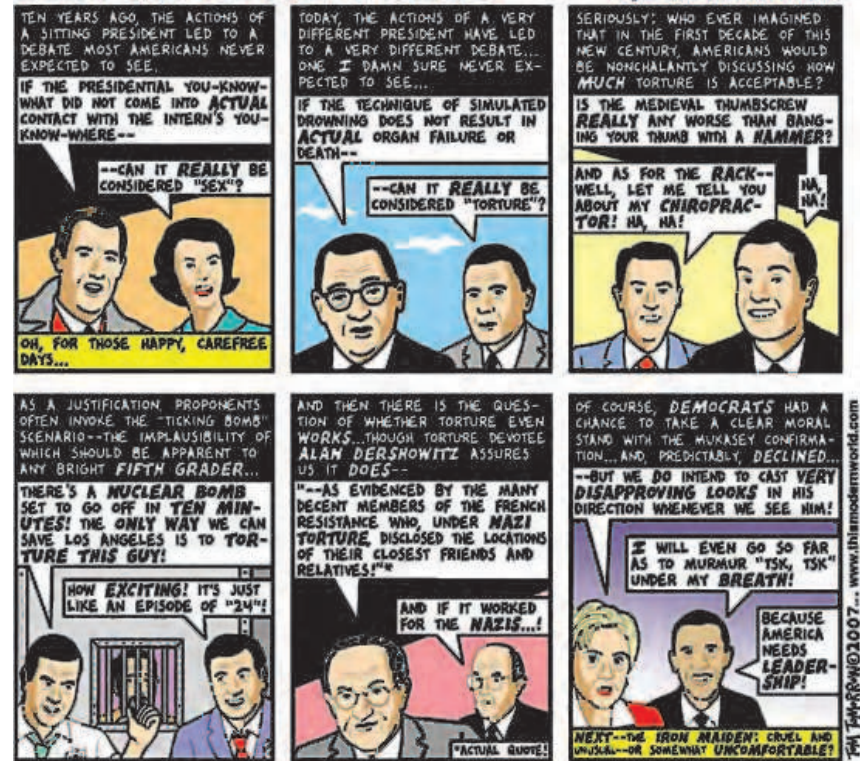
The plan includes, but places its lowest priority on, organizing a signature biking event in Eugene. Such an event was a high priority among participants at the city's Walking and Biking summit in Eugene last year. A Portland Bridge Pedal event promotes bike culture with 17,000 people a year.

Also not included in the vague plan is Mayor Kitty Piercy's call to increase Eugene's silver rating from the League of American Bicyclists to gold.

The draft "Eugene Pedestrian and Bicycle Strategic Plan" is available at www.eugene-or.gov/walkbike and the city is taking comments at david.f.roth@ci.eugene.or.us until Dec. 1. — Alan Pittman

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



news Briefs

CPA THROWS A PARTY

The Eugene grassroots activist group Citizens for Public Accountability normally has its annual meeting this time of the year, but instead, the group is planning a party. Mixed in with the music, food and wine, however, will be a bit of politics.

Next week's event begins at 7 pm Thursday, Nov. 29 at Tsunami Books, 2585 Willamette St. Keynote speakers will include Mayor Kitty Piercy talking about downtown, the recent election and where we go from here. Music at



Gary Blackmer

the event will be provided by classical guitarist Craig Einhorn.

The guest speaker will be Gary Blackmer, performance auditor for the city of Portland, talking about how independent auditors add transparency and accountability to local government and can potentially save millions of taxpayer dollars. Blackmer serves as an elected official answerable only to the voters, but independent auditors can also be hired by city councils to examine the performance of city government departments and provide

other services that require an independent evaluation. Lane County government has such a position.

A charter review committee in Eugene in 2002 recommended establishing an independent performance auditor, along with other reforms, but the issue has never gone to a vote. Recent city managers, along with some conservative councilors, have opposed the

idea. To get on the CPA mailing list, email cpasc@lists.opn.org

TOP PLACES TO CRASH

For a decade, the city has been compiling a list of the top 10 places in the city for vehicle collisions.

Every year the list is about the same. This year the intersection of 7th Avenue and Jefferson Street tops the list again. Over the last 10 years, the intersection has averaged about 30 crashes a year. Other top crash contenders every year include: River Avenue/Silver Lane at River Road, 7th Avenue at Washington/I-105, and 11th Avenue at Bailey Hill Road.

So if the top 10 places for crashes are so predictable, and with people's lives at stake, why hasn't the city made the intersections safer?

It's not the city's fault; it's drivers' fault, according to Eugene Public Works spokesman Eric Jones. "Public works can't prevent people from running red lights, speeding, chatting on the cell phone and paying more attention to their cup of latte than to the car ahead of them," Jones wrote in an email.

The city has done "close to the max" to engineer safety at the top crash sites with traffic lights, posted speed limits, etc. at the intersections "within the bounds of reasonable driver behavior," Jones said.

Rear-end collisions are the most common cause of

crashes at the intersections, according to the city. At 7th and Washington, 30 of the 46 reported crashes in 2006 were rear-end collisions. Eugene averages about 2,000 crashes a year.

"What these figures tell me is that there are serious consequences when drivers follow too closely and don't pay enough attention to the road ahead of them," said Tom Larsen, the city's traffic engineer.

But new to the top 10 places to crash list this year is 29th and Willamette. In recent years the city has permitted multiple narrow driveways at or near the increasingly busy intersection, including a corner credit union with drive-through lanes.

— Alan Pittman