

Bypassing Inconvenient Truths

Hidden highway history and the mayoral election

The Piercy-Torrey mayoral election includes two flavors of misinformation about the West Eugene Parkway, a highway first proposed in 1951 and officially canceled in 2007.

Jim Torrey promoted the WEP as city councilor and mayor. However, in June 2001 he was part of the "West Eugene Charette," an intergovernmental consensus of the city, Lane County, ODOT, the BLM and the Federal Highway Administration. The group selected "no build" because the WEP was too illegal and too expensive. County Commissioner Bobby Green and Oregon Transportation Commissioner Randy Papé (brother of then City Councilor Gary Papé) were also part this agreement.

Shortly after the charette, Torrey, Green and Papé changed their minds and pushed through an advisory vote on the November 2001 Eugene ballot. Even though federal aid highways are federal decisions, pro-WEP politicians used the 51-49 percent vote (which promised "the money is there" even though it wasn't) to say "the people voted for it."

Between 2002 and 2006, ODOT spent a couple million dollars to "study" the WEP even though the agency privately knew it could not be built. If Torrey, Green and Papé had honored their June 2001 "no build" consensus, the millions spent on additional studies between 2002 and 2006 could have fixed West 11th intersections and aided other efforts to mitigate west Eugene traffic flow problems. From their perspective, they hoped that their highway activism might have persuaded ODOT and FHWA to approve the project despite its countless legal and financial flaws; or if not, then they could use it as a wedge issue to blame liberals for supposedly blocking the project instead of accepting responsibility for wasting public funds chasing a failed project.

Perhaps the main environmental accomplishment of Kitty Piercy's term was her tie-breaking City Council vote to remove the city's support for the WEP, along with her vote at the Lane Council of Governments to remove the WEP from the Regional Transportation Plan.

The city's change of position was the excuse used by FHWA to cancel the WEP via a "no build" Record of Decision in March 2007. Privately, the transportation agencies knew the WEP would violate nearly every transportation law; the highway was not needed; it was overpriced; and fixing cracked bridges on I-5 is a bigger priority for ODOT and FHWA.

In November 2007, Piercy voted for a new Regional Transportation Plan that contains \$817 million for more road expansion during the remaining decades of the petroleum era. The other Eugene representative at the LCOG committee that decides this plan, Alan Zelenka, voted against this proposal. The city of Springfield is now pressuring Rep. DeFazio to appropriate pork barrel funds to pay for its highway expansions on Route 126 in Thurston. This is not "sustainability."

After the WEP's demise, Piercy created the West Eugene Collaborative, a group focused on transportation and land use. The WEC includes bureaucrats, politicians, Chamber of Commerce members and Friends of Eugene, but it does not include west Eugene neighborhood organizations.

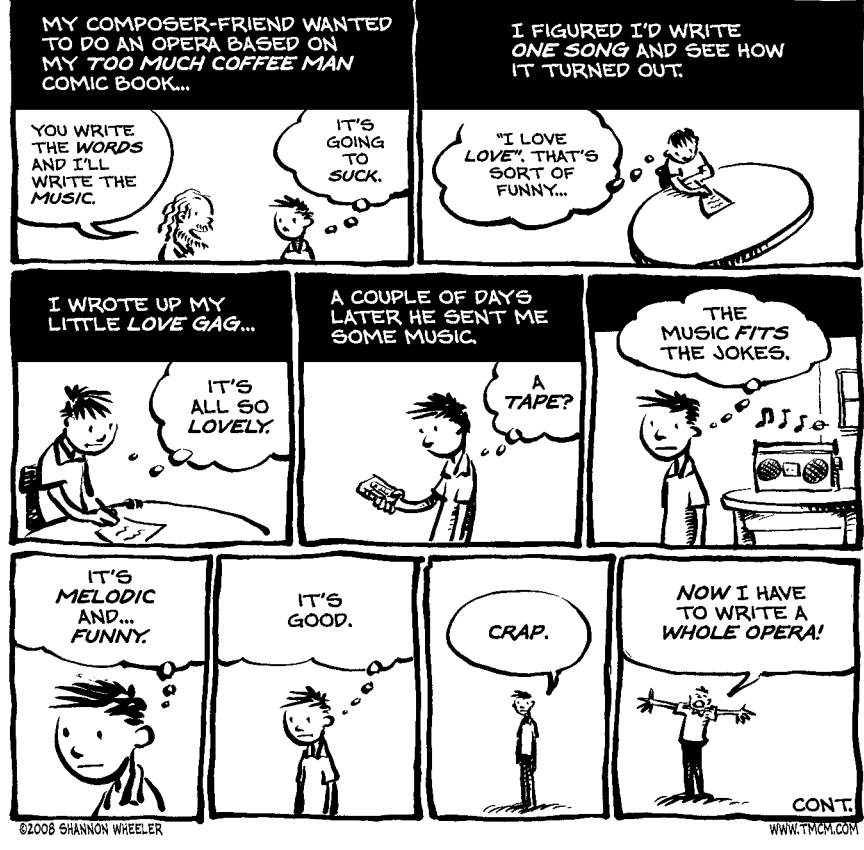
The WEC's reports ignore the WETLANDS alternative – West Eugene Transportation, Land and Neighborhood Design Solutions – even though the WEC's primary convener Mary O'Brien privately called it "brilliant" and the consultants told this writer that it was well presented.

In March 2008, the WEC had its first "design storm" exercise to solicit suggestions for solutions. The map prepared by the "collaborators" included a new proposal to build the eastern half of the Parkway through Bertelsen Nature Park as long as it included a Bus Rapid Transit component and new development (in wetlands!) around the bus stops. This map is preliminary and unofficial, but it is similar the Crandall Arambula option, a worse version of the WEP promoted in 2002 by Mary O'Brien, Rob Zako and Rob Handy. The Crandall Arambula option (named after the Portland architects who consulted on it) would have built the WEP plus an express bus and commercial development in the wetlands around the bus stops. Crandall Arambula would have paved more wetlands, forests, homes and farmland than ODOT's version. No environmentalist who publicly opposed Crandall Arambula was invited to be part of the alleged "collaborative."

Kitty Piercy has united Eugene – against her downtown corporate welfare plan, which was equally rejected by all sections of the city last November. I look forward to the day when most politicians who talk green implement policies consistent with their rhetorical statements.

Mark Robinowitz is a "road scholar" who prepared technical details of WETLANDS vs. FHWA, a lawsuit to prevent the WEP if it had been approved. Details are posted at GreenwashEugene.com.

How to Be Happy (OPERA ORIGIN) by Shannon Wheeler



Letters TO THE EDITOR

FREE TIBET AND IRAQ

The Chinese government's actions in Tibet have been deplorable and some human rights activists' calls for the boycott of Beijing Olympics and disruption of the Olympic torch travels across the globe understandable.

However, violations of human rights in Tibet pale in comparison to our government's violation of these rights in Iraq. Invasion and subsequent five-year occupation, slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, displacement of millions of people inside and outside of Iraq, physical destruction of the country, torture, Abu Ghraib disgrace: All are gross violations of human rights that should be addressed by these same activists.

Where are the calls for banning American athletes from international athletic competition? In the 1970s and '80s South Africa was banned from all international competition as a reaction to the evils of apartheid. That banning along with the struggles of South African people and international economic sanctions helped get rid of that horrible system.

Maybe we can learn from those

lessons. It's much easier to point fingers at countries thousands of miles away than to look at the mirror and struggle for change in our own back yard.

*Pete Mandrapa
Eugene*

CRUEL RODEO

I am very disappointed that a supposedly progressive-leaning newspaper would stoop to promoting blatant cruelty to animals by glorifying "rodeo queens" in a three-page article complete with cover page (3/ 27). I am hoping to see a follow-up article which goes behind the scenes to reveal the callous disregard with which the non-voluntary participants in this violent activity are subjected. A good place to acquaint EW readers with the realities of rodeo can be found at sharkonline.org

*Barb Lomow
Eugene*

WALKER A CHAMPION

On May 20, I will be casting my vote for Vicki Walker in the race for secretary of state. Not only has she been a champion for our children's education, she has one of the best environmental records among all the candidates in this race.

Sen. Walker has just been named Legislator of the Year by the Special Districts Association of Oregon. In addition, Walker has consistently stood up to powerful special interests for the sake of protecting average Oregonians from state fraud and other abuses. I have seen firsthand her tireless efforts to make sure every person, regardless of economic and social status, has a voice in Salem.

Walker's record in the Legislature proves she is the best person for the job. She is also the only candidate with a plan detailing her goals as secretary of state. Instead of hiding behind sound bites and vague political rhetoric, she has shown courage by outlining her next four years in office.

My decision is an easy one. Walker is the candidate of choice if Oregonians wish to move this state in the right direction.

EUGENE '08 TRACKTOID

In 1992, Oregonians Dan O'Brien and Dave Johnson were the top two decathletes in the world, earning them endorsements from Reebok, which ran a series of TV advertisements pitting "Dan vs. Dave." However, O'Brien embarrassingly no-heighted in the pole vault at the Olympic Trials that year and failed to qualify, while Johnson took home the bronze at the Games. O'Brien later won gold at the 1996 Olympic Games, and both were inducted into the Oregon Sports Hall of Fame in 2005.

