

Bike Plan Wobbles Along

Cycling advocates say draft needs pumping up BY ALAN PITTMAN

The city of Eugene is moving forward with a draft plan that envisions doubling cycling in 20 years with bike lanes on south Willamette Street, a separated cycle track on High Street, a bridge over Beltline and miles of “bike boulevards.”

But many other important bike projects are missing and the draft has disappointed many in the bike community who say they fear that it lacks teeth to actually make the big shift to the greener, healthier, more livable and cheaper mode of transportation.

“I’m very disappointed in the plan,” said Fred Tepfer, a UO planner involved in bike advocacy for decades in Eugene. The proposed new policies are “weak” and “asleep,” he said at a meeting of the city’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) last week. “Business as usual could fit very well into the goals that are stated.”

“I think this plan has got to have teeth in it,” said BPAC member Judi Horstmann. If the City Council decides to remove tough policies, “then we can fight there,” she said.

The bike plan, the large part of the city’s new Eugene Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan, has already generated record citizen interest with more than 900 comments during its development this spring. The early draft of the plan will go out for public comment this month and is expected to be finalized with City Council approval by the end of the year.

But despite citizen enthusiasm for the issue, Eugene’s draft plan comes across flat by comparison to Portland’s. That city’s new bike plan touts the social, environmental and economic benefits of quadrupling biking in the city. “You just can’t get a better transportation return on your investment than you get with promoting bicycling,” the plan quotes Portland Mayor Sam Adams.

But Eugene’s dryly worded plan contains only vague proposed policies that largely correspond to existing city policies without calling for measurable increases in city efforts and results to increase cycling.

The draft plan states that doubling bike trips by 2031 is a “vision,” but it doesn’t say whether it’s a city policy. Nor does it say how to measure bike trips. Eugene now has a bike commute mode share of 11 percent, the highest percentage for a city of its size or larger in the nation, according to the U.S. Census.

The plan doesn’t explicitly state that the city’s policy is to double that number to 22 percent in two decades, still well below many cities in Europe now. Nor does the plan state an interim 2021 goal of a 50 percent increase.

There’s a call for reduced bike theft, but no measurement of by what percentage. In the past, Eugene has been rated by Kryptonite as one of the worst cities in the nation for bike theft. Nor does the plan call for actual increased police efforts or new laws to reduce theft.

The plan calls for developing programs to shift from driving to biking, but it doesn’t say how. New York and cities in Europe are now pursuing policies to make driving and parking more difficult and expensive to encourage alternative modes like biking. Portland’s new bike plan calls for “making bicycling more attractive than driving for short trips.”

“We don’t have disincentives” in the plan, Eugene transportation planner Rob Inerfeld admitted.

“Most transportation system plans would have both” incentives and disincentives, Tepfer said. “If it’s just incentives, we never get there.”

“What’s in the plan to get people out of their cars?” agreed BPAC member Harriet Behm.

Tepfer noted that limiting parking has been an important part of the UO’s success in increasing biking and other alternative modes.

Even the city’s old TransPlan from 20 years ago (that the new bike plan is meant to improve) includes policies calling for reducing parking through “maximum allotments,” paid parking and “increasing parking fines.”

“They can’t afford it,” said BPAC member David Gizara, of the UO’s decision not to provide more parking. Gizara said Eugene also can’t afford all the new parking and roads to serve cars. “We can’t afford individual autos anymore. They are bankrupting cities.”

The proposed plan also lacks a hierarchy of modes that would prioritize scarce funding and right-of-way space for increased cycling. “The UO has had a transportation policy since 1977 that says that,” Tepfer said.

The plan does not prioritize bicyclist safety over the storage of private vehicles in the public right of way. Parking removal has been a big hurdle to many planned Eugene bike safety projects in the past.

The draft also does not prioritize bicyclist safety over small delays in traffic speeds caused by removing car lanes for bike facilities.

The plan does not change city policy prioritizing limited flexible federal funds for asphalt maintenance projects over cyclist safety projects.

The bike plan calls for the city to “obtain stable and diverse resources” for bike projects but doesn’t give a dollar amount or a percentage of transportation funding to spend on bikes. Currently, about 2 percent of planned local transportation spending goes to bike projects, well below their 11 percent mode share.

The draft plan also does not have:

- A call for measurable decreases in vehicle miles traveled per capita (VMT), unlike the old TransPlan and the state Transportation Planning Rule
- A policy of 24 percent of future local transportation funding measures to go to biking to match the city’s mode share goal
- Measurable, specific increases in density and reduced urban sprawl to increase biking. The old TransPlan noted that the city’s housing sprawl and lack of density “limits the effectiveness” of efforts to increase alternative modes.
- A percentage reduction in obesity from active

transportation. The city has already mapped obesity using DMV records (see “fat map”) as part of its study of “20-Minute Neighborhoods” to promote biking and walking.

• A policy of increasing cyclist satisfaction with road safety as measured by a question inserted into the city’s annual citizen survey

• A specific total mileage of bike infrastructure to build, nor monitoring of progress toward that goal

• A policy of reducing serious and fatal bike crashes by a certain percentage

• A calculation of a total bike safety deficit in unbuilt infrastructure similar to the city’s much-hyped street repair backlog total and a policy in reducing the safety backlog by a certain percentage over time

• A calculation or goal for transportation spending saved by the use of far less costly cycling

Planner Inerfeld admitted the policy section of the draft plan needed work and invited BPAC members to send suggestions. But he said the city may need a “broader conversation” about disincentives. “When we try to ram things through from just one perspective, we get more pushback,” he said.

The proposed plan has a confusing array of sometimes overlapping lists and maps of “proposed,” “recommended,” “priority” and “future” bike projects.

It appears that only the small “priority” list matters much because they “should be given funding priority” to build during the next 20 years, the plan states. The “future” projects “will be implemented beyond the 20-year planning horizon of this plan,” the document states. There’s nothing on when the many “proposed” or “recommended” projects will be implemented, if ever.

The priority list (see priority map) includes several key projects that cyclists have been requesting for years, including:

- Willamette Street bike lanes from Donald to 18th Avenue. The city recently obtained a state grant that it could use to study actually adding the safety improvement that has already been in city transportation plans for decades.
- A High Street separated cycle track to connect the Amazon bike trail to the river
- An over-crossing of Beltline near North Eugene High School

